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Border Encounters: American Cultural Politics and the U.S.-Mexico Border

By

Jennifer Andrea Reimer

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

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Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

in the

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of the University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Prof. José David Saldívar, Co-Chair

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Prof. Beth Piatote

Fall 2011

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Abstract

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

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Border Encounters: American Cultural Politics and the U.S.-Mexico Border is a transnational, interdisciplinary cultural study of the contemporary U.S.-Mexico border that argues for the critical role of the international border in the racial past, present, and future of the Americas. Through critical readings of contemporary photography, music, fiction, and poetry, this dissertation shows how the border is not only a contact zone for Mexican, white, and Native peoples, but also a more heterogeneous geography that includes a fluid set of diverse racialized subjectivities. I bring together a distinct collection of multiracial cultural texts to demonstrate how they interrogate issues of nation, race, and belonging through the representation of certain critical terms and issues related to the U.S.-Mexico border and the borderlands studies (immigration; feminicide; trafficking; NAFTA; maquila labor; the structural inequalities between the United States and Mexico, and the trope of boundary crossing, among others). By grounding literary, visual, and musical analyses in the material realities of the borderlands, *Border Encounters* engages the U.S.-Mexico border as a complex site of innovative cultural production while simultaneously revealing how global operations of power work through the series of specific geographies we call the borderlands.

In the first section, I bring together a series of experimental cultural texts in order to demonstrate how a diverse group of artists use innovative aesthetics to comment on material realities in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. I begin with an analysis of the transnational collaborative photo-textual book, *Here Is Tijuana!* by Fiamma Montezemolo, René Peralta, and Heriberto Yépez (2006). Expanding transa's field of reference from Tijuana to the greater U.S.-Mexico borderlands, my second chapter reads Harryette Mullen's epic poem, *Muse & Drudge*, as a text of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. I conclude this section with a comparative analysis of experimental fictions by Chicana writer Helena María Viramontes and Asian American writer Karen Tei Yamashita. The second section compares and contrasts representations of the U.S.-Mexico border by two different white artists in order to explore the under-theorized relationship between whiteness and cultural production in U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Chapter Four turns to Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy* and argues against reading McCarthy as a "revisionist" Western historian, and critiques McCarthy's sexualized representation of Mexican women on the border as a dominant, if ambivalent, white masculine narrative. By contrast, my final chapter analyzes the lyrics and musical forms of the Roger Clyne & Peacemakers, a contemporary rock band from Tempe, Arizona, identifying how the band advocates for a peaceful cross-cultural coexistence.

for Alfred

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A line, half water, half metal
--Alfred Arteaga, *Cantos*

Introduction

Encountering the U.S.-Mexico Border

The federal government's failure to enforce our border has functionally turned every state into a border state.

--Rep. Randy Terrill (*New York Times*, 12/31/10)

At every border there are rigid wires and fallen wires.

--Nestor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*

On the other side of the border in Tijuana, in a neighborhood called "Colonia Federal," is a house. Behind the house, someone has planted geraniums in brightly painted pots. Behind the house, the white-washed brick wall stretches toward the river, toward the hills, toward the ocean. Behind the brick, the metal fence. A sign reads: "EL ARTE TUMBARA ESTE MURO" (ART WILL KNOCK THIS WALL DOWN). Beneath the house, there's a tunnel that was, until recently, used by smugglers and coyotes to transport people and contraband across the U.S.-Mexico border. After the tunnel's discovery in 2004, the house was sold to Tijuana's Consejo Fronterizo de Arte y Cultura (Border Council of Arts and Culture) to be used as a cross-border center for arts and culture. Run by local artist Luis Ituarte, La Casa de Túnel features gallery and workspace for artists, a store, and a rooftop café/presentation space for music and performances. From the rooftop, you can see over the fence, to the tourist parking lot in San Diego. You can watch the guards on both sides pace up and down the length of the fence. You can see the barren military outpost of San Ysidro and the traffic slowly circulating through downtown Tijuana. You can see into Luis's studio, across the street, where he has been making and exhibiting art for over 17 years.

On a rainy afternoon in February, Luis tells me that they are trying to buy up as much real estate in the neighborhood as possible, so they can start an international artists' colony. He invites me to come and live in the community and do postdoctoral research in Tijuana. In this space, which is quite literally a stone's throw from the international border, Luis tells me matter-of-factly that the border is just a part of life here and that art goes on; it grows up and around the border like so many weeds. As we stand on the rooftop, talking, I imagine the concerts, poetry readings, and performances that draw crowds on both sides of the fence. And for the first time since I crossed over that day, I stop thinking about the pervasive presence of armed surveillance, the streets empty of tourists, the perceptible shift from privilege to struggle. Luis is clearly amused by my enthusiasm for the center. For him, he's just doing what he's always done—making art, living life on both sides of the most heavily trafficked, widely unequal international boundary in the world. Art may eventually knock the wall down, but for Luis, the U.S.-Mexico border is not something to be overcome or transcended. It is simply to be lived—with conscience and with resistance, each collaborative art practice demystifying the border's seemingly monolithic strength and rendering it into possibility and future.

Luis and La Casa de Túnel reminded me what's at stake in cultural production in the U.S-Mexico borderlands. In a geography that often feels torn apart by the simultaneous, contradictory forces of the national and the transnational, containment and flow, fear and pleasure, projects like COFAC's La Casa de Túnel in Tijuana reflect the transformative power of culture-making on the U.S.-Mexico border. By turning an underground smuggling tunnel into a transnational cultural center, COFAC, and organizations like it, are speaking back to mainstream representations of the border (in both the United States and Mexico) that portray it as dangerous, culture-less, militarized, an export-processing zone, a hedonistic playground for tourists, or a cartel-ridden war zone. These representations, the stories they tell and the images they portray, are encountered everyday on both sides of the border. As an alternative to these negative narratives, La Casa de Túnel offers a new model of cultural development at the U.S.-Mexico border that sustains people's shared humanity, instead of erasing it in favor of citizenship or legal status. This new model invites full participation from all people and doesn't marginalize, erase, or silence. As a symbol for the future of cultural development in the borderlands and beyond, La Casa de Túnel represents art's most powerful potential as an oppositional practice in the fight against state terrorism, nativist rhetoric, violence, and injustice.

Why does it matter what happens on the U.S.-Mexico border? Why does it matter what images, stories, and ideas about the border we encounter in culture? Who writes about the border and why? This project investigates these questions by recognizing that since it's official creation in 1848 by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the war between Mexico and United States, the U.S.-Mexico border has shaped the social imaginary of both Mexico and the United States. As the quote from Representative Randy Terrill above indicates, the United States is nearing a watershed moment in recent borderlands history. Over the coming years, immigration policies are likely to be redefined at the state level, instead of through federal policies. As a result, Rep. Terrill is correct to say every state has become a border state. One recent example of such legislation is Arizona's Proposition SB 1070. Passed in 2010, Arizona's new law is the broadest and strictest anti-illegal immigration measure to be passed by any state in decades. Among other things, the law grants power to local law enforcement agents to check the citizenship status of any persons suspected of criminal activity. Although Arizona has received harsh criticism over SB 1070, several other states, including Georgia, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina, are currently considering similar legislative measures.¹

Proposition SB 1070 is just the latest incarnation of nativist fear and rhetoric that have shaped public policies and opinions about the immigration, race, and U.S-Mexico border for decades. In 1994, these anxieties resulted in California's landmark Proposition 187, which aimed to greatly reduce services available to undocumented persons, and the same concern has legislated and justified an increasingly militarized international border. For example, in the period from 1993 to 1997, the budget for boundary enforcement along the southwest doubled from \$400 million to \$800 million (Nevins 4). There are more Border Patrol agents in the San Diego region than there were along the entire 2,000 mile-long border only two decades ago (Andreas and Biersteker 4). Post 9-11 security measures and rising violence as the result of Mexico's deadly drug wars, combined with

a continued flow of illegal crossings by Mexicans, Latin Americans, and others, are the latest crisis in a long history of national anxiety over security at the nation's frontier zones. As Samuel Truett and Elliott Young point out in their introduction to *Continental Crossroads*, there is nothing "new" about borderlands history: "Ever since the border was mapped in 1854, the borderlands have supported a complex web of historical relationships that transcended—even as they emerged in tandem with—the U.S. and Mexican nations" (Truett and Young 2). Thus, struggles over how to delimit and define spaces the nation's boundaries have always revealed the inconsistencies and anxieties over the nation itself—not only what and where it's located, but what ideological and imagined spaces it occupies. Our current moment of militarization, security, and legal stringency around the immigration and borderlands exposes deep ambivalences and fears about the nation, particularly what it means to be an American citizen and who can occupy this identity. The border both challenges and reinforces the integrity of the nation-state: "At every border there are rigid wires and fallen wires" (Canclini 261). And because the nation is often understood as the primary social group—what Benedict Anderson has called an "imagined community"—through which subjects identify themselves, questions regarding the status of 'the nation' are also questions regarding the status of subject formation. Migrants, diasporic people, border crossers...these are among the groups of people whose ambivalent (or nonexistent) relationship to the imagined community of the nation challenge master narratives about nation, belonging, and citizenship. Thus, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the United States faces a crisis of meaning that is both terribly new and sadly familiar. Among the larger questions being re-evaluated by the United States as the result of the increased national attention to the international border are: relationships between U.S. minorities and global populations; the role of the nation-state in a globalized society; the intersections of race, class, gender/sexuality, and citizenship status; the mutually constitutive relationships between culture and society; and how structures of power operate differently on different spaces, places and peoples at different times.

It is no surprise, then, that the U.S.-Mexico borderlands becomes the critical site where this crisis is played out. Since Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in 1893, the American West has always served a symbolic function by standing in for the nation itself (see Limerick, Slotkin). To put it another way, what happens in the borderlands, never stays in the borderlands. An analysis of the U.S.-Mexico border can tell us where we've been, where we are, and where we are going, both in the national U.S. context, and more broadly as a hemisphere. The border matters. Thus to examine how the border and the multiplicity of issues that arise around it are represented in culture helps understand how these issues are given ideological meaning and social significance. It forces an encounter between past and present, continuity and change. By better understanding the complexity of cultural production in and about the borderlands, we can better understand ourselves. A better understanding of ourselves, as citizens and noncitizens alike, can raise awareness about the powerful role the border plays in the making of American identities, recuperating lost or disavowed histories and contributions, as well as testifying to the great multiplicity of voices speaking from the varied terrains of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Such an understanding is vital because despite the increased visibility of the border in culture and politics, many border subjects remain largely invisible in the national imaginaries of both

the United States and Mexico, and until their presence is fully acknowledged, injustice and inequality will continue.²

Border Encounters: American Cultural Politics and the U.S.-Mexico Border engages the project of more fully accounting for the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a socially significant site the racial past, present, and future of the Americas through a central research question: How is the U.S.-Mexico border represented in contemporary culture? This investigation hinges on the belief that a more comparative analysis of these representations can broaden our understanding of the U.S.-Mexico border and its significance for American cultural politics and American literary history. This dissertation considers cultural texts not only by Mexican and Chicano/a writers, but a wider, multiracial canon of border artists. *Border Encounters* is a transnational, interdisciplinary cultural study that engages critical readings of photography, fiction, poetry, and music. I analyze how these texts represent certain critical terms and issues related to the U.S.-Mexico border and the borderlands studies (immigration; feminicide; trafficking; NAFTA; *maquila* labor; the structural inequalities between the United States and Mexico, and the trope of boundary crossing, among others) to show how the American Southwest, and the international border specifically, becomes a significant site through which American culture evaluates larger concerns of nation, race, and belonging. By grounding literary, visual, and musical analyses in the material realities of the borderlands, *Border Encounters* engages the U.S.-Mexico border as a complex site of innovative cultural production while simultaneously revealing how global operations of power work through the series of specific geographies we call the borderlands.

In focusing on cultural texts, I argue for the constitutive role culture plays in creating and reinforcing or challenging political ideologies. As “a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes crisscross from within and beyond its borders” (Rosaldo 20), culture is a dynamic process, not simply a set of products. This project is indebted to current theorizing in cultural studies and the work of scholars such as Fredric Jameson, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy for demonstrating how culture and ideology are mutually constitutive processes that can often occur within structures of dominance and unequal power relations. Or, how what Hall calls culture’s “regimes of representation” give meaning to the effects and existence of “events, relations, structures” outside the sphere of the cultural (Hall 443). Cultural critique thus carries significant political meaning. As Alicia Schmidt Camacho writes in *Migrant Imaginaries*, “Cultural forms are not a reflection of the social, or merely a detached ‘set of ideas,’ but rather the means by which subjects work through their connections to a larger totality and communicate a sense of relatedness to a particular time, place, and condition” (Schmidt Camacho 5). Thus, my analysis of contemporary border cultures looks to ways in which texts not only reflect certain realities of lived experience in the borderlands, but also create and give meaning to those realities and, in particular, how they imagine alternative realities. In imagining possible alternatives, culture demonstrates both the power and limitations of the imagination. Walter D. Mignolo (2000) has called this potential “border thinking”—a subaltern, alternative epistemology produced at the borders of the modern/colonial world system where the conflicts around colonial difference have produced decolonizing, transforming alternative ways of thinking. Many of the artists in the following chapters demonstrate the great diversity of possibility in such “border thinking,” while others remind us of the work yet to be completed. Lisa Lowe has rightfully cautioned that

cultural forms do not always necessarily offer resolutions, “but are often eloquent descriptions of the ways in which the law, labor exploitation, racialization, and gendering work to prohibit alternatives. Some cultural forms succeed in making it possible to live and inhabit alternatives in the encounter with those prohibitions; some permit us to imagine what we have still yet to live” (Lowe x).

In some cases, the work of an alternative cultural imaginary emerges through innovative, experimental forms that have come to be associated with borderlands culture, and literature in particular. These include code-switching, cross-genre writing, multi-voiced texts, collage, pastiche, among others. In this genre, the border operates as a powerful metaphor for all manner of formal boundary crossings, a metaphor that is often associated with narratives of marginalized identity and border-crossing experiences, particularly in Chicano/a literary and cultural studies.³ Ursula Biemann has described this as the process by which “a border as a metaphor for marginalizations becomes materialized” (Biemann 101). Following in this tradition, part of the work in *Border Encounters* is to account for how formal innovation functions in several of these texts by linking experimental aesthetics to the material realities of the borderlands and the colonial history of the American hemisphere. For example, I argue that poet Harryette Mullen’s “linguistic mestizaje” celebrates ‘mixing’ while simultaneously critiquing the systems of classification and racial hierarchy historically used to separate, define, and disempower nonwhite people. In the first section, I show how innovative aesthetics can serve a decolonizing function by exposing the continuity between the U.S.’s colonial-imperial past and neoliberal present and by offering connections between historically divided groups as sites of solidarity against oppression. Yet, I don’t make the case that all cultural production from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is experimental or formally innovative. There isn’t an automatic equivalence between marginalized status and experimental aesthetics. In some cases, the experiences of marginalization can produce innovation, but not always. My analysis keeps in mind what Rafael Pérez-Torres (1995) has argued—that negotiation and improvisation are often born out of necessity in the hostile world of the U.S.-Mexico border where people don’t always get to choose transgressive strategies. Instead, people are often “forced into transgression by the oppressive situation they find themselves in, even though they may actually prefer a different kind of life” (cited in Biemann 111). Therefore, it’s not the goal of this project to identify any one “borderlands aesthetics” or to define what qualifies as a “border text” or who can be called a “border writer.” What *Border Encounters* does demonstrate is the incredible multiplicity of voices and styles that can, and do, represent the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. By collecting a sampling of these voices, including some unlikely or unexpected ones, *Border Encounters* asks what can we learn from these encounters and envisions new ways of understanding and “seeing” the border.

Border Encounters engages the complex, yet under-theorized encounters between cultural-aesthetic flows and geopolitical flows of goods, people, information and technologies, offering a critical lens through which to understand how, for example, neoliberalism, globalization, and transnationalism work through culture (and vice versa). In investigating the encounters between discursive spaces and physical places, I’m particularly concerned with accounting for how these texts relate the local, specific spaces of the borderlands (for example, the transborder city) to transnational circuits of globalization and neoliberalism. In the negotiation between regional texts and global

transformations, this study draws a line from colonialism to neoliberalism to illuminate what Aníbal Quijano has called the coloniality of power in a comparative borderlands context.⁴ The border is a provocative site through which to examine the working of the United States empire and its imperial desires, because, as Amy Kaplan says, “The American Empire has long followed a double impetus to construct boundaries and patrol all movement across them and to break down those borders through the desire for unfettered expansion” (Kaplan 15). From European colonialism to NAFTA, the specter of modernity and its discontents haunts these texts, demonstrating the need for a critical practice that contextualizes the local scenes of engagement imagined within a world system of colonial power and domination. Thus the operations and intersections of power, history, and race (the coloniality of power) are central to my understanding of how these texts imagine encounters with a series of local and global contemporary material realities. I argue that each of the following texts dramatizes the working of empire, by either critiquing its structures of domination and control or, in the case of Cormac McCarthy’s novels, ambivalently upholding those structures. From the hybridized spaces of encounter and contact, each of these texts demonstrates the transformative potential of connections between the borderland’s various populations. As a result, they serve a decolonizing function by contesting colonialism’s hierarchical systems of separation and categorization.

The U.S.-Mexico borderlands are a geography of difference. In 1987, Gloria Anzaldúa famously named the 2,000 mile-long U.S.-Mexico border an *herida abierta*—an open wound—“where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 25).⁵ Similarly, *Border Encounters* demonstrates how racial-ethnic, national, gender-sexual, and class differences are created, enforced, and made visible or invisible in the borderlands in diverse ways. In some of the texts gathered here, Anzaldúa’s metaphor of wounding continues to find purchase, but a new generation of border texts is emerging and these texts envision alternatives that offer connections between people in order to heal the wounds of history. In these texts, the border is not a metaphor for separation and definition, but an opportunity for connection and solidarity. It is, as José David Saldívar says, “the social space of subaltern encounters, the Janus-faced border line in which peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves now negotiate with one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics” (*Border Matters* 14). As a geography of difference-through-encounter, where, as the following chapters demonstrate, new relations and hybrid cultures are indeed being created, these developments need careful contextualizing.

The U.S.-Mexico borderlands have often been called a “contact zone”—what Mary Louise Pratt defines as those “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Pratt 4). Writing specifically in an Asian American context in *Immigrant Acts* (1996), Lisa Lowe calls this kind of grounded hybridity “the materialist concept of hybridity” (Lowe 82). Similar to how Pratt emphasizes unequal power relations in contact zones, Lowe defines “hybridity” as “the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations [...]” (67).⁶ For Gloria Anzaldúa, the “hybrid space” of the borderlands creates “mestiza consciousness:” “From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una*

conciencia de mujer: It is a consciousness of the Borderlands” (Anzaldúa 99). Similarly, Homi Bhabha’s Third Space is an “alien territory,” the “split-space” of the colonial subject where he conceptualizes an “international culture” based not the “diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*.” In hybrid cultures it’s, “—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha 56). Theorists such as Saldívar, Pratt, Lowe, Anzaldúa, and Bhabha ground their understanding of hybridity within specific historical experiences and communities: the colonized female body of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the migrant border-crosser, the Asian immigrant, or the global postcolonial subject.⁷ Their theories carry with them the weight of particular experiences of marginalization, exclusion, displacement—the search for consciousness among competing patriarchal violences or the search for a way to assert ambivalent, discontinuous cultural differences for migrants, the colonized and political refugees. This careful recognition that hybrid cultures are created under conditions of violence and coercion, as always up for grabs, capable of being manipulated and appropriated by commercial culture looking for a new commodity and by the agendas of multiple nation-states speaks appropriately to the kinds of social and cultural encounters we find in the following texts. The varied and various worlds encountered in the works discussed here imagine a dynamic borderlands that is most definitely a hybrid contact zone (or series of zones) of cultural-aesthetic innovation, but these worlds are more fully enlivened by grounding such border encounters in their historical contexts and material realities. The late, great Chicano poet Alfred Arteaga put it well when he wrote: “In other words, the border can be a symbol and rendered poetic, but it is always a site of real world politics. It is not simply a metaphor” (Arteaga 8).

The border, as both metaphor and lived experience, has, to date, found its fullest expression in Chicano/a studies and U.S.-Mexico borderlands studies. Important work by Chicano/a scholars have made visible, audible, and tangible the histories, experiences, and narratives of Mexican and Latin American migrants and Mexican American communities in the United States. From the modernist writings of the proto-Chicano writer Américo Paredes to the foundational texts of the Chicano Nationalist Movement, through Chicana feminist interventions to the contemporary Chicano/a avant-garde community, the canon of writings by and about the border in Mexican American experiences is as rich and varied as the borderlands themselves. As Schmidt Camacho asserts: “Chicano/a literature has been an imaginative space for reckoning with the wounding divisions that the geopolitical border imposed on transborder communities” (Schmidt Camacho 6). Thus envisaged, the work of Chicano/a writers and scholars has made significant contributions to increasing the visibility of Chicano/as and immigrant communities in national culture and politics. My work has benefitted greatly from Chicano/a studies scholarship and seeks to situate itself within this tradition and also to extend the current conversations by broadening our understanding of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to more fully account for the ethno-racial diversity of its populations. In doing so, this project includes cultural texts by Mexican, Chicana, Asian American, African American and white artists, and vigorously advocates for their inclusion in the canon of borderlands literature/culture in as much for the ways in which these texts uphold certain conventions of the genre as they do frequently challenge, depart from, or riff on them. To argue for more heterogeneous scholarship does not mean trivializing or

erasing the important work Chicano/a literary and cultural studies has accomplished in recent decades, nor does it mean that significant differences between groups should be entirely erased as part of a borderlands “melting pot” theory. A comparative ethnic studies approach can help us understand encounters between and across the categories of race, gender, and nationality so that the global forces of movement, diaspora, and border crossing become visible in the specific regions and communities of the borderlands. While this dissertation focuses mainly on how such encounters are imagined through culture, Claudia Sadowski-Smith reminds us that a comparative borderlands approach could help mobilize different groups for political and social action. In *Globalization on the Line*, she writes:

While cultural, linguistic, and ethnic ties remain important for theories of social action, we also need to make various groups of borderlanders visible to one another by showing how similarities in their positions are mediated by the joint efforts of nation-states and corporations to accommodate processes of globalization. A rethinking of theories of affiliation would allow different understandings of political identities and social activism that could, for example, center on cross-ethnic and cross-diasporic struggles for immigrant rights [...] (Sadowski-Smith 89)

Sadowski-Smith reminds us that the uneven processes of globalization are embodied and made particularly real for “borderlanders” whose daily lives are structured by multinational corporations, neoliberalism’s free trade agendas, tourism, and all the other ways in which globalization makes itself real at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Part of the important work accomplished by Chicano/a studies has been a (much needed) intervention in American studies. Chicano/a studies, along with ethnic studies, African American studies, gender & sexuality studies, and other forms of scholarship from the margins, have challenged the disciplinary boundaries of traditional American studies by exposing its elitist privileging of the nation and certain master narratives while obscuring others. Writing in the late 1990s, José David Saldívar acknowledged the role of the border in exposing the limits of American studies: “In the past ten years the terms *border* and *borderlands* in Chicano/a studies have come to name a new dynamic in American studies—a synthesis of articulated development from dissident folklore and ethnography; feminism; literary, critical-legal, and cultural studies; and more recently gender and sexuality studies” (*Border Matters* xii). This new emphasis on borders, diaspora, and extranational spaces in American studies has been referred to as the “transnational turn” in American studies. This turn to the transnational has been articulated in different terms by different scholars, but, in general, it reflects a scholarship that looks beyond the borders of the nation state to understand, as Shelley Fisher Fishkin said in her 2004 Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, “the ways in which ideas, people, culture, and capital have circulated and continue to circulate physically, and virtually, throughout the world, both in ways we might expect, and unpredictably [...]” (Fisher Fishkin 21).⁸ *Border Encounters* contributes to this discussion by linking social identities on the borderlands to both national projects and transnational circulations. Drawing on current scholarship in postcolonial and transnational American studies, I use race and gender as the primary lenses through

which to connect social identities in the borderlands to European/American colonialism and United States imperialism. As a result of the inevitable encounters between multiple groups that occur in the borderlands, the U.S.-Mexico border makes highly visible the ways in which colonial domination created categories of difference and the extent to which such categories are experienced today as subalternized identities. In this conversation, the nation-state alone is insufficient as the primary unit of analysis. I argue that that status of the nation (or, what it means to be “an American”) is best excavated when contextualized within its global colonial past, present, and future. Thus, *Border Encounters* seeks to tread the fine, but critical, border between the national and transnational, arguing that while the U.S.-Mexico border may help us understand what it means to be an American, it will also ask us to reconsider the very terms of identification themselves, exposing their limits and potential in a globalizing society.

In the first section, I bring together a series of experimental cultural texts in order to demonstrate how a diverse group of artists use innovative aesthetics to comment on material realities in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. I begin with an analysis of the transnational collaborative photo-textual book, *Here Is Tijuana!* by Fiamma Montezemolo, René Peralta, and Heriberto Yépez (2006). I explore how the Mexico-based contributors propose “*transa*,” the borderlands slang term for “transaction,” as a way of describing and representing contemporary Tijuana. In the book, *transa* is both a metaphor for describing the contemporary transborder city, and also an aesthetic that unfolds through the book's three sections: “Avatars,” “Desires,” and “Permutations.” The authors use experimental, *transa* techniques of pastiche, collage, and juxtaposition to depict a brutal yet thriving Tijuana—a city (re)crossed by transboundary flows of people, goods, services and capital that simultaneously celebrates its own unique identity, contesting North American and Mexican stereotypes. *Here Is Tijuana* documents and visualizes a series of geopolitics and cultural phenomena that can be linked to both transnational and national processes and structures that are deeply rooted in colonial legacies of domination and hierarchy. In contesting the old metaphors and narratives about Tijuana, the book offers the rich, if unstable, idea of ‘*transa*’ as a new metaphor for U.S.-Mexico borderlands cultural formations in the twenty-first century.

Expanding *transa*'s field of reference from Tijuana to the greater U.S.-Mexico borderlands, my second chapter reads Harryette Mullen's epic poem, *Muse & Drudge*, as an innovative text of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands by focusing on her literal and figurative transactions between multiple discourses, including Spanish, and the corresponding sets of material conditions these discourses conjure to understand how *Muse & Drudge* reveals the on-going racialization and exploitation of African American women and Latinas in the borderlands. I argue that the feminist avant-garde critics who use metaphors of “border-crossing” and hybridity to discuss Mullen's formal innovation fail to account for the presence of the actual, geopolitical U.S.-Mexico border in the poem. I identify a “transaborder poetics” in *Muse & Drudge* where the shared colonial histories unite Afro-Caribbean diasporic and borderlands subjects, and in the literal and figurative transactions between multiple discourses and the corresponding sets of lived, material conditions these discourses conjure. As part of her poetics, themes of separation, definition, regulation are racialized concepts, deeply embedded in the violent

histories of racial mixing and mestizaje that are both named outright and also alluded to metaphorically through Mullen's hybridized language.

I conclude this section with a comparative analysis of experimental fictions by Chicana writer Helena María Viramontes and Asian American writer Karen Tei Yamashita. Both Helena María Viramontes's short story, "The Cariboo Café," and Karen Tei Yamashita's novel, *Tropic of Orange*, have been read as texts of a postmodern Los Angeles. Yet, reading both texts as **also** part of a growing tradition of decolonial U.S.-Mexico border literature reveals how each text contests the on-going marginalization of Los Angeles's abject (immigrants, diasporic subjects, racial minorities, working class whites, and the homeless) and offers unlikely connections between diverse peoples as a site of solidarity against oppression. These connections serve a decolonizing function by confronting how global forces of inequality are localized in the segregated social and physical spaces of Los Angeles's urban geography. Both Viramontes and Yamashita engage experimental formal strategies, particularly the multi-voiced text, to give voice to the voiceless and recover their stories from the margins of official history.

The second section compares and contrasts representations of the U.S.-Mexico border by two different white artists in order to explore the under-theorized relationship between whiteness and cultural production in U.S.-Mexico borderlands. In the fourth chapter, I argue against reading Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy* as an example of "revisionist" Western history, as literary critics often assert. In grounding my reading in a critical analysis of race and gender, I expose the limits of McCarthy's "revisionist" potential by demonstrating how he reifies stereotypes about the availability and hypersexualization of Mexican women on the U.S.-Mexico border in order to construct a dominant, if ambivalent, white masculinity. The critical concerns this chapter addresses seek to re-situate McCarthy's influential borderlands art within a more nuanced series of border encounters that locate his representations of the U.S.-Mexico border and the diverse array of people who inhabit it within a larger transnational history of racial encounter in order to make available certain identities and modes of representation. Exposing the links between McCarthy's representations and real-world material realities are crucial to this analysis because they reveal how McCarthy both accounts for and disavows the operations of power and history on the U.S.-Mexico border.

By contrast, my final chapter analyzes the lyrics and musical forms of the Roger Clyne & Peacemakers, a contemporary rock band from Tempe, Arizona, identifying how the band's multilingual lyrics (English, Spanish, and "Spanglish") and blending of U.S. and Mexican musical genres advocate for a peaceful cross-cultural coexistence. While Clyne's music may occasionally lapse into happy stereotypes and romanticized depictions of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, his representation of a transnational musical utopia, including the incorporation of Mexican musical traditions and Spanish language in his music and characters who refuse stable national or cultural identities, combined with his passionate advocacy for "peace, love, liberty, dignity, humanity" represents an alternative cultural politics on the border (*Leave an Open Door*). Like Cormac McCarthy's novels, Clyne's music posits an ambivalent white identity for borderlands subjects. Yet while McCarthy's ambivalent white masculinities depend upon racial and imperial desires to construct their meaning, the transnational identity Clyne creates is less

hyper-masculinized and violent, and more inclusive and vulnerable. Clyne's music reflects a new form of cultural politics that embraces the in-betweenness of transnationalism and demonstrates the imperializing limits of 'nation' and 'citizen.' For Clyne, such categories ultimately fail to capture the complexity of the human relationships.

Border Encounters speak to the urgent, on-going need in American cultural and literary studies to more fully account for how encountering the U.S.-Mexico border reveals forces of domination and subordination, but also sites of active resistance. These sites of confrontation and resistance offer opportunities for solidarity between groups of subalternized people in, across, and between the Americas by revealing shared struggles. They also invite people disunited by differences to simultaneously embrace the particularity of their experiences, identities, and histories while coming together to effect positive social change. In imagining such sites of difference and solidarity, the texts gathered here imagine new forms of imagination itself that can, and will, shape the future of the American hemisphere.

¹ Preston, Julia. "Political Battle on Illegal Immigration Shifts to States." *New York Times* 31 Dec 2010 Web.

² See, for example, Rosa Linda Fregoso's analysis of the invisibility of meXicanas in national narratives. In *meXicana Encounters*, she writes: "By emphasizing the role of social identities in nation-building narratives, I aim to offer an account for the apparent contradiction between the visibility of meXicanas in cultural representation, and their invisibility in the history of the nation" (Fregoso xii).

³ In their Introduction to *Literature and Ethnicity in the Cultural Borderlands*, Jesús Benito and Ana María Manzanás describe border literature as "a transgressive discourse whose aim is to render possible, within the fixed cultural, literary or linguistic bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted" (Benito and Manzanás 13).

⁴ See Aníbal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power and Latin America." *International Sociology*. 15:2. 215-232 (2000).

⁵ More recent scholarship on Anzaldúa theorizes her work more broadly to reflect Anzaldúa's own multiple creative and theoretical interests, including spirituality, queer identities, her commitment to social justice, activism, performance, and teaching. Work by AnaLouise Keating and Chela Sandoval, for example, pushes *Borderlands'* key terms beyond identity-based applications into a more expansive and inclusionary vision for social justice. See AnaLouise Keating's anthology of new Anzaldúa scholarship: *Entre Mundos/Between Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa* (2005) and *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (2009).

⁶ A materialist concept of hybridity: "conveys that the histories of forced labor migrations, racial segregation, economic displacement, and internment are left in the material traces of 'hybrid' cultural identities; these hybridities are always in the process of, on the one hand, being appropriated and commodified by commercial culture and, on the other, of being rearticulated for the creation of oppositional 'resistance cultures.' Hybridization is not the 'free' oscillation between or among chosen identities. It is the uneven process through which immigrant communities encounter the violences of the U.S. state, and the capital imperatives served by the United States and by the Asian states from which they come, and the process through which they survive those violences by living, inventing, and reproducing different cultural alternatives (Lowe 82).

⁷ For further examples work that fully engages both materially specific social analysis and literary-cultural critique, see work by Alicia Schmidt Camacho (2008), Marcial Gonzalez (2008), Ramón Saldívar (2006), Luis Gerard Mendoza (2001), Rosa Linda Fregoso (2000), Sonia Saldívar-Hull (2000), Claire F. Fox (1999), Emma Pérez (1999), Leticia Garza-Falcón (1998), José Limón (1998).

⁸ Many American studies scholars have told and retold this history (and subsequent controversy). For a more in-depth discussion of "the transnational turn in American studies" see: Rachel Adams (2001); Jane Desmond and Virginia Domínguez (1996); Shelley Fisher Fishkin (2004), (1998); Amy Kaplan (2003); Carolyn Porter (1994).

One

Tijuana Transa

To talk about Tijuana invokes a complex history in which all of these magic signs, discourses, practices, and struggles are filtered through a particular border site with its own metaphorical overlay of feminization and abjection, but its own legal history, its own racially inflected past and present, its own biculturally determined exchanges.

---Debra A. Castillo, Maria Grudelia Rangel Gomez, and Bonnie Delgado¹

The border between Mexico and the United States is 3,000 kilometers long and is the most asymmetrical border in the world

---Televisa² cited in *Tijuana!* (140).

Tijuanalogy

“Since its big bang, there exists a Tijuanalogy,” the authors of *Here Is Tijuana!* (2006) announce in the introduction to their impressive photo-textual study of contemporary Tijuana. Fiamma Montezemolo, a Mexican anthropologist; René Peralta, an Italian architect; and Heriberto Yépez, a Mexican scholar/writer, explain that *Tijuanalogía* refers to the fascination with Tijuana by governments, agencies, tourists, travel writers, artists, scholars, residents and visitors...all of the ways and all of the different times Tijuana appears in public and private discourse. In *Here Is Tijuana!* the collaborators combine their different research projects to “produce a book that would reunite the different postures about the city in order to extend the conflict to others as well” (*Tijuana* 4). This fundamental contradiction reinforces the authors’ opening claim: “Tijuana, instead of a city, more often than not, is a transa.” They define transa as:

[...] agreement, bribery, business, intention, reflection and project. Transa refers to the illegitimate and what happens on the verge; not only of illegality but also of any non-conventional initiative. It is derived from ‘transaction.’ A transaction within another transaction—this is how Tijuana functions, Tijuana muddles everything up—Tijuana transa.

As a metaphor, “transa” “de-codifies” and “re-codifies” Tijuana as a series of transactions. These transactions tell stories about how we encounter and represent Tijuana (and the U.S.-Mexico border) through culture. Through photography and textual sampling, the authors depict a brutal yet thriving Tijuana—a city (re)crossed by transboundary flows of people, goods, services and capital that simultaneously celebrates its own unique identity, contesting North American and Mexican stereotypes about what the city represents—vice, illegality, poverty, a cultural wasteland. Or, as the authors state: “[...] as hybrid, illegal, happy, Americanized, postmodern, pure myth, new cultural Mecca—and all of this is simultaneously real and imaginary.” The Tijuana that emerges

from the book's pages testifies to the contradictory power of the U.S.-Mexico border to transgress and render obsolete national boundaries while also heightening the (perceived) power and presence of states and cohesive national identities.³ Through the transa forms of textual and visual collage and pastiche, the book documents and visualizes a series of geopolitics and cultural phenomena that can be linked to both transnational and national processes and structures.

As a formal technique, transa describes the book's composition—190 collaged pages of photographs, quoted material (the textual “sound byte”), statistics, interviews, demographics and Internet postings. A borderlands remix. Transactions within transactions. The authors “ [...] decided the book would have to be a transaction of disciplines and disagreements, a transaction between the many discourses about Tijuana (statistical, literary, academic, popular etc.) and its rich visual cultural” (*Tijuana* 5). Although they describe the book in multiple ways—as a “compendium,” “a preamble,” “an anthology,” “a Mexican lottery,” and a “de-fragmentation”—the authors assert that the “structure of the book is analogous to the city.” The journey through its three sections—“Avatars,” “Desires,” and “Permutations”—reminds us that Tijuana can never be absolutely abstracted as a metaphor for the borderlands. While the authors caution that the book is, after all, “a representation among many,” it also illustrates how “the importance of the relationship between cultures and urban space is magnified on the international boundary between the United States and Mexico” (Herzog 7). Or, as Saskia Sassen notes, “Trends in major cities cannot be understood in isolation of fundamental changes in the broader organization of advanced economies” (cited in Ngim and Torres 370). Thus, the book's “visual tourism” shows us how Tijuana's historical and contemporary relationship to the global coloniality of power⁴—as a “transfrontier metropolis,”⁵ *maquila*-town, dump, hedonistic tourist attraction—always already influences how we imagine and encounter Tijuana. Tijuana transa.

Adiós, happy híbrido?

By exploring Tijuana's various conflicting forces, or transas, *Here Is Tijuana!* echoes critic Nestor García Canclini's well-known discussion of Tijuana and border cultures in *Hybrid Cultures* (1990; 1995). In *Hybrid Cultures*, Canclini identifies a process of hybridization⁶ that occurs as Latin American countries at the end of the twentieth century negotiate between the opposing pushes and pulls of tradition and modernity. While Canclini is careful to ground “socio-cultural” forces of hybridity in material realities and lived experiences of structural inequality in the border region, Canclini's analysis invokes Tijuana as a case-study for similar geographies where the transnationalization of markets and migrations creates conditions of cultural crossing. Tijuana, as a “laboratory of postmodernity” (Canclini 233), becomes a specific site through which he teases out larger questions of continuity versus change in contemporary Latin America. The authors of *Tijuana!*, however, are less interested in using Tijuana as an example of postmodern socio-cultural changes at large and remain grounded in the specific territories of the city itself, drawing their metaphors from the very slang of the city streets.

The careful recontextualizing and reterritorializing of hybridity theory is a concern that *Here Is Tijuana!* contributor Heriberto Yépez (writer, artist, scholar, psychoanalyst) addresses in his own scholarship. Working through a constellation of

mediums: poetry, fiction, criticism, theory, psychoanalysis, installation art, and electronic forums such as blogging, Yépez uses the everyday architecture of city streets, sidewalks, and billboards as pages to illustrate the relationship between art and the urban landscape of a global border town. In this, his work is similar to Canclini's analysis of monuments, billboards, public art, signage, and graffiti in *Hybrid Cultures*. Yet, in his scholarly writings, Yépez has criticized appropriations of Canclini's work that he believes oversimplify cultural conflict and celebrate a more watered-down idea of cultural blending. Instead, he offers a theory of oppositional forces of "fission" that result as culture, ideas, and people combat each other in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. He argues against border theories that portray the borderlands as the uncomplicated synthesis of two bounded (but always inherently unequal) cultures. He asks us to say "adiós" to what he identifies as the overused metaphors of "happy hybridism" (*Made in Tijuana* 11). In his collection of essays, *Made in Tijuana*, Yépez summarizes and rejects the recent theorizing of the border as a hybrid space and ultimately attempts to re-situate the border and the "frontier writer"(85) in opposition to popular metaphors of hybridity. While Yépez's wariness over the misappropriation of hybridity theories, like Canclini's, is a point well-taken, in proposing new metaphors for art in the borderlands, "*Adiós, happy híbrido*" relies too heavily on Euro-centric philosophies in its critique and also misses some of the important confluences between Canclini's attention to conflict and Yépez's own interest in violent "fuerzas" (forces).

Yépez opens his introductory essay, "Adiós happy híbrido: Variaciones hacia una definición estética de la frontera [más allá del mítico personaje mixto]" (Goodbye happy hybrid: Variations toward an aesthetic definition of the border (more than the mythic mixed personality) by declaring: "La hibridación como metáfora para describir los fenómenos de contacto en la frontera México-Estados Unidos ha llegado a su fin. La metáfora de la hibridación probó ser ingenua, neoliberal, hegeliana" (Hybridity as a metaphor for describing the phenomena of contact in the Mexico-United States border has reached its end. The hybridity metaphor proved to be ingenuous, neoliberal, Hegelian). In a perhaps overly dismissive rhetorical move, Yépez sets out to refute metaphors of hybridity, mixing, contact, synthesis, blending, and multiculturalism used by scholars, politicians, and the media to describe the U.S.-Mexico border. In calling hybridity theories "disengenuous, neoliberal, and Hegelian," however, Yépez forgets the biological origins of the word, which refers to a process of change in which two discrete species combine to create a third, a context that Canclini is careful to attend to in his own definition of hybridity. The biological origins of the word point to some of its limitations: it assumes, as Canclini says in the Introduction to *Hybrid Culture's* second edition, "a space betwixt and between two zones of purity" (Canclini xv). This definition erases the possibilities of multiple, always already hybrid zones of origination. Thus, postmodernists and journalists are not solely to blame for the occasional obscuring of the term's critical tensions. Also, Yépez, who prefaces his essay with epigraphs from Ludwig Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida, seems overly preoccupied with Western philosophical-theoretical appropriations of hybridity theories and doesn't account for its more careful and none-too-'happy' theorizing in the work of subaltern writers such as Homi Bhabha, Gloria Anzaldúa, Lisa Lowe, and even Canclini himself.

Yépez argues Canclini's audiences of academics, artists, authors, and journalists have simplified "su tesis sobre la hibridación y el postmodernismo—quienes

establecieron lo ‘híbrido’ como la categoría automática bajo la cual habría que definir lo fronterizo” (his thesis on hybridity and postmodernism, those who established ‘the hybrid’ as the automatic category for defining all things related to the border) (*Made in Tijuana* 12). Yépez accuses this generalized mass of cliché-creators, whom Yépez never names specifically and perhaps erroneously assumes his readers are familiar with, of rendering the hybridity metaphor useless. He also credits the postmodern works of Jean-François Lyotard and Fredric Jameson on global semiotic changes as responsible for introducing a kind of bipolar ambivalence (12) that has informed hybridity theories.⁷ Postmodernism, he argues, has become “Decontextualización Feliz. Happy meal de los discursos.”⁸ In the postmodern celebration of blurred boundaries, Yépez worries that we have “depoliticized” (12) borders and that we celebrate a Hegelian synthesis of differences “mientras que en realidad observamos todo lo contrario: las fronteras, de ambos lados, se remarcan” (while in reality we are observing the complete opposite: borders, on both sides, are reinforced). Yépez reminds us that “the border reality is much more complex than this metaphor” (14) and the “asymmetric reality of the border demands different metaphors.” In sum: “El concepto de hibridación desdibuja tensiones; neutraliza. Y lo que la frontera realiza es transgredir entendidos, cargar intencionalidades: abrir conflictos” (The concept of hybridity blurs tensions, neutralizes. And what the border accomplishes is to transgress understandings, to overload intentionalities: to open conflicts). The extensive popularity of performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, whose hybridism expresses a “parodic and detached insolence” (Canclini 239), symbolizes the theorizing that Yépez blames for mythologizing hybridity theories. These theories fail to account for the violent, contradictory forces created by the confrontation of cultures and for the real people who experience such cultural confrontation (and corresponding regimes of power) as part of their daily lives. While Yépez makes a very good point about the linked processes of blurring and remarking boundaries, he is perhaps overly dismissive of Jameson and doesn’t engage in a serious discussion of his work, choosing instead to write-off all Western postmodern theorists with glibness and humor. This disregard is an intriguing move, since the rest of Yépez’s essay spends a considerable amount of time mining quotes by theorists such as Serge Gruzinski, Theodore Adorno, Hélène Cixous, Kierkegaard, Lévi-Strauss, Kathy Acker, and others.

Yépez turns the physical sciences and to the work of Latin American modernist, Jorge Luis Borges, for different metaphors. From Borges, Yépez appropriates the image of the “Aleph”—a complex image that alludes to a vast space-time vortex where all times and all places converge (14). The image of the Aleph is especially relevant, he says, in thinking about the movements of migration (an idea further teased out in *Here Is Tijuana!*). In addition to the more metaphysical image of the Aleph, Yépez borrows the term “fission” from subatomic physics: “La frontera no se define por su fusión sino por su fisión” (The border does not define itself by its fusion, but rather by its fission). Fission, as a phenomenon, refers to the spontaneous or induced splitting of an atomic nucleus into smaller nuclei, usually accompanied by a significant release of energy. Fusion, in turn, occurs when two or materials merge or blend. Yépez argues that the fusion model has, along with postmodern theory, transcended national identities in favor of a new global “mezcla,” a new “Americanization” (20). Yépez writes: “La fusión, hibridación y síntesis tienden a construir ‘Estados Unidos.’ La fisión de las culturas

fronterizas, en cambio, se concreta en ‘Estados Contradictorios’ ” (Fusion, hybridity and synthesis tend to build United States. The fission of border cultures, on the other hand, combine themselves into Contradictory States.). Yépez plays on the word “state”—as a bounded, national territory as well as a theoretical (or psychological) state of being. Hybridity, he argues, oversimplifies the role of states by transcending or disavowing them in favor of more diffuse, transnational global identities. Yépez also plays on the Spanish words for the United States—“Estados Unidos”—signifying not only the unifying tendencies of hybridity theories (of the “global village” variety), but also ironizing U.S. hegemony. Hybridity, according to Yépez, doesn’t just create a universal melting pot; it creates the United States. Implicit in Yépez’s denouncement of hybridity theories are serious anxieties about its increasingly hegemonic quality. For him, hegemony works through transnational flows of capital and culture, encouraged by neoliberal policy, which purport to export a postnational, global identity. Yet that identity, according to Yépez, tends to overwhelmingly reflect U.S. culture and values—a type of U.S. cultural hegemony that threatens to turn any united states into The United States. Globalization = Americanization = hegemony.

While this essay relies too heavily on Western-centric theorists, both in the objects of its attack and the objects of its affection, Yépez’s essay also doesn’t take into account the similarities between his own conflict-based metaphors of fission and Canclini’s work. In observing the exchanges of traditional symbols with increasingly globalized circuits of movement and communications, Canclini notes

the unequal appropriation of knowledge and art do not disappear. The conflicts are not erased, as neoconservative postmodernism claims. [...] Therefore, the analysis of the advantages or inconveniences of deterritorialization should not be reduced to the movements of ideas or cultural codes. Their meaning is also constructed in connection with social and economic practices, in struggles for local power, and in the competition to benefit from alliances with external powers (Canclini 241).

In this sense, Canclini actually names the potential conflicts inherent in hybrid and hybridizing cultures more specifically than Yépez, who is happy to leave his “fission” at the level of metaphor without specifically naming the kind of power appropriations or structural inequalities that Canclini’s essay is more sensitive to. For example, Yépez ends his essay by returning to the image of “fuerzas” or forces. He uses the images of opposing magnets to illustrate that with its erotic clashes, attraction and repulsion, a fuerza-de-resistencia⁹ is, finally, the perfect alternative metaphor for borderlands culture. The tension of opposing/resisting forces “molds the structures, identities and forms” (35) of the borderlands. These forces are transa. But what remain unnamed in this particular essay are the socio-economic contexts that give rise to these forces, and it’s unclear to what level Yépez intends to leave the metaphor at the level of the cultural or aesthetic. Canclini, on the other hand, observes:

In the movement of the city, commercial interests are crossed with historical, aesthetic, and communicational ones. The semantic struggles to neutralize each other, to perturb the message of the others or change its meaning, and to

subordinate the rest to its own logic are stagings of the conflicts between social forces: between the market, history, the state, advertising, and the popular struggle for survival (Canclini 222)

Here, Canclini names these conflictive forces as operations of “history, the state, advertising, and the popular struggle for survival,” a crucial specificity that Yépez’ essay lacks.

Thus *Made in Tijuana* introduces an important conversation that becomes more fully worked through in Yépez’s collaborations with Fiamma Montezemolo and René Peralta in *Here Is Tijuana!* Yépez’s arguments find better traction in the very specific geography of Tijuana. While Canclini’s *Hybrid Cultures* effectively illuminates how the cultures of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands reflect the larger forces of conflict, change, resistance, and continuity in Latin America, *Here Is Tijuana!* reterritorializes the city, documents what remains specific to the city itself, and reminds us that Tijuana cannot be abstracted into a “laboratory of postmodernity” because Tijuana, after all, is a transa. While *Hybrid Cultures* gestures towards the kinds of social and economic forces that always already contextualize deterritorializing or reterritorializing projects, *Here Is Tijuana!*’s visual-textual tourist “trip” more effectively names and visualizes the specific forces at work in our encounters with Tijuana, and also how we represent these encounters in culture.

“Tijuana= Mexico + USA / Mex & co. — Estados Unidos ≠ Tijuana”¹⁰

Here is Tijuana’s formal structure transacts between sites of “reality” (social, political, economic) and how we encounter these sites through culture. “Avatars” depicts the multiple forms of border movement—legal and illegal immigration, tourism, working, shopping—while “Desires” explores Tijuana’s sex industry, booming music scene, and other cultural performances. “Permutations” examines the unequal architecture of change vs. decay (or history vs. present) in a city of *maquilas*, police brutality, commercialization, poverty and uneven development.



Figure 1 (Source: *Tijuana* 8-9)

“Avatars” opens with a double-page photographic spread of the San Diego-Tijuana border. On the left, the stark military outpost of San Diego contrasts with the brown hills of tightly packed houses and billboards on the Tijuana side. Looming in the foreground is a gigantic, red Coca-Cola billboard. The red of the billboard stands out against the drab, brown-grey of the Baja California landscape. Three quotes border the photo on the left side of the page. One quote by Jesse Lerner notes

the strange transformations that occur when Mexico’s ancient cultural heritage reaches the country’s northern border [...] a region where San Diego’s military bases and million dollar ocean view homes rub against Tijuana’s post-apocalyptic landscape wasted by neo-liberalism [...] (*Tijuana* 8)

The contrast represents the tendency of urban spaces to reflect the underlying values and means attached to space. “Space,” as Nina Glick Schiller tells us, “is not a product of nature but is socially delimited by the intersections and overlays of institutions of family, economy, school, culture, and politics” (*Displacements* 160). Even in spaces of high interdependence, such as the border, “neighboring cities reflect the pull of national politics and culture, which generate distinct built environments and spatial structures” (Herzog 121). In this case, the photo dramatizes a major difference in spatial organization along the Tijuana-San Diego border: wealthier Tijuans live downtown, just meters from the international boundary, while in San Diego, the wealthy live away from the border (133). The emptier space on the San Diego side of the border, marked by high fences and official-looking compounds reflects the U.S.’s emphasis on distance, security and surveillance, while the bustling highway, middle-class homes, and colorful

billboards on the Mexican side reflect commerce, activity, and movement. The Coca-Cola billboard pulls the viewer's gaze to the lower right-hand corner of the image. Although not quite the "post-apocalyptic landscape wasted by neo-liberalism" that Lerner describes, the advertisement reflects the overwhelming power of the market to shape space along the border. The lack of similar advertisements on the United States side reinforces Herzog's observation of the "highly uneven" nature of economic space in San Diego-Tijuana, where Tijuana's ties to commercial processes in California are much stronger than San Diego's (formal) commercial ties to Tijuana (185). As an "establishing shot" for the Avatars section of the book, this photograph is intriguing. The photographer uses the international boundary to divide the image neatly in half, reinforcing the image's message of division and difference. Yet, the authors have arranged the layout on the page so that the book's spine creates another line of separation across the far left of the image (on the U.S. side). By allowing the photograph to bleed across the gutter, the page layout de-emphasizes the international border's overly neat separation of spaces, challenging and reinterpreting the photographer's gaze while also calling attention to the constructed nature of the page itself, the ways in which the authors are manipulating space for the reader/viewer. Throughout the book, the authors invite a re-evaluation of the overly simplistic dialectics that render Tijuana, the border, and its representations as a (unequal) synthesis of two separate nations or two separate cultures. Transa invokes the unequal transactions between shifting sites and how these shifting sites are translated through a multiplicity of representations, such as theirs. Thus, the authors ask us to think carefully not only about how the border itself can become an avatar for U.S.-Mexico relations, but who or what we fashion into avatars for the border.



Figure 2 (Source: *Tijuana* 10-11)

Flip the page and we zoom in on close-ups of fences, some with gaping holes, which seem to extend into infinity, separating the Mexican and U.S. shores (Figure 2). The photographer's gaze reaches northward, peering through rusted holes in the fence, aligning the position of the viewer with the position of a possible border crosser. The photos emphasize how the fence blends into the continuous geography—the same tawny sand, the same coastal chaparral extends across both sides of the fence. On the other side of the page, statistics on illegal immigration are printed in bold:

- In 2000, the earnings of traffickers of illegal persons along the border went up to more than \$7,000 million, according to the United States Department of State.
- Contrary to popular belief, the majority of these smugglers are United States citizens.
- 123 smugglers were detained at the Tijuana-San Diego border crossing during 2003, 89% of whom were North Americans.
- A third of the money that undocumented persons [...] pay to be crossed by smugglers ends up in the pockets of Mexican and United States immigration officials (*Tijuana* 11).

These data suggest a double-sided process. Media and political discourse depict opportunistic Mexican *coyotes* exploiting desperate migrants (which certainly happens), but one of the contrary forces the authors illustrate here is the extent to which the process of undocumented crossing involves and benefits U.S. citizens. This disavowal of U.S. participation in what is fundamentally a transnational process reflects, as Joseph Nevins points out, the dominant view of the “‘illegal alien’ as someone whose supposed criminal activity (in violating immigration laws) is independent of the actions of people and institutions in the United States” (Nevins 140). The data also allude to the long history of smuggling on the U.S.-Mexico border. Because the United States is, according to Peter Andreas, the world's number one smuggling target, vast networks exist to transport people, drugs, and black market goods across the international boundary (Andreas 2000; 16). Common perceptions of smuggling usually focus entirely on the transport of people and illegal drugs by non-U.S. citizens, yet Andreas maps a more complex network of smuggling, which includes the participation of U.S. citizens and non-citizens in the trafficking of a wide variety of products that are either illegal in the U.S. or carry a high tariff (from legal prescription drugs to exotic plants and animals and cigarettes). Like Andreas, *Tijuana's* authors use a photo collage of images that emphasize holes, gaps, and a continuous landscape to suggest a more complex and porous process of border movement, an uneven transa where the movement of people is inextricably tied to transnational movements of money in unexpected ways.

In challenging one-sided notions of what and who moves across the border, “Avatars” continues by complicating stereotypical constructions of ‘the immigrant.’ *Here Is Tijuana!* portrays Tijuana as racially diverse—a destination for thousands of immigrants from Central America and interior Mexico who use Tijuana as their staging area for crossing into the United States and who often end up as permanent city residents. As a result, the racial and ethnic composition of the city is more diverse than many imagine. The authors cite data from the National Institute of Migration in Baja California that state that within the first years of the 21st century, the majority of illegal foreigners

detained in Tijuana were from Guatemala. Brazil took second place (*Tijuana* 12). On the same page, data from the Casa del Migrante (2004) tell us that Tijuana has received 130,000 migrants between 1987—2004 from other parts of Mexico and Central America. Immigration scholars have documented dramatic increases in immigration from Central America to Mexico and the United States since the 1980s, when political unrest and civil wars created a massive influx of refugees fleeing the violence, warfare, and poor conditions in their homelands.¹¹ Corresponding “pull” factors include employment opportunities in the *maquiladora* industry along the border and the informal economy of U.S. border states and cities, particularly Los Angeles, where many Central American women work in sweatshops or as domestic servants.¹²

Yet, Tijuana’s racial and ethnic diversity extends both more globally and more locally. A quote on page twenty refers to the “unprecedented mixing” along the border where “[...] there are more Chinese restaurants in Tijuana than any other city in México [...]” (*Tijuana* 20). Tijuana has had a historic role in Chinese immigration to the Americas. When the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) made Chinese immigrants illegal, many were smuggled illegally into the U.S. through Tijuana. In addition, many Asian-based smuggling networks operated out of Tijuana during the early 20th century, smuggling opium across the border.¹³ The networks required to facilitate such operations created a lasting Asian presence in the city. The transnational linkages between Asia, Mexico, and the United States continue today. As Claudia Sadowski-Smith notes, “Under the cooperation of human cargo smugglers—Chinese ‘snakeheads’ and Mexican ‘coyotes’—the U.S.-Mexico border has become one of the major transit points for Chinese immigration” (Sadowski-Smith 76). Elsewhere in the section, the authors quote a street vendor on Revolution Avenue who mixes English and Japanese when addressing his clients: “Chicken [she can] try it. And if you want, I can hara kiri [the] price” (*Tijuana* 35). Not only does the vendor racialize the two Asian American women¹⁴ as foreigners who don’t understand English, he also assumes they are Japanese, reflecting the common stereotype of the ubiquitous “Japanese tourist.” By drawing attention to the global population of the city, *Here Is Tijuana!* undermines popular representations of Tijuana as a city-sized slum full of poor Mexicans. Instead, Tijuana is represented as a point of intersection and transaction in a larger historical and contemporary circuit of transnational and global movements and processes.

Later, on a dramatic black and white spread, a series of quotes and statistics on Tijuana’s indigenous population are juxtaposed with six portrait photographs that capture candid shots of men, women, and children, some with indigenous features, as if to combat the potential dehumanizing of the statistics. One scholar describes Tijuana’s “ethnic scene”:

characterized by: a small population of indigenous natives, a significant population of U.S. origin living along the coast of the peninsula, center of population of Chinese, Italian, Japanese, and Russian origin, as well as a large component of mixed population from different regions of the country and a recent indigenous migrant population with a sharp rate of increase over the last two decades (*Tijuana* 40).



Figure 3 (Source: *Tijuana* 41)

On the opposite page, census data show that 1.4% of the population in Tijuana speaks an indigenous language, mostly Mixtec, and that from 1990—2000, an increase of 19,508 indigenous speakers was registered in the state, which equates to an annual increase of 7.6% (*Tijuana* 41). The indigenous population of Tijuana is perhaps the most abject, as they face ethnic and class-based discrimination from both Mexicans and North Americans. In one of the book's most sobering and ironic photographs, a young indigenous woman sits on the sidewalk with a baby cradled in a shawl around her neck and a plastic cup in her hand. She looks in consternation away from the photographer, down the street. Her baby is leaning his or her head back in her arms, his or her gaze extended in the opposite direction of the mother. Both are bundled as if against the cold. The image visualizes statistics from the online newspaper *Frontera*: "From 1996 to 2004, the number of women migrants who arrive at this border in search of a better life has grown by more than 400%. The majority of them are mothers between 20—30 years of age. Eight of each ten have completed only the sixth grade" (47).

The direction of the mother's gaze draws the viewer's attention to a bold sign hanging in the window of the shop behind her that advertises, in English: "WE NOW HAVE THE LOW WAIST CUT JEANS ASK FOR THEM!!." The photo suggests several things: the hegemonic influence of U.S. culture as evidenced by the use of English and the jeans (a classic U.S. product now manufactured outside of the country); the way fashion trends market women as sexually desirable bodies; and the implication that such fashion trends—or at least these jeans—are a relatively new commodity in the city. The photograph emphasizes the distance between the woman and child, begging for coins on the street, and the potential shopper. The provocative image of women in "low

waist jeans” contrasts uncomfortably with the woman, whose sexuality has ceased to be a fashion statement and is literally embodied in the child cradled against her body. The unease the photograph produces in the viewer reflects one of the largely unacknowledged uncomfortable truths about increasing the availability of goods and services across borders—these policies have failed to improve the lives of non-elites and have actually worsened conditions in Mexico. Jeff Faux argues that as a result of privatization policies and the opening of Mexico’s economy, “The [Mexican] poverty rate rose from 45.6 percent in 1994 to 50.3 percent in 2000. The share of Mexicans in extreme poverty, defined as people who cannot maintain the bare minimum of nutrition needed to remain healthy, rose from 27.9 to 31.9 percent” (Faux 139-140). Faux demonstrates how neoliberalism rewards a global class of wealthy and elite capitalists and punishes the poor, disenfranchised, and working classes. Thus, while “Avatars” celebrates and claims Tijuana’s diversity, the authors are conscious and careful to remind readers of its conflictive context and the very disastrous effects global restructuring has on America’s (North and South) most abject peoples.



Figure 4 (Source: *Tijuana 15*)



Figure 5 (Source: *Tijuana* 17)

“Avatars” devotes several pages to border crossings often overlooked: working, shopping, and traveling. A large color photo dominates page fifteen. Shot from ground level, the photo captures a man with a backpack pushing through the gated turnstile of the international pedestrian crossing point. The turnstile has been fitted into a long white metal fence. The photographer’s gaze looks up through a maze of criss-crossing bars and lines, emphasizing containment, security, claustrophobia, and regulation. It’s as if we are looking out through a barred window into a barred and gated world. In contrast, the man with his furrowed brow is captured in the midst of movement—pushing though, possibly on his way to work, to shop, to visit family or friends. A quote above the photo reminds us that among the daily “population movements, the best known and perhaps the most important is that of the commuters, who are persons whose residence is in one country but who move, sometimes every day, to the neighboring country to work” (*Tijuana* 15). Herzog claims such labor flows are largely ignored because of the overwhelming attention given to undocumented workers. But, he claims such “frontier workers represent an important component of the U.S.-Mexico transfrontier social geography. They reflect a regionalized response to the social context of production in the border zone: lower standards of living south of the border, and greater availability of jobs at higher wages to the north” (Herzog 156). The following pages continue with a series of shots of the vehicle crossing point. These shots, taken at a high angle looking down at the border, reflect a perpendicular composition. The east—west running pedestrian arches, fences, and immigration checkpoints are penetrated by the north-south flows of cars in heavy traffic. Once again, the book’s visual elements effectively dramatize the choque of opposing forces, in this case security and containment versus movement and flow.

Statistics above the photos inform us: “24% of all North-bound border crossing is to work in San Diego and that 1/10 of Tijuana’s workforce works in San Diego” (*Tijuana* 17). In his fieldwork with Mexican commuter workers, Herzog has identified that most Mexican commuter workers cross into San Diego to work in the service industry—in restaurants, hotels, auto repair and private households. Other major employment sectors include manufacturing and construction (Herzog 159). While some of these commuter workers hold documentation that allows them to work in the United States, many others use their “white cards” (permits granted to residents of a Mexican border city to stay for

up to 72 hours in the United States within 25 miles of the boundary) to work illegally in the United States. According to Herzog, more than one million Mexicans along the border possess these cards, and immigration services have admitted that they simply do not have the resources to monitor Mexicans who may abuse their “white card” privileges. Contrary to public perception, Herzog notes that most Mexican commuter workers come from established middle- and working-class neighborhoods near Tijuana’s city center, and not from the most destitute squatter settlement zones (157–161). As the pages continue, additional photos of people crossing the border on pedestrian ramps or fenced-in walkways give way to photos of tourists and Tijuanaans shopping.



Figure 6 (Source: *Tijuana 22*)



- According to Richard F. Gonzalez, United States Consul General in Tijuana, 67% of the inhabitants of southern California have not visited Tijuana, 'mainly because of negative information about the city.'

Newspaper *Frontera*, www.frontera.info

- Downtown Tijuana is visited by 116,000 people daily.

Local television, Channel 12, Tijuana.

“

VISITORS TO BORDER CITIES SUCH AS TIJUANA, CIUDAD JUAREZ, AND NUEVO LAREDO SHOULD REMAIN ALERT AND BE AWARE OF THEIR SURROUNDINGS AT ALL TIMES. ”

U.S. State Department, <http://travel.state.gov/mexico.html>



Figure 7 (Source: *Tijuana 32*)

Shopping, both for residents and North American tourists, represents another significant transborder encounter. Herzog identifies a “transborder consumer market” along the Tijuana-San Diego border where “goods and services can be easily exchanged over the political boundary and when there are large enough threshold populations to make retail and wholesale trade a profitable venture” (146). In Figure 6, two white women are foregrounded crossing a street in the tourist district. We can’t see their faces, but their handbags are in clear focus. For the 116,000 people who visit Tijuana daily from the U.S., the trip is often driven by the excitement of spending money (*Tijuana 32*). Coded within these encounters are complex stories about class and race. Consumption, Appadurai states, “calls for both free time” and “discretionary income” (Appadurai 79-

80). It becomes “a temporal marker of leisure, of time away from work.” Thus, those who can afford to spend a day in Tijuana as tourists are generally middle class U.S. citizens. Studies such as George Lipsitz’s (1998) demonstrate the strong correlation between economic privilege and whiteness in the U.S., which perhaps explains why all of the tourists in *Here*’s photos are white. One small photo in particular captures three white women at a Mexican restaurant, looking with distrust and apprehension at the photographer. On the same page, a large, bolded quote taken from the U.S. State Department warns tourists in Tijuana to “remain alert and be aware of their surroundings at all times” (32). This satirical juxtaposition pokes fun at the pervasive North American stereotypes about Mexico and border towns as dangerous and lawless. While violence, even towards tourists, has increased even since *Here Is Tijuana!*’s publication in 2006, this section of the book takes great care to de-center Tijuana’s violence and highlight how day-to-day life functions in a variety of familiar and unfamiliar ways on the international border.

The tourist industry generates significant income for Tijuana’s residents. 50,000 local families depend on tourism, according to the Tourism and Conventions Committee (2002), which yields “more than 530 million dollars annually, generated by the 15 million tourists who visit” (*Tijuana* 33). A series of photographs contrast images of tourists shopping in street markets from various vendors with portrait shots of Mexican shopkeepers and vendors. The photos of tourists are candid shots taken at a distance and depict them interacting with vendors, handling wares, walking, or eating. Alternatively, the photos of the vendors themselves are more artistically composed and feature the vendors in the center of the photographs. Six shots in a series depict a man filling a taco; a Mexican mariachi posing, smiling, on a bench outside a Mexican restaurant; and an ice-cream vendor ringing his bell as he pushes his cart down the street. While these photos are shot in color with subjects who are either smiling for the camera or who seem at ease, the photos that follow, shot in black and white, depict more somber moments: a man pushing a hand truck stacked with Mexican blankets; a man pushing a cart of produce; a haggard-looking balloon vendor; and a tiny old woman, her back bent as she hauls a load of unidentifiable goods. There are also photos of Mexicans doing their own shopping—checking out at a supermercado or wandering down the aisles of a large, covered market.

This series of photos illustrates a number of significant opposing border encounters. The authors contest assumptions about cross-border movement that would characterize it solely as a steady stream of “illegal aliens.” The photos represent a diverse array of crossings and the contradictions embedded in them. While thousands of Tijuana residents may depend on the tourism that proximity to the U.S. makes possible, those same tourists are a constant reminder and embodiment of the deep social and economic inequalities between the two communities. These collaged pages assert that the movement of people in Tijuana cannot be separated from the economic motivations and transactions of the various travelers and crossers. The shots of happy (and wary) tourists remind us that while most Mexicans cross the border to work, the significantly fewer numbers of U.S. citizens who travel south do so for travel and leisure. Indeed, Herzog found that “of the average daily movement of about 106,000 persons across the Tijuana-San Diego border more than 65 percent of these trips are from south to north” (185). Thus, one tension the book holds (delicately) is the need to diversify and complicate our understanding of the kinds of movements that occur at the border (and who does the

moving) while never losing sight of the fundamental inequalities and asymmetries between the two communities. In this highly uneven economic space, the fate of Tijuana and its residents depends overwhelmingly on its northern neighbor.



Figure 8 (Source: *Tijuana* 42)

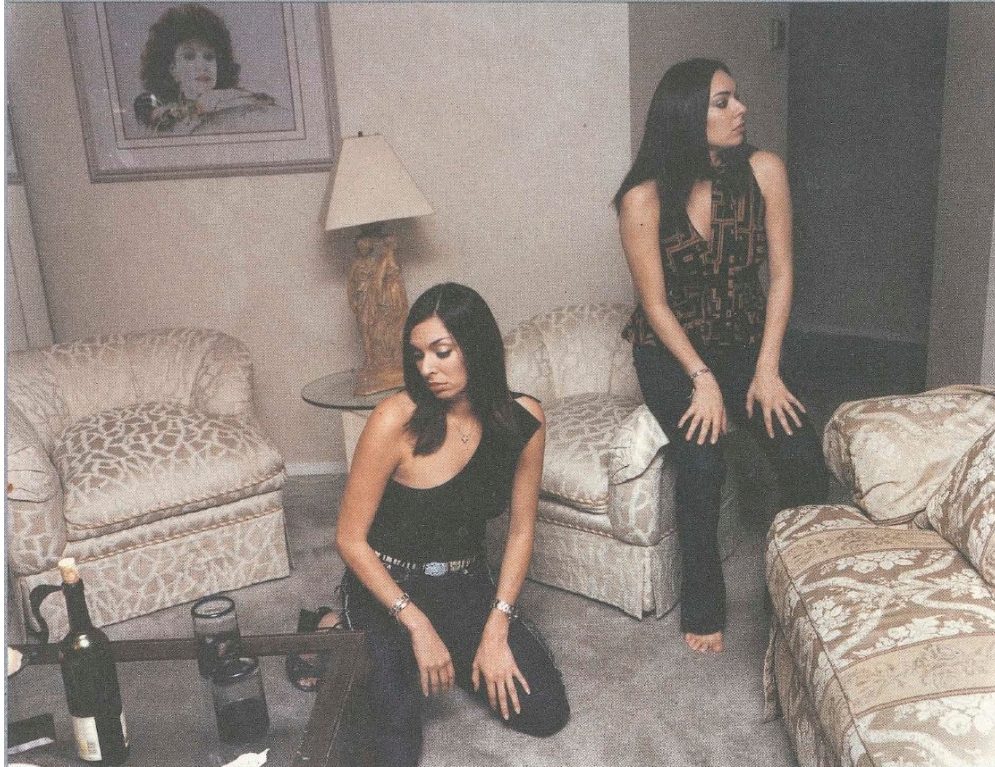


Figure 9 (Source: *Tijuana* 43)

Halfway through this first section we have a double-page, full-color photo spread of domestic scenes, as if to remind us, as Peggy Levitt says, “[t]he economic initiatives, political activities, and sociocultural enterprises [individual actors] engage in are powerfully shaped by the social fields in which they occur” (Levitt 7). These scenes of people at the dinner table (where Coca-Cola features prominently), and two women artistically posed in a comfortable-looking living room, drinking wine, are the first photos that take the viewer away from dizzying cityscapes filled with people moving through public spaces and into the interior, domestic and private spaces of Tijuana. These photos are important as they balance the book’s bleaker representations of public life with cozier portraits of everyday lives and domestic rituals.

The photos also transition the book from a focus on boundary crossing and tourism, to more local scenes of engagement. Here, photos of tourists and fences give way to images of hospitals, school children, and local loncherías. Despite source material that quotes depressing statistics about the quality of life in Tijuana, the following pages portray contradictory images of Tijuana life: children in brightly colored clothes smiling while they dance folklórico¹⁵ alongside a teenage mother bottle-feeding a baby outside a clinic. Or shacks constructed from corrugated metal and other detritus juxtaposed with brand-new suburban homes. Several pages are devoted to depictions of religious life in the city, with an emphasis on Catholic churches and icons. The section ends where it began, with images of movements. In the final pages of “Avatars,” the authors show us city buses, taxis, a bus terminal, and the international airport, where families are greeting/saying goodbye to one another at the terminal. These images render a bustling

urban space where residents are constantly on the move, in a variety of forms and for a variety of reasons.

“Avatars” is thus an appropriate name for the book’s first section. By invoking the process of how things become embodied and represented in virtual reality, the authors portray Tijuana as a site of multiple realities, some virtual and some painfully, violently real, and how certain images, ideas, forms, and peoples become avatars for Tijuana within these many spaces. Yet *Here Is Tijuana!* does more than simply provide a lens through which to view Tijuana’s many avatars. By grounding representations in material realities and by calling attention to how various avatars themselves are constructed through specific ideologies (of racism and inequality or aesthetics, for example), the book consistently fights against the disembodiment that often occurs when something is translated into virtual reality. While offering up its own carefully chosen selection of avatars and, to some extent, even offering Tijuana itself as an avatar for the U.S.-Mexico border at large, the authors remain deeply ambivalent and wary of losing sight of the constructed nature of these choices. In the slippery way that virtual avatars can traverse the borders of our real and virtual worlds, avatars are also tricky transas that blur boundaries between who’s transacting and what is being transacted. Within this complex system of representation, it’s easy to see how commodities can gain agency and certain agents become commodities on the border—a transa that becomes embodied in the lush, erotic, and kinetic photography in “Desires.”

“Desires” begins with an historical vignette of Tijuana as a vice destination for North American tourists seeking relief from the strict laws of Prohibition. A series of quotes from historian David Piñera Ramírez narrate: “[d]uring the 1920s increasing numbers of bars, night centers, liquor dispensaries, and casinos appeared not only in Tijuana but all along the border” (80). Lawrence Herzog and Joseph Nevins have also both commented on Tijuana’s enormous growth during U.S. Prohibition.¹⁶ Entrepreneurs from the U.S. invested in bars, nightclubs, cabarets, and other forms of recreational activities during this period, rapidly speeding up Tijuana’s transformation from a ranching settlement to a major center of transboundary activity (Nevins 43). While Prohibition was eventually repealed and hard economic times in the U.S. in the 1930s and 1940s had a negative impact on Tijuana’s booze and vice industry, its reputation remained vibrant and, over time, Tijuana reestablished itself as a decadent tourist “playground.”

Sex, drugs, and rock n’ roll have earned Tijuana the title of “Happiest City in the Republic,” according to *Frontera* in 2004. This title was quickly satirized in an episode of *The Simpsons*, when Krusty the Clown says, “Tijuana is the happiest place on earth” (*Tijuana* 126). Krusty references the well-known slogan for Disneyland as “The Happiest Place on Earth,” suggesting that Tijuana has become a demonic simulacrum of Disneyland’s intoxicating mix of pleasure, patriotism, nostalgia, empire, and consumerism.

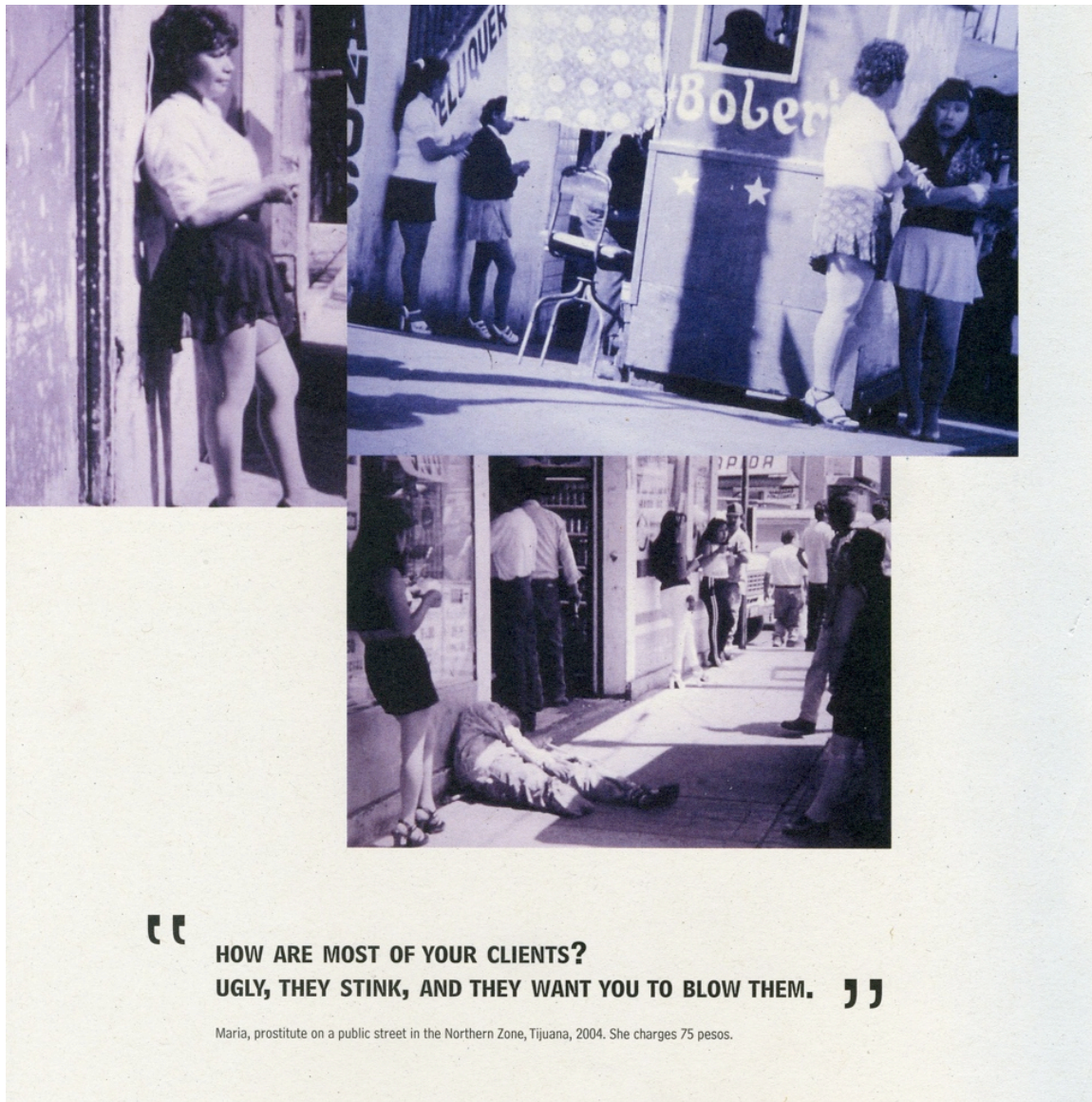


Figure 10 (Source: *Tijuana* 82)

Figure 10 contains photos of female sex workers on the streets.¹⁷ They are identifiable by their short skirts and high-heeled shoes and the large, bolded excerpt from an interview that appears below in English: “How are most of your clients? Ugly, they stink and they want you to blow them” (*Tijuana* 82). In one photo, a woman leans against a storefront and next to her a man is slumped over on the ground, passed out or sleeping. Included in this section is a “price list” taken from the Internet that lists the going rate of all kinds of sexual services, from a \$20 “trick,” to \$500 “vaginal sex with a ‘Cherry Girl’” (85). The authors also publish testimony from a tourist, taken off an Internet called worldsexguide.org. Among other pieces of advice for prospective travelers to Tijuana, the author confesses: “I’ve found if you keep smiling and talking, your hands can roam a little and the girl won’t mind. This of course is the reason you’re in the Zona Roja: to get away with doing things that would get you slapped anywhere

else. The girls' English ranges from pretty good, the virtually non-existent. But don't let the language barrier keep you from the girl of your dreams" (86).

If the statistics and offensive Internet content threaten to objectify or reduce these women, the authors counter these possibilities with testimonios from sex workers, giving them a voice and depicting them as sophisticated social actors making conscious choices in a complex world where women's choices are often limited. For instance, "Nirvana," is a 21-year old prostitute from Acapulco: "She's been in Tijuana for two months [...] She doesn't know the city but says that she has been treated well. She says that all her girlfriends are from Mexico City, Acapulco, Oaxaca, Guadalajara. None from Tijuana" (87). How does Nirvana deal with the gritty realities of her job? She visits the doctor for exams and STD tests every 15 days. Her motto: "With soap and water you erase the footprints of any idiot."

As several studies suggest, most female sex workers in Tijuana have *chosen* sex work as a lucrative alternative to other kinds of jobs and to escape a low quality of life.¹⁸ Common reasons female sex workers say they enter their profession include: the desire to earn enough money to support their children and families, buy a house, pay for schooling, and/or otherwise advance themselves economically. As Castillo, Gomez, and Delgado and Katsulis have shown, many female sex workers turn to sex work to escape the brutal working conditions of the *maquiladora*, where unionizing is prohibited or controlled by the company and women are routinely sexually harassed by male supervisors. Castillo, Gomez, and Delgado report: "Over and over again the women describe a societal structure based on male dominance in the workplace and male rights to women who are perceived as stepping out of their traditional roles, whether by remaining unattached to a male protector or by attempting to enter the realm of paid labor" (Castillo, Gomez, and Delgado 404). In such a patriarchal and male dominated system where women have few choices, sex work, according to testimonies from women in these studies, represents an alternative choice in which they could make (more) money for doing things they had to do anyway at their old jobs. In their new professions, women have more flexibility with their schedules, can set their own hours, and, in the case of legally registered sex workers, are eligible for a variety of benefits, including free health care and regular STI tests.

Despite the availability of such resources, sex work is certainly not easy or comfortable, even for legal, registered sex workers. Both legal and illegal sex workers often experience the physical and mental stresses that one might expect: infection, poor self-image, violence at the hands of customers, and drug addiction. Yet, the situation is worse for sex workers who do not voluntarily chose their work but are trafficked into it from other parts of Mexico, Europe, and even the United States. Statistics quoted on the following pages suggest a sobering reality: "Each year 50,000 women and children are trafficked illegally to the United States for prostitution. The Tijuana-San Diego region is one of the main corridors of this traffic;" "At least 900 minors prostitute themselves in Tijuana" (83-84). This phenomenon has been well documented in recent media, including an extensive investigation by Peter Landesman published in *The New York Times Magazine* in 2004. Landesman's article exposes the European and Mexican trafficking networks that collude to lure women from Europe and Mexico into forced sexual slavery. Most of these women and children eventually end up in Tijuana where they are trafficked over the border into the United States by coyotes.¹⁹ Once across the border, the victims are hidden in inoffensive-looking suburban homes where they service

a mainly U.S. clientele. As Ugarte, Zarate, and Farley state: “Criminal networks in San Diego county control more than 50 brothels and outdoor farm labor sexual exploitation camps. Trafficked girls are sold to migrant farm workers, US tourists, and US military personnel” (Ugarte, Zarate, and Farley 150). Unfortunately, the United States has been slow to respond. Because many of the girls who end up in brothels on the U.S. side of the border are undocumented immigrants, state services often treat the problem as a problem of illegal immigration and fail to distinguish voluntary sex workers from trafficked persons (lumping all women who perform sexual service into the category of prostitute). In addition, because victims of sex trafficking tend to suffer from severe mental and emotional problems as a result of their experiences, they are often distrustful and reluctant to seek help from authorities.



Figure 11 (Source: *Tijuana* 88)

Unlike the U.S. and Mexican governments, *Here Is Tijuana!* doesn't disavow the more harrowing and brutal aspects of sex work. On the next page, one of the most disturbing images in the entire book takes up half of a page: the body of a woman, curled into a fetal position on the street. Her back is to the camera, but we can see that her pants are down around her thighs and her dirty buttocks are exposed, with only twisted, tiny thong underwear covering her. She's wearing a t-shirt with "MEXICO" in large, capital letters on the back. Above, a quote from Humberto Félix Berumen claims that "those with economic power [...] have assumed the task of getting rid of the negative image of Tijuana, so they can increase the amount of foreign investment" (88). The photo protests the attempts by economic and political elites to disavow uncomfortable realities, the same realities that are often created or exacerbated by foreign investment and subsequent economic and social restructuring. The way the page juxtaposes the text and the photo, with a visual emphasis on the word "MEXICO" spelled out across the woman's half-

naked back is a brutal indictment of a country at times unwilling to recognize and confront its problems and that continues to reject or ignore its most abject citizens. *Tijuana!* does the work for them, refusing to indulge in happy, hybrid advertisements of an up-and-coming global nexus. The authors expose the ugly consequences of inequality, the persistent social problems that plague the residents of Tijuana, and the ways in which elites from both the sides of the border contribute to on-going struggles for survival.

The remaining pages of “Desire” explode with full-page color spreads of a variety of cultural activities: ballet, wrestling, symphonies, bullfights, community dance projects, marathons, and movie going. Such images portray cultural alternatives to the illicit party scene, reminding viewers that Tijuana has much more to offer than prostitutes, bars, and black markets. Yet, similar to “Avatars,” the section ends where it began—with illegality and its deadly consequences. The final three pages discuss Tijuana’s drug cartels and the violence they propagate, as well as a series of statistics on drug use in the city.²⁰ We learn that “[a]t the end of the twentieth century, there were around 50,000 hard-core addicts in Tijuana” (123). Information from *Frontera* suggests that not all drug users are who we might think they are: housewives and pregnant women are among the most common methamphetamine users (mainly for weight loss). The next page collages a series of color photographs of pharmacy and drug store signs (Super Pharmacy, Drug Depot and Mexico Americana Pharmacy, for example) advertising the lowest prices on drugs. Below, data from *Expansión* magazine report an annual amount of 100,000,000 dollars in medicine sales in Tijuana and that the adult tourist population spends an average of \$300 on medicine (125), making Tijuana the largest medicine store along the border with 7,000 employees.

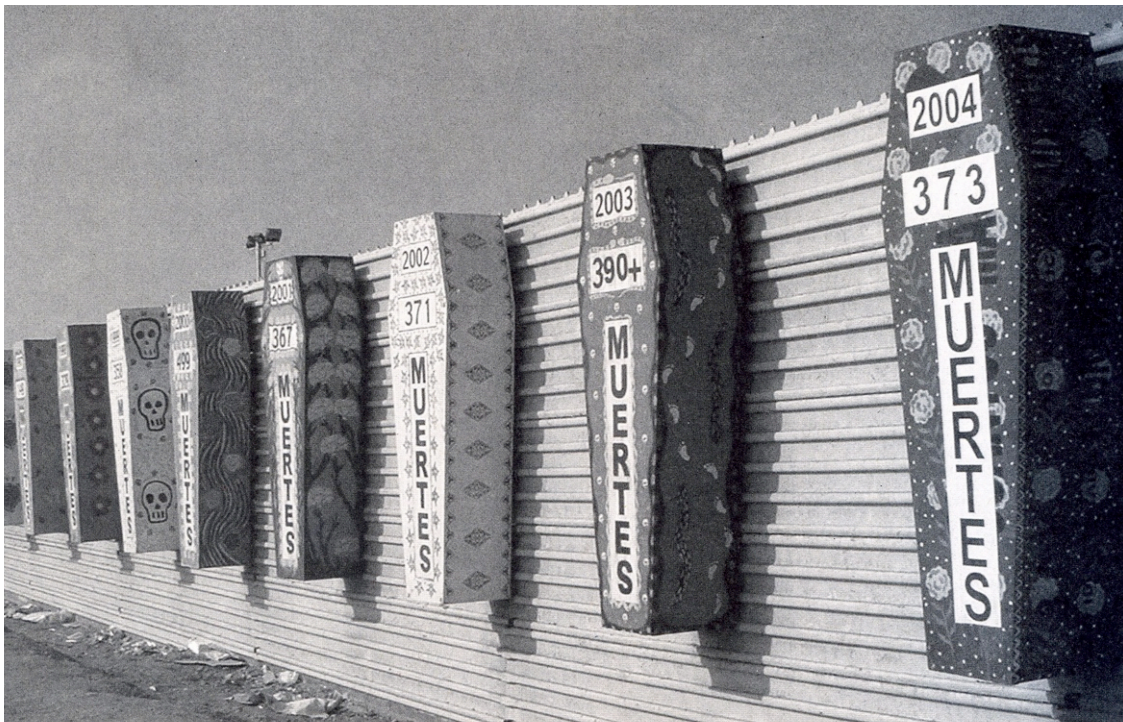


Figure 12 (Source: *Tijuana* 127)

The photos of ubiquitous drug stores, sharing retail space with McDonald's, seem to reinforce the idea: "Everything can be bought in Tijuana. Everything can be sold" (124). But at what price? The next page, the last in the section, depicts a black and white photo of a piece of border installation art: painted coffins nailed to the border fence with a year and the corresponding number of "Muertes" (Deaths) as the result of attempted border crossings. This haunting photograph bears witness to Joseph Nevins's observation: "In the context of increasing boundary enforcement since 1994, the number of migrant deaths has increased notably" (Nevins 145). In southern California alone, the number of crossing-related deaths, as the result of Operation Gatekeeper, reached an alarming 500, up from 23 in 1994. The horizontal shot emphasizes a vanishing line of coffins, off into the infinity of left-hand space. The somber black and white tone of the photo, combined with the perspective that emphasizes the serial and seemingly never-ending accumulation of deaths properly contextualizes the section's "desires" within their lethal consequences. While the authors certainly celebrate the desires that create cultural vibrancy (for instance, the many photographs depicting Tijuana's dynamic music scene) and that reflect the desires that unite us as humans—the need to belong to communities, to express ourselves creatively, to experience the world metaphorically and physically—the choice to end the section with this particular photograph deliberately emphasizes the costs of happiness in Tijuana. It also emphasizes the potential of art as a socially symbolic practice capable of intervening in processes of violence. In its multi-layered significance, the photograph of border art installation reminds us of the power of art to protest, to remember, and to render visible the invisible victims of the darker sides of "desires" on the U.S.-Mexico border. While immigration officials may blame smugglers and *coyotes* for leading migrants into high-risk situations, *Tijuana's* pages point to a much more complicated web of domestic and transnational transactions where profit and politics have more value than a human life. Here, Tijuana is gritty and beautiful, vibrant and nightmarish; a city of "ambivalences, contradictions, resistances, and counter-forces," whose very audacity rejects any attempt at totalizing representation (*Tijuana* 4). Tijuana ≠ Tijuana.

Here Is Tijuana's final section, "Permutations," does not synthesize the previous two sections. The photographic spreads in this section tell a variety of stories, from the rapid expansion of the city's population in recent times and the corresponding architectural and spatial changes to the city's landscapes, to more politically charged portrayals of corruption, police brutality, poverty, exploitative labor practices, and crossing-related violence. "Permutations" opens with two aerial shots of the hilly, eastern part of Tijuana: "Nueva Tijuana"—New Tijuana. New Tijuana is the fastest growing sector in the city, and also the area where living conditions poorest. These settlements are commonly referred to as "squatter settlements" and, according to Herzog, their continued growth "remains the greatest burden on the city's future well-being" (Herzog 114). As evidenced in the photographs, squatter settlements in Tijuana are generally located around ecologically less desirable areas—hills, canyons, and flood plains. In contrast to the dull, black and white aerial photos of the squatter settlements, a highly saturated color close up of the exterior of several shacks covers an entire page further along in the section. The opening pages of this section emphasize Tijuana's rapid growth, through photographs of densely packed settlements and newly built housing

tracks. The juxtaposition of middle-class suburban communities with the informal squatter settlements reinforces the extreme socio-economic divisions between the city's populations, a division that carefully selected data and quotations also highlight. Although, as the section's title suggests, "Permutations" documents the many kinds of changes Tijuana has experienced in the past few decades, the authors use juxtaposition and collage to critique oversimplifications of these changes as either all good or all bad. Yet, when they address the growth of Tijuana's assembly plant (*maquila*) industry and their workers, the selection of photographs and text creates a pointed critique of such exploitative labor practices and deadly ironic gap between the rhetoric of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the realities free trade imposes upon poor, working class Mexican, Central American and indigenous women, in particular. As photographs of various dwellings and settlements give way to depictions of other social issues, the book quotes a local resident who says that most of the *maquila* workers live in the unincorporated squatter communities (*Tijuana* 131), transitioning the section into several pages of photographs of various aspects of *maquila* labor: TVs on the production line, close ups of electronic components, and pictures of the female workers themselves in the workplace.

This section begins with a brief history of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP), which is credited with bringing the first factories to the border region.²¹ Over forty years later, Evelyn Hu-DeHart cites a recent report that "[...] counts twenty-seven hundred *maquiladoras* in Mexico, which now, after the enactment of NAFTA, spread from the northern border zone deep into the Yucatán of southern Mexico [...]" (Hu-DeHart 246). Indeed, *Tijuana!* reports that with 562 plants, Tijuana has the most assembly plants of any Mexican city (*Tijuana!* 142). These data appear on a double-page spread called "Assemblyland." The gray background of these two pages reinforces the industrial theme. Statistics on *maquilas* and assembly plant workers create two long columns on both pages, where one piece of information follows another, mimicking the routinized process of component assembly that occurs within the plants themselves. Appropriately, the columns of data end in an image—a fully assembled TV with a plastic banner hanging next to it that reads: "Se Solicita Personal" ("Now Hiring").



Figure 13 (Source: *Tijuana* 143)

Who's getting hired? The overwhelming majority of assembly plant workers are women. In fact, the book reports that of the 1,550,383 Mexicans working in the assembly plant industry, 516,048 are women, whose average age is 29.4 years (145). In

1995, 57.2% of the total employees of the assembly plant industry of the border states were women (144), who are generally favored due to the common perception that they are innately suited for work requiring little skill and a light touch. In addition to being seen as “nimble fingered,” women are often thought to be less likely to unionize and easier to control.²²



Figure 14 (Source: *Tijuana* 144-145)

Images of domination and control are reinforced through two photographs taken inside a *maquila*. The first photograph, a color close-up, depicts women’s hands attached by a cord and wristband to the assembly line they are working. The photo focuses on the bright yellow wristband and emphasizes the continuity between woman and machine. The photo’s perspective reveals an endless line of workers, stretching down the assembly line. Next to this photograph, the authors quote Norma Iglesias: “All of the women had assimilated the fundamental words of being an industrial worker: enter, leave, push, pull, hurry, pull the handle, ‘push’ the button, produce [...]” (*Tijuana!* 144). This visual-textual juxtaposition recalls Ursula Biemann’s observations about the relationship between women and machinery in *maquila* work. Not only are the women themselves described in language normally used to describe machines—efficiency, speed, and production numbers—but also devices such as the wristbands photographed here “renders the worker’s body inseparable from the machine she works at” (Biemann 102). This lack of separation erases the distinction between the organic body and machine, contributing to the “technologizing” of women’s bodies and the gradual erasure of their humanity.

On the opposing page, a black and white photograph shows the inside of a large factory where hundreds of young women sit assembling some small electronic components. Although the depiction of rows upon rows of workers relates the women

themselves to the piles of parts of they assemble like so many components in a larger machine, the photograph also shows one woman with her head turned away from her work, as if chatting with the women around her. The photo thus reminds the viewer of the opportunities for social facilitation on the factory floor, where women can contest the dehumanization of their work by forming friendships and alliances with their fellow workers. Unfortunately, company bosses and Mexican government officials routinely squash attempts by workers to organize their social alliances into political alliances to air grievances about working conditions and wages (Faux 143). According to Faux, the failure of NAFTA to include or enforce labor standards for borderlands factories while multiple protections of investor rights were established reflects one of NAFTA's most distressing outcomes.²³

The gap between NAFTA's happy rhetoric and its devastating geopolitical realities reinforces the authors' interest in the relationship between Tijuana and representation. As they claim in the introduction, Tijuana has almost been "over-represented" in media and culture. Its many competing representations threaten to render any attempt to talk about the city useless. Not wanting to lapse into what they see as postmodern oversimplifications and yet paying careful attention to how regimes of representation create real effects for citizens, the authors choose TV manufacturing as one symbol of the complicated relationship between representation and the city. Several photographs in "Permutations" depict televisions in various stages of assembly. These photos are accompanied by statistics: "Since 1989, Mexico has been the first exporter of color televisions to the United States [...] In 1996 the five television set companies located in Tijuana absorbed 16% of the employment in their area [...]" (*Tijuana!* 146).

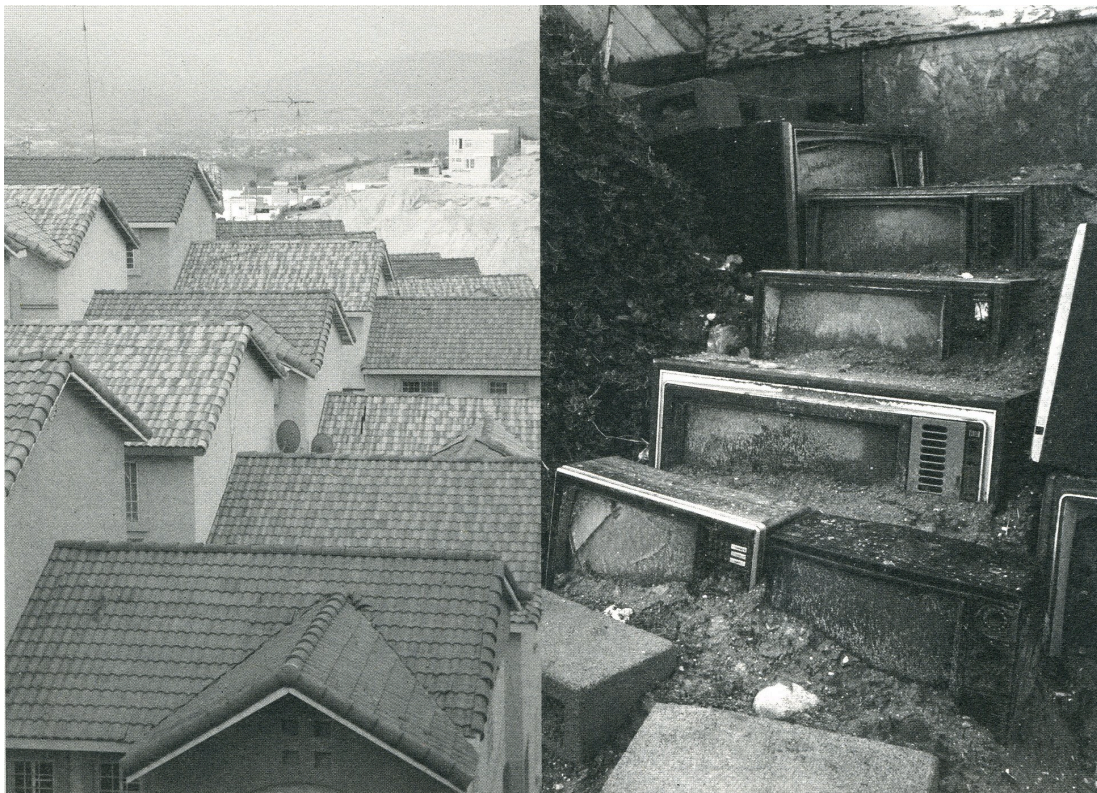


Figure 15 (Source: *Tijuana* 167)

Figure 15 shows a pile of discarded, outdated televisions half-buried in dirt and stacked in intervals like a staircase rising out of the dump. Next to it, and cropped to exactly the same size, is a picture of middle-class rooftops, similarly stacked upon each other and stretching out towards a canyon. The photographs raise a series of compelling thematic concerns. The pictures of televisions themselves call attention to the ways in which Tijuana (and Mexico) are represented through media and cultural forms and discourses, yet the statistics combined with the other forms of textual information, heighten the disparity between how Tijuana is represented through public discourse and the real life experiences of citizens and visitors. This particular photograph solemnly captures this tension: the ascending “staircase” of discarded televisions invokes all the images of Tijuana as seen on television, while their disposal into a trash heap recalls the worst of the city’s poverty, where assembly plant workers do not earn enough to purchase one of the new color TVs they assemble everyday. The juxtaposition with the photo of middle-class rooftops reinforces another layer to this tension—the relationship between public and private spheres of representation. The rooftops frame domestic, interior spaces where people come together to participate in social rituals, such as watching television. Thus, televisions also serve as sites where public discourses, images, and representation in general are translated into private, interior and domestic spaces. Both photographs comment on the tension between public and private spaces—while the rooftops contain domestic scenes, the photo emphasizes their uniform exteriority and while the old televisions represent a site where public and private spheres collide, here they have been relegated to a city dump. Adding a final layer to this multi-layered collage, the photos themselves are yet another form of representation whose construction, composition, and placement on the page are not neutral acts.



Figure 16 (Source: *Tijuana 178*)

“Permutations” cycles through several pages of architectural portraits of the city—a landscape caught between continuity and change, urban decay and fast-paced renewal and development. Several photographs capture important city monuments, while others depict graffiti covered walls and make shift fences. The section (and book) ends with a return to images of the international border. Just as it began, *Here Is Tijuana!* ends with similar east-west photograph of the San Diego-Tijuana border, separated by a long metal fence (see Figure 16). Juxtaposed against a now familiar scene is a close shot of one of the series of metal dots in the pavement that signifies the actual, territorial borderline. The close up of the metal dot on the left diminishes the border’s power by reminding viewers that borders are constructed and often arbitrary, allowing people, ideas, culture, and capital to “roam back and forth.” Yet, the photo of the two geographies cut by a metal fence reminds us of all the ways the border does, in fact, separate, divide, and displace. The opposite page represents the reality that the fence signifies—a list of deaths along the border since the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper, a textual reinforcement of the sentiment expressed so powerfully through the previous photo of the painted coffins nailed to the fence (127). While security, surveillance and control have emerged as significant themes throughout the book, the final pages directly engage with the increased militarization and patrolling of the international boundary as a result of Operation Gatekeeper and responses to 9/11. Information from various websites, nonprofit coalitions, and magazines reinforces arguments made by Andreas and Nevins—that Gatekeeper has not stopped migration; it has only driven migrants to take increasingly desperate and riskier measures, resulting in an increased number of crossing-related deaths. As Andreas has noted, escalated border policing is not simply about deterring illegal crossings, but also “a symbolic representation of state authority; it communicates the state’s commitment to marking and maintaining the borderline” (Andreas 2000; 8). This “expressive role” of law enforcement is just as important as other “instrumental goals,” according to Andreas, who argues that “gestures” such as the appearance of heightened control and policing convey powerful messages to society (11). Thus, the border is not only an international boundary, but has increasingly become a political stage, where politicians, lobbyists, and law enforcement agencies perform ceremonial practices—such as high profile drug seizures and arrests—in order to reassure society that our borders are safe and secure.

Tijuana! takes on this relationship between the public belief in the rule of law, boundary enforcement and the criminalization of immigrants on the following page. The text quotes an online source that draws parallels between the concept of an undocumented person as criminal and the architecture of the new migrants’ agency building in Tijuana: “High bars, made of thick tubing, that repeat the design of the second fence that the United States citizens installed paralleling the first metallic, rusted fence constructed originally to try to slow down the undocumented” (*Tijuana!* 181).²⁴ Backed with the weight of the law, the construction of the immigrant as “illegal” equates immigration with criminality and negates any sense of responsibility or obligation U.S. society might feel towards undocumented persons, regardless of whatever contributions such persons make to society. This “fusing of the law, territory and social power” contributes to heated societal debates, such as those in California in the early 1990s over the passing of Proposition 187, which would have severely curtailed undocumented immigrants’ access to state-sponsored social services.²⁵

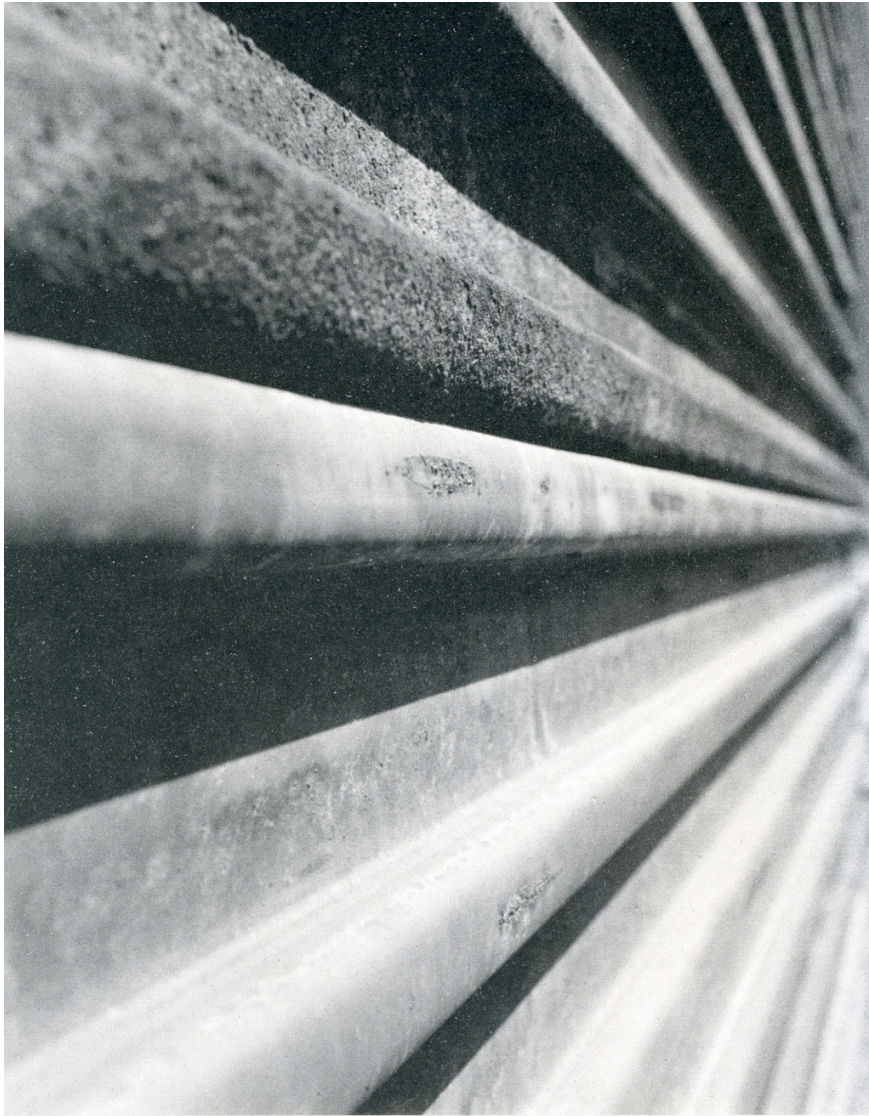


Figure 17 (Source: *Tijuana* 172)

That such ideologies become translated into the architectural landscape of both sides of the border is no surprise. *Tijuana*'s pages demonstrate the profound interrelationships between social structures, the ideology they produce, and the physical and cultural landscapes of the city. The online commentary quoted here regarding architectural means of control are further emphasized in the book's final photographs, which capture various images of the walls and fences that constitute the international boundary. Some photographs depict other kinds of installation art—crosses constructed out of clothing and nailed against the fence—another shows children clinging to a chain-link fence. Figure 17 shows a close up shot of corrugated metal where the grooves in the metal appear to extend on into infinity. All of these physical structures reflect what Michel Foucault called “biopower”—how the modern state controls and regulates bodies of people through subjugation. Through the exercise of biopower, political processes and ideologies are mapped onto the architecture of the U.S.-Mexico border, an architecture that, in turn, enacts processes and ideologies onto the bodies of subjects, often in deadly

ways. This cycle echoes Gloria Anzaldúa's famous image of the border as an open wound—*herida abierta*—"where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa 25). For Anzaldúa, the geopolitical and ideological realities of the U.S.-Mexico are embodied in her flesh:

1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja *me raja* (24)

Anzaldúa's vivid imagery eloquently captures how the architecture of the border—those deadly fence rods—not only split people and cultures, but are staked into the very flesh of her body, splitting her. Anzaldúa's poetry reminds us that the U.S.-Mexico border cannot be absolutely abstracted through political, economic, or cultural rhetoric. While the border may represent a variety of macrolevel processes, these processes are always experienced by and embodied through the real lives of people--citizens, crossers, migrants and tourists alike who encounter the landscape of the border in a variety of ways at a variety of times. As *Here Is Tijuana!* demonstrates, encounters between the many landscapes of Tijuana can be violent and fatal and also celebratory and productive.

Tijuana ≠ Tijuana

Here Is Tijuana!'s many-voiced, multiperspectival "trip" uses both visual and textual experimental techniques to question how we encounter Tijuana through culture(s). *Tijuana*'s collage form juxtaposes both macro- and mirco-level transactions to document and expose their mutually constitutive relationships. As the book visualizes a series of transborder encounters, from the most intimate to the most abstract, the book itself becomes yet another series of encounters that forces the reader to reflect on how representation works through culture on the U.S.-Mexico border.



Figure 18 (Source: *Tijuana* 185)

At the end of the book, we encounter a black and white photograph of a large pile of shoes (Figure 18). A sign with the word “No identificado” (Unidentified) repeated four times has been placed in front of the pile. Beneath the photograph is a quote from a publication on Baja California:

Finally, it is important to know the time that it takes to do a book like this. While researching, writing, editing, and distributing, the state continues its development. We readers should salvage, through research, the information in order increasingly to know better the place where we live (*Tijuana* 185).

Perhaps this offers a way of reading the book—an act of salvaging cast off and unidentifiable pieces. Or perhaps this quote is meant as a warning—that it’s time to put the books aside, stop reading and take action. The quote, taken out of context from another text entirely, calls attention to the very constructed nature of the page, in a way that ironizes the sincerity of the message. Yet, as the authors have reminded us vigilantly throughout the book, Tijuana is never what it seems and that there are no easy answers. While perhaps the book does invite readers to “know better” the city of Tijuana, the authors refuse to offer resolutions or redemptions—there is no X to mark the spot on the map. To “know better” the city of Tijuana is to acknowledge the multiple mappings of the city by a variety of state and non-state actors, each with their own perspectives and ideological agendas. Perhaps Tijuana is Borges’ Aleph, to return to Yépez’s metaphor—that point in space and time that contains all other points. Or maybe not. Although the authors favor a multiplicity of readings and meanings, the Tijuana that emerges from the book’s pages continually asserts its unique presence, its unavoidable difference and its refusal to be collapsed into or consumed by the metaphors that would attempt to describe it. Thus perhaps more appropriate is the final quote from Mexican actor Gael García Bernal upon viewing the cannonball man blast-off on the beach of Tijuana: “Tijuana is the armpit of Latin America” (192). Part joke, part critique, part adulation, this final image of Tijuana as the sweaty breeding ground where various parts encounter one another uneasily echoes the authors’ introduction: “if there is utility in the US-Mexico border, it is to evidence its ambivalences, contradictions, resistances, and counter-forces. Therefore, Tijuanalogy continues” (4).

¹ Castillo, Debra A., Maria Gudelia Rangel Gomez, and Bonnie Delgado. "Border Lives: Prostitute Women in Tijuana." *Signs* 24:2 (Winter 1999): 387—422. JSTOR. Web. 27 Oct 2009.

² Montezemolo, Fiamma, Peralta, René, and Yépez, Heriberto. *Here Is Tijuana!* London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006. Print. 140.

³ See Nevins (2002).

⁴ See Aníbal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power and Latin America." *International Sociology*. 15:2. 215-232 (2000).

⁵ Lawrence Herzog introduces the term "transfrontier metropolis" to describe the rapid development of international twin-cities along the U.S.-Mexico border in the second half of the twentieth century. See Herzog (1990).

⁶ Canclini defines this process: "*I understand for hybridization socio-cultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices*" (italics in original) (Canclini xxv).

⁷ For instance, the loosening of signs from signifiers in order to represent the indeterminate discursive fields of postmodernity.

⁸ Happy Decontextualizing. Happy Meal of discourses.

⁹ Force of resistance.

¹⁰ *Here Is Tijuana!* 187.

¹¹ For example, see Dorrington (2001).

¹² See López-Garza and Díaz (2001).

¹³ See Nevins (2002).

¹⁴ The text identifies the two women as "Asian American" (*Here Is Tijuana!* 35).

¹⁵ traditional Mexican dances.

¹⁶ See Herzog (1990) and Nevins (2002).

¹⁷ In their 1999 article, Castillo, Gomez, and Delgado suggest that the number of female sex workers in Tijuana has reached close to 15,000 (Castillo, Gomez, and Delgado 403). In Tijuana, sex work is legal and regulated, but only in certain zones of the city and only if workers register themselves at a local clinic.

¹⁸ See Castillo, Gomez and Delgado (1999); Ugarte, Zarate and Farley (2003); and Katsulis (2008).

¹⁹ See Ugarte, Zarate and Farley (2003) and Landesman (2004).

²⁰ In his extensive research on the illegal drug trade in Mexico, Andreas notes that Mexico's involvement in drug smuggling (both illegal and legal drugs) dramatically increased in the 1990s when U.S. crackdowns on U.S. southeast trafficking routes from Colombia through Florida encouraged drug cartels to reroute their trade through the U.S. southwest, increasing the role of Mexico as an intermediary in the process. As a result, Andreas cites DEA data that suggest Mexico earns more than \$7 billion a year from the drug trade (Andreas 1998; 160). As Mexico become more involved in the drug trade, public fears in the U.S. over controlling the flow of illegal drugs across the borders increased rapidly. The public attention to the "war of drugs" has created a policy problem for U.S. and Mexican governments who want to encourage borders open to trade and economic flows while simultaneously cracking down (or at least appearing to crack

down) on the drug trade. Unfortunately, the same networks put in place by NAFTA to expedite trade (such as limited or no inspections for certain trucks carrying goods) have actually made the transport of illegal drugs across the border easier for traffickers. As a result, governmental policy and rhetoric on the illegal drug trade has become concentrated on the border, especially in Tijuana, home to one of Mexico's most notorious drug cartels (run by the Arellano Félix brothers).

²¹ BIP was an outgrowth of a larger effort on behalf of the Mexican government during the early 1960s to "beautify" Mexican border towns and attract greater levels of tourism (Nevins 45). The BIP "established the border zone corridor of export processing industries known as *maquiladoras*. The stated intention of the program was to create location-specific magnets for economic growth and thus serve as a development engine for the entire northern border [...]". Additionally, the BIP sought to reduce unemployment in border towns.

²² See Hu-DeHart, 252. Also see Biemann in Sadowski-Smith (2002), 105-6.

²³ NAFTA, originally designed to eliminate trade barriers for the U.S. while purporting to liberalize Mexico's formerly isolationist economy and thus staving off a huge financial crisis in that country, has, according to Faux and others, genuinely failed to raise the standard of living in Mexico. The *maquila* program under NAFTA was hailed as an opportunity for local Mexican businesses to grow, but Faux argues that "[...] the Mexican *maquila* industries, set up exclusively to use low-wage labor to assemble imported components for the U.S. market, remain unconnected to local businesses, and therefore have not stimulated the rest of the Mexican economy" (Faux 136). Because U.S. investors are drawn to Mexico's low wages, which considerably lower the cost of manufacturing, there's little incentive for raising the wages for assembly work (In 1992, the cost of assembly in the United States was \$90; in Tijuana, \$15) (*Tijuana!* 146). As Faux notes, "the ostensible goal of neoliberalism in Mexico was to close the gap between U.S. and Mexican wages. Instead, it has widened it. In 1975, during the 'bad old days' of Mexican isolationism and self-sufficiency, Mexican wages averaged about 23 percent of U.S. wages. In 1993—94, just before NAFTA was implemented, they were 15 percent. In 2002, they averaged 12 percent". These, then, are the conditions facing *maquila* workers as they come to work each day, strapped to an assembly line or sitting in front of a pile of imported components.

²⁴ Nevins explains that the relatively new emphasis on the legality of immigration into the United States:

draws upon and reinforces a powerful ideological force or position in American society. The dominant view of the law sees it rational, benign, and necessary, as well as independent of any specific social and/or geographical context [...] The effect of such a worldview is to put the law beyond question, and thus to normalize sociospatial relations (Nevins 139).

²⁵ For further information on Proposition 187 see Ono and Sloop (2002).

Two

Disordering the Border: Harryette Mullen's Transaborder Poetics in Muse & Drudge

What does it mean to our understanding of ourselves and of American language that black people make these orders of art?

--Aldon Lynn Nielson¹

From the mean streets of Tijuana, Harryette Mullen's book-length poem, *Muse & Drudge*, takes us on a panoramic, many-tongued journey through a global Southwest—those spaces that stretch from the U.S. South to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands to Latin American and the Caribbean. While criticism on Mullen is generally limited to two main topics: Mullen's relationship to the literary avant-garde, particularly a feminist avant-garde, and Mullen's relationship to "black poetry" and "black identity," I depart from these two approaches by reading *Muse & Drudge* as a transaborder text. I argue that the feminist avant-garde critics who use metaphors of "border-crossing" and hybridity to discuss Mullen's formal innovation fail to account for the presence of the actual U.S.-Mexico border in the poem, marked by Mullen's use of Spanish and her references to border iconography, such as *maquilas*. I identify a "transaborder poetics" in *Muse & Drudge* where the shared colonial histories unite Afro-Caribbean diasporic and borderlands subjects, and in the literal and figurative transactions between multiple discourses and the corresponding sets of lived, material conditions these discourses conjure.

Thus, the poem calls attention to the presence of borders (as literal and figurative tools of representation and regulation) and attempts to work from that space of negotiation and transaction between them. Within her transaborder poetics, themes of separation, definition, regulation are also racialized concepts, deeply embedded in the violent histories of racial mixing and *mestizaje* that are both named outright and also alluded to metaphorically through Mullen's hybridized language.

The poem, like much Chicano/a poetry, can be read in terms of what Chicano poet Alfred Arteaga has called "border verse." Border verse, according to Arteaga, "makes lines of poetry from the competing lines of discourse that crisscross the border zone" (Arteaga 91). In *Muse & Drudge*, these "lines of discourse" don't compete as much as they *transact* between each other in complex and intriguing ways. Mullen's transactions between the blues, hip hop, African American vernacular speech, the lyric tradition, the language of advertising, Creole, Spanish, and Spanglish contest assumptions about the rigidity of categories. Out of these multiple transactions emerge a pointed critique of how language structures social roles, particularly for women of color. These *transactions* demonstrate how, as Stuart Hall says, the subjects of America's multiracial border and diasporic spaces constitute *hybrid* identities through "very specific" histories and material conditions (Hall 502). As Mullen's poem moves between layered discourses, each layer invokes a set of material geopolitics. Encoded within these discourses—and the movement between them—are commentary on slavery, drug trafficking, exploitative

labor, urban poverty, sexual and gender violence, racism, and the violent commodification of culture in the media.

Mullen includes Spanish in the poem as one of the many marginal and marginalized discourses constantly working with and against English. In fact, Mullen has admitted that her “heteroglossic” childhood in Texas influences how she approaches poetry from gaps, margins, and spaces of overlapping boundaries.² Mullen’s self-assessment as an interstitial, heteroglossic writer who works with discourses understood as “minor,” “marginal” and “in-between,” recalls Montezemolo, Peralta and Yépez’s definition of *transa* as “what happens on the verge.” Mullen situates herself and her work in a similar moment, where “occupying the gap” means transacting between overlapping forces. Similar to how the authors of *Here Is Tijuana!* invoke *transa* as both a theoretical category and as an action, Mullen’s poetic language both enacts *and* theorizes the discursive multiplicity from which it’s created. The “complex, unpredictable and subliminal” forces that surface in *Muse & Drudge* are *transa*—mobile, contested, contentious, gritty and deceptive (and sometimes celebratory) transactions.³

Muse & Drudge avoids recreating or re-inscribing a stable, coherent identity *or* language through her use of fragmentation, collage, allusion, parataxis, and signifying. What makes the poem unique is not just the nexus of languages she gathers, but also that these languages transact between themselves, disrupting, signifying on, and changing each other. It’s a form of innovation that comes, as Mullen has said, from the “discomfort” or “awkwardness” of being “in-between” discourses, cultures, communities and the movement “back and forth between these different arenas” (“Untitled” 12–13).⁴ Mullen’s language resonates with the feminist borderlands thinker Gloria Anzaldúa’s *nepantla*, “an Aztec word meaning torn between two ways [...] and in a state of perpetual transition” (Anzaldúa 100). Anzaldúa’s path-breaking work in *Borderlands/La Frontera* famously named this in-between condition of painful transition as the condition particular to the new *mestiza* of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Anzaldúa’s work, although read widely and broadly, is often closely aligned with the specific experiences of the lesbian Chicana/*mestiza*, and Mullen’s “muse” offers a very similar theorizing, in the voice(s) of a hybrid African American woman. This muse, like Anzaldúa’s new *mestiza*, reclaims her multilingual “wild tongue” as part of the process of representing herself/story and healing the wounds of history.⁵ Both Anzaldúa and Mullen use their personal experiences as borderlands subjects to theorize a new poetic consciousness of transition and transaction. Within this movement, both poets asks readers to recognize how identities are constructed through certain public and private discourses, which can themselves be linked back to the specific social/historical/political contexts out of which they are produced. The similarities between these two transborder feminist writers offer another opportunity for a comparative theorizing of the borderlands subject, particularly the female subject, across and between the borders of race.

Many scholars of feminist avant-garde poetry have written on Mullen’s relationship to experimental women’s writing. Scholars such as Deborah Mix (2005), Cynthia Hogue (2002), Juliana Spahr (2001) and Elizabeth Frost (1995) have explored Gertrude Stein’s influence on Mullen and the various ways in which Mullen revises the Steinian feminist project.⁶ These scholars look at the similarities and differences between Stein’s *Tender Buttons* and Mullen’s *Trimmings and S*PeRM**K*T*.⁷ Frost and others

have cogently identified and explicated the various “hybrid traditions” at work in Mullen’s poetry.⁸ Frost identifies what she names a “poetics of multiplicity,” which includes “both repetitions and renovation” of established traditions, such as the classical lyric, the blues, and the Black Arts “voice” (*Feminist Avant-Garde* 158). Such work has done much to establish Mullen’s place in a canon of contemporary experimental women’s writing and to identify the linguistic and cultural diversity of her poetics. Several of these feminist critics rely on adjectives such as “mongrel,” “liminal,” “border-crossing,” and “hybrid” in their analyses of Mullen, and *Muse & Drudge* in particular.⁹ Cynthia Hogue refers to how Mullen revises Stein’s privileging of white femininity as “revisionary border work,” which consists of “explorations of the linguistic, racial, gender, and visual border work that created the foundation for [Mullen’s] mature poetic project” (“Beyond the Frame” 84). She also argues that Mullen’s use of code switching in her early work anticipates her later explorations of “being in a linguistically and racially mongrel community” (87). Frost similarly notes Mullen’s “linguistic border crossing,” “mongrelization,” and “hybridity of forms” (“Sleeping with the Dictionary” 411; “Ruses” 475).

Such terms have become increasingly popular in U.S. literary and cultural studies criticism to describe a range of cultural productions, but it’s important to remember the specific contexts that produced such terms. In this scholarship, the use of these terms threatens to appropriate them for the purposes of identifying a kind of genre-busting cultural poetics, without recognizing that these terms are not neutral, and are heavily invested in material realities, especially for immigrants and people of color. It’s ironic that scholars such as Hogue can use phrases like “border work” and “border-crossing” to describe Mullen’s poetics without taking into consideration Mullen’s own biographical connection to the actual U.S.-Mexico border, the references to that border in the poem, or the ways in which the borderlands become a site of social critique and cross-racial female solidarity. In addition, the term “mongrel” has a specific racialized history—the history of racial classification and hierarchies in the United States, particularly real for African Americans subjected to the violence of the “one drop rule.”¹⁰ Mullen’s references to “passing” in the poem and also her own scholarly research on the trope of passing in African American literature indicate her awareness and deployment of these meanings.¹¹ Such literary and theoretical abstractions threaten to obscure the violent histories and on-going struggles of America’s racialized bodies—those real-life border crossers who appear throughout the terrain of the poem.

Another site of inquiry and contestation has been Mullen’s relationship to African American literary traditions, which is sometimes seen as at odds with the avant-garde influences and/or feminist influences in her work. This struggle stems from a well-known tension for writers from marginalized communities who often feel pressure to conform their writing to certain expectations about authentic voice. Deborah Mix notes how Mullen’s work intervenes in such a tradition that generally values the “experiential” over the “experimental” qualities of much ethnic writing (Mix 65). Yet Mullen, and many other writers of color, reject this perceived binary. Rigid categories create “oversimplifications,” according to African-American poet Nathaniel Mackey, and “contribute to the relative invisibility of African-American writing that seeks to advance

content outside the prescribed or expected limits and/or to be formally innovative or experimental” (Mackey 8).

Mullen has commented widely on this tension in her poetry, interviews, and critical essays.¹² She writes: “the codes of oppressed peoples also have their aesthetic basis” and that their discourses “really are very rich, very aestheticized, very metaphorical” (Griffin and Magee 45). This recognition disrupts common perceptions that an “authentic” black voice must be a vernacular one and that “black culture” is defined by its relationship to orality.¹³

Mullen acknowledges the importance of orality but worries that “African-American literature that privileges a speech based poetics, or the trope of orality, to the exclusion of more writerly texts will cost us some impoverishment of the tradition” (“African Signs” 670-71). As a result, some readers associate African American writing with a set of stereotypes about vernacular, region, race, history and identity.¹⁴ Mullen has contested the hegemony of these absolutist ropes and themes by documenting how African and African American cultures have used script, writing, and reading as part of the cultural tools throughout history.¹⁵

Partly in order to address this tension, Mullen wrote *Muse & Drudge* as a response to “[...] this idea that you can be black *or* innovative [...] *Muse & Drudge* is my attempt to show that I can do both at the same time” (*Combo* 47). In dramatically re-enacting how “a speakerly text may also be a very writerly text” (41), *Muse & Drudge* uses translated fragments of Sappho’s ancient Greek poetry, which, Mullen says, “sounded to my ear like a woman singing the blues,” in combination with another voice, “Sapphire, an iconic black woman who refuses to be silenced” (*Recyclopedia* xi). Thus one language transaction the poem performs is the place where the traditional lyric voice of “high art” meets the bluesy musicality of a contemporary black woman’s voice(s) and what happens to that meeting when Mullen inscribes it into a poetic language.¹⁶

Muse & Drudge opens by suggesting that its many-layered discourses resemble “blues played left-handed / topsy-turvy inside out” (*Recyclopedia* 103):

pot said kettle’s mama
must’ve burnt them turnip greens
kettle deadpanned not missing a beat
least mine ain’t no skillet blonde (105)

These are the “hussified dozens” (113) that combine the feminized domestic space with the combatant masculinized space of the street. Here, “bodacious butt shakes” create “rebellious riddem / older than black pepper” (106). The “rebellious riddem” is a decidedly female “riddem” and the funky poetic voice of the poem constantly reminds us who’s in charge. It’s:

her own jive
player and instrument
all the way live
the way a woman might use it (120)

The “avid diva” with “her own jive” tells us she’ll “sing it in my voice / put words in like I want them” and the result might be “leaning meaning / signifying say what” (119; 125; 131). Mullen’s focus on the possibilities of language play refuses to privilege a fixed voice or fixed identity, a characteristic often valued by experimental poetics. But what distinguishes Mullen’s innovative poetics from some projects is her awareness of the social-historical contexts for speech and writing for African Americans. Here, the difference race makes produces a poetics deeply conscious of the historical barriers to free speech (in all its registers) that African Americans have experienced and how such experiences change the meaning of language play. The poem is an “Ethiopian breakdown / underbelly tussle” from “threadbare material soils / the original colored” (131; 130). In the midst of the allusive (and often elusive) mayhem, meaning making seems to be a “dense fabric that obeys its own logic,” but the poem continually reminds that this “logic” comes from specific cultural and historical contexts (130). In reminding us that innovation is often “pulled” out of struggle, the muse invokes the history of black oppression as a metaphor to describe “strong backward progress:”

with all that rope they gave us
we pulled a mule out of the mud
dragging backwoods along
in our strong backward progress

Mullen plays on “backward” and “backwards,” transforming them to “backwoods” and “blackward” to reference the history of Southern blacks, celebrating strength and progress instead of accepting the racial hierarchies that name some “evolved” and some “backwards,” some cultures “high” and some “low.” Here, the violent history of lynching can be reconfigured into a funky-up metaphor for African-American survival and resistance.

While the poem may begin in the backwoods of the U.S. south, the muse’s voice echoes throughout the Southwest, teasing out the tension between the seemingly diffuse condition of diaspora and the more site-specific U.S.-Mexico border. The poem speaks from the spaces of black diaspora—that chronotope Paul Gilroy has called the “black Atlantic.”¹⁷ Yet these are also the imaginary transnational social spaces of “Greater Mexico” theorized by the proto-Chicano scholar Américo Paredes.¹⁸ The geographic terrain of *Muse & Drudge* unites both Gilroy’s black Atlantic and Paredes’s Greater Mexico through their shared “colonial difference” in the modern world system.¹⁹ The black diaspora and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are linked through their common experience of what Latin American sociologists Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein have termed the “coloniality of power”—all of different times and places in which hierarchies of national/cultural/global power are exercised and articulated within the modern world system. More specifically, what José David Saldívar identifies as a “coloniality of border and diaspora power” names all the ways the cultures of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands/Greater Mexico articulate “colonial difference” through chronotopes that challenge national boundaries (Saldívar 2009, 46).

Mullen’s early childhood experiences in Texas have influenced the way she understands the shared oppression between Latin American and African American subjects in the U.S. southwest. In an interview, she tells a story about growing up in

segregated Fort Worth, Texas: “One of my elementary school teachers when I was still in a little segregated black school was a man from Panama, who was a native Spanish speaker, bilingual, so I identified Spanish also with black people as well as Mexican Americans” (Bedient 652). For the young Mullen, language and race function as complicated and intertwined categories. She identifies with her Spanish-speaking teacher because in her town black and Spanish-speaking people are racially marked as different. Interestingly, although her teacher was from Central America, Mullen identifies Spanish speakers with Mexican Americans, no doubt because most Spanish speakers in her town were Mexican or Mexican Americans. The segregated school becomes a chronotope that collapses the differences and distances between Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States.

The muse refuses to choose either diaspora or the borderlands as her locus of enunciation, instead she shows us how identity, culture and history are deeply implicated in both concepts. As a result, Mullen allows her muse to speak from the more complex condition of transaction between the two. Mullen “expands the idea of blackness” by using discursive techniques such as code-switching and linguistic *mestizaje* to dramatically re-enact the tangled transactions between the United States, Latin American, Africa and the Caribbean:²⁰

creole cocoa loca
 crayon gumbo boca²¹
 crayfish crayola
 jumbo mocha-cola (*Recyclopedia* 162)

bring money bring love
 lucky floorwash seven
 powers of Africa la mano
 poderosa ayudame numeros suenos (126)²²

restore lost nature
 with hoodoo paraphernalia
 get cured in Cuban by a charming
 shaman in an urban turban (126)

Alliteration, assonance, and end rhyme create a playful transculturation of languages and references.²³ From the creolized South in the second stanza, she takes us to the Afro-Caribbean, where “powers of Africa” are aided and invoked by a supplication to “the powerful hand” and “numbers dreams” in Spanish. These allusions to *voodoo*, *santería* and the revelatory power of dreams are named explicitly in the second stanza as the “hoodoo paraphernalia” of a “charming” Cuban shaman in an “urban turban” with the power to “restore lost nature.” Again, Mullen cleverly uses assonance and consonance to yoke unexpected terms together: *Cuban*, *shaman*, *urban*, *turban* and *charming* and *shaman*.

Muse & Drudge foregrounds language as the site from which the muse performs her mestiza legacy—as colonial difference—and contests the operations of power that attempt to silence her. Paul Hoover has argued that the poem’s many voices “suggests

the shuffling of cards in a poker or Tarot deck. It therefore invites comparison to Ifa divination, in which sixteen cowries or palm nuts are cast on a tray in an act of prophecy” (Hoover 62). I argue that the poem sounds more like a transa than a Tarot deck, where Ifa divination is just one of many registers being “mused” upon and “dubbed” by Mullen. In this transa, the poet’s humor mediates the potential trauma in the memories of the shared histories of colonial violence. If Paredes’s Greater Mexico “allows us to make sense of the new geographies of citizenship in an era of the emerging globalization of capital with its intensified flow of idea, goods, images, services, and persons,” Mullen’s poem, written fifty years after Paredes, when the era of “emerging globalization” has become the era of entrenched globalization, gives those new citizen-subjects a voice (Saldívar, R. 59).

The same voice that chants *santería* prayers in Cuba describes the bleak and “unforgiving” deserts of the U.S. southwest:

dry bones in the valley
turn over with wonder
was it to die for our piece
of buy ‘n’ buy pie chart

when memory is unforgiving
mute eloquence
of taciturn ghosts
wrecks havoc on the living

intimidates inmates
polishing naked cactus
down below a bitter buffer
inferno never froze over (169)

Iconic images locate us in the desert: the “dry bones in the valley” and “naked cactus” that dot the landscape of a “bitter buffer.” For those familiar with the tragedy of the Juárez murders, images of “dry bones” recalls the media images of search parties looking for missing women in the desert and finding only bones and perhaps a shred of clothing or a lone shoe. Since 1993, more than four hundred women have disappeared in the norteño border town of Ciudad Juárez (across the border from El Paso, Texas), and by mid-2002, 282 women had been identified as victims of femicide (Fregoso 1). This “historical and social trauma” hinges upon women’s perceived invisibility within traditional, patriarchal societies and the brutal visibility of their murdered bodies. In attempting to account for this gender violence, feminist scholars such as Julia Estela Monárrez, Debbie Nathan, Rosa Linda Fregoso, and Ursula Biemann have analyzed how power relations operate on Mexican/Latina women within the simultaneous processes of globalization, social/economic change at the border zones, and traditional patriarchal societies. Thus, “[f]emicide in Juárez makes evident the reality of overlapping power relations on gendered and racialized bodies as much as it clarifies the degree to which violence against women has been naturalized as a method of social control” (2). In this violent equation, the bodies of brown female workers are seen as expendable victims in

the fight for domination by states, the rich, and white elites—the perceived “order” protected and bounded by the border. In her haunting documentary of this feminicide tragedy, filmmaker Lourdes Portillo’s *Señorita Extraviada* (*Missing Young Woman*) visually and aurally represents the “mute eloquence” of the “taciturn ghosts” of the dead women who wreak “havoc on the living.”

Women living in the borderlands are indeed victims of globalization’s dark side—a devastating piece of the “buy ‘n’ buy pie chart”. In the new international division of labor, the majority of Juárez’s feminicide victims are employees at the large multinational *maquilas*, or assembly plants, where they assemble components for electronic and high-tech goods (such as televisions and computers), which are then exported back to U.S., tariff free. Mullen’s “buy ‘n’ buy pie chart” satirizes a profit-oriented neoliberalism, which encourages multinational corporations to locate their factories in places such as the U.S.-Mexico borderlands where wages are lowest and government regulations the least intrusive.

As Evelyn Hu-DeHart and others have pointed out, this kind of global factory labor is gendered:

The biggest losers in this global assembly line are women—Latina and Asian women—characterized as inherently, innately, and naturally suited for the kind of low-skill labor in light manufacturing, whether in the Third World export-processing factories or U.S. electronic assembly plants and sweatshops. This ‘myth of nimble fingers’—a purely ideological construct—is nothing less than the rationalization for low wages, not to mention justification for the perpetuation of the notion of Third World women’s intellectual inferiority. It is not just the gendered quality of the international division of labor that is so problematic, but that the gendered division is inferred and inscribed as a permanent hierarchy that is further reinforced by race, class, and nationality differences, as well as denial of immigration and citizenship rights in the case of the smuggled and undocumented (Hu-DeHart 252).

Thus, the exploited factory worker, the sweatshop laborer, the sex worker, the domestic worker...these women have become “the unattractive public faces of the New World Order” (251). Mullen asks readers to confront these “unattractive,” unhomely faces when she muses:

how a border orders disorder
how the children looked
whose mothers worked
in the maquiladora (*Recyclopedia* 108)

To invoke the *maquiladora* invokes the Juárez murders and the violence of patriarchy, the backlash of NAFTA, the continued oppression of the U.S.-Mexico border as an export-processing zone for the North and West, as well as a long history of conflict along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. By asking us to consider “how the children looked / whose mother’s worked in the maquiladora,” Mullen’s poem somewhat sentimentally encourages her readers to humanize these women and to understand them as wives,

girlfriends, and mothers working within complex and violent power structures in order to provide for their families. In doing so, Mullen's poem contests and rejects the dehumanization of factory work and the erasure of women's humanity by both local and global processes.

In an interview, Mullen has observed how borders are created to separate a perceived "order" from the threat of a perceived "disorder." These borders "define social organization" and "artistic form," even when they are "imaginary" or "arbitrary."²⁴ As a political statement on the regulation of movement across geo-political borders, Mullen's comments echo border scholar Claudia Sadowski-Smith: "[...] literal or symbolic forms of transborder movement undermine state-based nationalist ideologies and oppressive nation-state structures by defying a central aspect of state power—to define, discipline, control, and regulate all kinds of populations, where in movement or in residence" (Sadowski-Smith 3). The line can also be interpreted as a statement of poetics. Here, the chronotope of the border as a defensible space and a moment in time (of order and organization) becomes the explosive coordinate from which Mullen can theorize a transborder poetics. Art and ideology, she claims, as much as people and national boundaries, cannot be absolutely regulated. In fact, the kind of aesthetic divisions that separate "art" from "garbage" are continually being troubled, or erased altogether. Mullen's decolonial border thinking reminds us that oppositional politics and formal innovation are not incompatible. To connect them is to enact an equally assertive political and aesthetic opposition to the forces of power that attempt to regulate and silence women of color.

Mullen's references to the position of Mexican and U.S. Latina women in the global division of labor invite comparison to the position of African American women in the United States. The earlier reference to "inmates" and her allusion to the illegal drug trade below similarly locate us in a landscape of illegality and violence:

precious cargo up crooked alleys
mules and drugs
blood on the lilies
of the fields (172)

Mullen puns on the title of the poem, replacing "Muse & Drudge" with "mules and drugs." This wordplay encapsulates many ideas at once: a repetition of the theme of women as workers; the double meaning of "mule" as an animal used for hard labor and as slang for those (mainly women) who transport illegal drugs across the border from Mexico; the violence perpetrated on the bodies of women who have no other choice but to smuggle contraband—"precious cargo up crooked alleys." Her references to the back alley world of smuggling, drug trafficking, and drug use invoke the US-Mexico border at the same time that they reference conditions in the urban ghettos of the United States. While our illegal drugs may come from/through Mexico, Mullen knows that it's African American bodies dealing drugs and black bodies filling the nation's prisons on drug-related charges. When asked about this line, she said, "That very literally refers to the frisking and strip-searching of black women in airports, because they're supposed to fit the profile of the drug courier, or mule" (Bedient 667). Mullen recognizes that not all border crossing can be abstracted as metaphors for aesthetic and cultural theories. Our

ultimate inability to regulate borders also creates opportunities for violence, exploitation, and criminality. As Saskia Sassen points out, writing about the survival of migratory women in global cities, “[t]he same infrastructure designed to facilitate cross-border flows of capital, information, and trade also makes possible a range of unintended cross-border flows, as growing numbers of traffickers, smugglers, and even governments now make money off the back of women” (Sassen 273).

Mullen’s social commentary links the U.S.’s different racialized and criminalized bodies, particularly through the lens of women of color’s shared struggles against dehumanizing stereotypes as sexually desirable objects, prostitutes, and laborers.²⁵ “Mules and drugs” are the African American women and murdered U.S. Latina and Mexican *maquila* workers in the borderlands whose bodies are used as vehicles for the illegal drug trade. Mullen’s verses are a pointed critique of the perceived illegality and expendability of women of color’s bodies. What happens in Mullen’s borderlands never stays in the borderlands.

Elsewhere, Mullen writes of the “disappeared undocumented workhorse / homeless underclass breeder” (178). This reference transacts between political categories of identity created by the state: the *desaparecidos* or disappeared persons (most commonly associated with the dictatorships of Chile and Argentina or the so-called failed states of Mexico) and the “undocumented worker.”²⁶ By yoking these two terms together, Mullen invites us to consider the similarities between the violence of dictatorship and the violence of U.S. hegemony, which depends on the same immigrant labor it criminalizes. According to Kent Ono and John Sloop:

The rhetoric of ‘immigration,’ one of the key ideographs of the United States, illustrates well the production of ambivalence surrounding others within narratives about citizens [...] The two sides of the ambivalence are the desire for productive laborers and a loathing of the laborer who does anything other than work specific jobs associated with facilitating the interests of efficient capital processes (Ono and Sloop 27).

What Ono and Sloop identify as “ambivalence,” takes on a more sinister meaning when we consider the poor material conditions of many of these immigrants and laborers, as well as the hostility they face as outsiders in U.S. citizenship narratives. By replacing “worker” with “workhorse,” Mullen emphasizes the dehumanizing that occurs when laborers are valued only for the demanding physical labor (drudgery) they perform and are seen as political non-entities or as a threat to a cohesive national identity. This is particularly ironic because there is no doubt that “immigrant labor is indispensable for the labor-intensive, service-dependent economy of the United States” (Hu-DeHart 253). Recent scholarship names the kind of work historically performed by African American women but now increasingly taken up by immigrant women from the Global South as “social reproductive labor.”²⁷ This scholarship identifies continuities between the gendered and racialized divisions of labor in a global age and in the “pre-global” age where: “Whether working in domestic, cleaning, janitorial, or food service, or in nursing home or child care, or as prostitutes, sex workers, or mail- or internet-brides, Third World immigrant women are not just making a living in low-paying, low-status often demeaning niches that require little English or other skills” (Hu-DeHart 250). Now, as before,

professional middle class women can leverage class privilege by transferring such “private sphere responsibilities” to “racially and socially subordinate women”—the mules of the world.²⁸ Mullen’s ironic critique points to one of the fundamental contradictions of the American creed—that “equality and justice for all” translates as success earned through individual hard work and pluckiness, and not from the calculated exploitation of others deemed inferior.

This nativist rhetoric reappears in the second line of the stanza. “Homeless underclass breeder” recalls rhetoric of U.S. political theorists such as Samuel P. Huntington, who warns Americans that the rising percentage of “Hispanic” persons in the United States is “driven not just by immigration but also by fertility” (Huntington 34). Huntington goes on to compare fertility rates between non-Hispanic whites, blacks, and Hispanics to argue “the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America’s traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to black and white American natives” (32). Like “workhorse,” “homeless underclass breeder” alludes to the flattening and dehumanizing of non-white subjectivity by nativist rhetoric—women of color are reduced to their reproductive capacity, seen solely as vessels for breeding a growing underclass which threatens to destroy U.S. national identity. Huntington’s rhetoric is a perfect example of the kind of discourse Ono and Sloop accuse of portraying “undocumented immigrants as either underpaid laborers whose work strengthens the economy or welfare recipients who drain the state’s social welfare system” (Ono and Sloop 28). Either way, immigrants are seen solely as “economic units.”

This kind of rhetoric also recalls constructions used to portray African Americans. As commentary on the conditions of African Americans, “workhorse” can refer to slavery and/or the blue-collar labor performed by a so-called underemployed and unskilled black “underclass.” The “homeless underclass breeder” references racist labels used to describe African Americans in the urban ghetto. Similar to the Mexican immigrant *barrio*, the black ghetto has often been theorized in racist and classist rhetoric as a breeding ground for lawlessness and laziness where “welfare mothers” drain the government of precious resources while breeding future gang members, criminals, and prostitutes who will continue the vicious cycle. As Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton write in *American Apartheid*: “By the end of the 1970’s, the image of poor minority families mired in an endless cycle of unemployment, unwed childbearing, illiteracy, and dependency had coalesced into a compelling and powerful concept: the urban underclass” (Massey and Denton 4). Mullen’s wordplay transculturates the relationship between African Americans and Mexican/Latin American immigrants in the United States, encouraging us to see continuity between America’s classic anti-black rhetoric and today’s increasing national hysteria over immigration at our southern border. In both cases, the social and economic conditions of these groups are generalized as products of a “culture of poverty” that reinforces laziness and lawlessness (5). Read both ways, Mullen’s invocation of this rhetoric reminds us of how language and power operate together to name and silence the muse’s voice. This rhetoric represents the “master’s language” that *Muse and Drudge* will spit back in the face of domination as just one of many possible discourses. While her “name” may be “determined by other names,” the

muse's voice aggressively asserts her own power to transact between language cultures, even racist ones (*Recyclopedia* 100).

In interviews, Mullen has acknowledged that her familiarity with and use of Spanish comes from her own life experiences, growing up in a middle-class African American family in Fort Worth, Texas where she interacted daily with Mexicans and learned to speak both a black vernacular and Spanish. She was “between the Anglos and, as we called them then, the Mexicans” (Griffin and Magee 39). Her daily experience of Spanish included:

hearing Spanish spoken whenever I was outside of my neighborhood, say downtown or on buses, and wanting to know what people were saying in that language. Actually, where I heard Spanish spoken frequently was in my grandmother's neighborhood, a black community with one Mexican-American family. We used to practice our few words of Spanish with them. We always exchanged greetings in Spanish with the Cisneros family, her next door neighbors (Bedient 651).

Mullen also picked up Spanish on her first job as a waitress at an all-white summer camp, where she felt more comfortable interacting with the gardeners and laundry women who were Mexican and Mexican American and spoke Spanish (Hogue 1999). Later, she studied Spanish in high school and college, to the level where she could read literature in Spanish. While Mullen does not claim to have access to Spanish in the way a native speaker does, she identifies “[...] a Southern or Southwestern emphasis in my work. In many of my works I have sprinkled Spanish words [...] Spanish is always in the background; it's that other language that cohabits with English” (Williams 702). In places, Mullen simply uses a Spanish word as one part of a quatrain in English, as in her description of an “occult iconic crow” as “solo misterioso” (*Recyclopedia* 138).²⁹ Or they appear as characters in other quatrains:

la muerte³⁰ dropped her token
in the subway slot machine
nobody told the green man
the fortune cookie lied (114)

go on sister sing your song
lady redbone señora rubia³¹
took all day long
shampooing her nubia (149)

The poem's speaker code-switches easily between the two languages without explaining or apologizing. The Spanish grammar, which, unlike English, includes gendered pronouns before nouns, grants Mullen access to a more emphatically feminized language. This structure is appropriate for the stanza's theme—cross-racial solidarity between “lady redbone” and “señora rubia” who can celebrate their feisty independence by spending all day “shampooing” their “nubia.”³² By rhyming “rubia” and “nubia,” we hear both the “Afrocentric” reference to Nubian and something suggestively erotic and female. Mullen

uses Spanish grammar, where feminine words are also recognized by their “a” ending, to “Spanishize” *nubia* in a more playful and productive form of linguistic miscegenation/*mestizaje*--an unequivocally assertive, sexual female language.

Mullen also uses complete or long phrases in Spanish. In the following stanza, she uses a Spanish phrase comment on skin-whitening creams:

if your complexion is a mess
our elixir spells skin success
you'll have appeal bewitch be adored
*hechizando con crema dermoblanqueadora*³³ (132)

This stanza represents one of the numerous places in the poem when Mullen uses the language of advertising both playfully and critically. The commercial “jingle” provides the tone, rhythm, and rhyme scheme for the stanza, which faithfully imitates the “catchy” sound of an advertisement. In this case, skin whitening cream is offered as the “elixir” to increase a woman’s sex appeal so that she may “bewitch be adored.” On one level, the stanza appeals to all women who feel societal pressures to conform to certain standards of beauty and who considerable sums on products and treatments meant to beautify. The stanza has particularly troubling resonances for women of color who often feel they don’t fit societal standards of beauty. “For women who are not White,” write Joanna Rondilla and Paul Spickard, “much of the beauty issue is concentrated around the color and texture of their skin. The prime value is placed on being light and smooth, and such qualities can affect one’s life chances significantly” (Rondilla and Spickard 1). For African American women, light skin has been both fetishized and punished in the public imagination. Mullen’s use of Spanish to name the skin whitening cream alludes to how Latin American and Latina women are also adversely affected by the privileging of light skin. As Christina Gómez points out in her essay, “Brown Outs: The Role of Skin Color and Latinas:”

Notions of female desirability and respectability are tainted by historical colonial domination and by current consumer media today. Women of color have been marginalized for not fitting into socially constructed ‘notions of beauty’ [...] This phenomenon has had real costs for women of color through wages, education, occupational attainment, marriage selection, health, and self esteem (202).

Mullen’s text invokes the commercial transaction, through the language of advertising and the presence of commodities, as a site worthy of poetic exploration and social commentary. She positions the discourse of advertising in order to turn it back onto itself, drawing attention to the role language plays in packaging and selling (and “spelling”) identities for women of color. This doubling effect allows Mullen to propose “transactions” of her own where social roles are not “sold,” but dismantled, in order to create opportunities for building alliances between marginalized communities on the basis of difference.

In the following stanza, written almost entirely in Spanish, Mullen references the colonial history that produced *mestizaje*:

mulattos en el mole
me gusta mi posole
hijita del pueblo Moreno
ya baila la conquista (*Recyclopedia* 165)³⁴

This stanza is deceptively playful. The first two lines have a singsong rhythm and rhyme scheme, and the words seem nonsensical. But everything shifts in the third line when we meet the “little daughter from a Brown town”—the result of the conquest’s “dance.” Mullen plays on the double meaning of “pueblo” in Spanish—as both “town/village,” but also as “community” or “people.” She also takes advantage of the Spanish preposition “de,” which means both “from” and “of.” In the image of a little daughter from/of a brown town/people, we now have a context for and an embodiment of those “mulattos” in the first line. The mole and posole cease to be simply iconic cultural markers and become symbols of mixing, specifically racial mixing. Mole, a traditional Oaxacan chili and chocolate-based sauce, and posole, a stew made from hominy, meat, and chili peppers, are both dishes that depend on the combination of many different flavors, textures, and spices. In the discourse of mainstream multiculturalism, food and cooking metaphors are often (over)used to describe racial/ethnic heterogeneity (the tiresome “melting pot”) or people themselves (Latino/as as “hot” and “spicy,” etc.). At first, Mullen appears to be echoing the same kind of essentializing discourse, but the last two lines subvert this discourse, reminding us that mixing is the product of the conquest’s violent “dance.” It’s not surprising that Mullen chooses a little girl to represent colonialism’s racial legacy in Latin America—indigenous women and girls were the earliest victims of the conquest’s sexual violence. As Alicia Arrizón notes, “Massive miscegenation was facilitated not only by the social condition of the natives but also by the fact that the conquistadors’ position of power made it possible for them to exploit women at will” (Arrizón 7). To peer beneath the surface of Mullen’s seemingly playful rhymes reveals multiculturalism’s silent history—the deeply embedded histories of racial and sexual violence in the Americas.

Thus, the stanza’s second half subverts the expectations created by the first half’s playfulness. In subsequent readings, Mullen’s irony becomes clearer. Her use of “baila” (dance) to describe the process of conquest is perhaps the most biting ironic moment in the entire poem. The urgency of the Spanish word “ya” in the final line, roughly translated in English as “now,” brings us back to the present moment. Mullen reminds us that colonialism’s dance is not over, that the consequences of the racial and sexual violence visited upon “brown people” of all shades and combinations continue to have purchase in contemporary social injustices.

One of the most complex transactions in *Muse & Drudge* emerges between Mullen’s self-consciously hybridized language and her references to actual racial mixing. We know that the mixing of races produced complicated and important racial hierarchies where skin color and bloodline were crucial to one’s status in society (as free or enslaved, citizen or non-citizen, “high class” or “low class,” etc.). Particularly in the Spanish colonies of Latin America, being a *mestizo* was equated with low class status and was a source of shame and humiliation (Castillo 8). While Mullen’s multiple discourses might often celebrate the complexity and interconnectedness of transAmerican culture, the *mestiza/mulatta* is not part of a “happy multiculturalism,” or the “happy hybrid” of

Yépez's disdain. Alicia Arrizón reminds us that the world "mulatto" comes from the Latin word for mule and there's little doubt that Mullen knows this etymology, adding yet another valence of meaning to the poem's title. Mullen's mestiza/mulatta figure is a site of both history and empowerment. In her historical role, she is "the embodiment of transculturation, commodification, eroticization" (Arrizón 84), perpetually denied full inclusion in both her "native" and "dominant" cultures. Mullen's mestiza/mulatta turns this history onto itself, using the "in-betweenness of cultural hybridization" to contest the history of racist, patriarchal power structures which have silenced her voice(s) and to aggressively make art from that transborder space of marginality (101).

In this chapter, I've proposed that *Muse & Drudge* represents a transborder poetics where Mullen's multi-tongued muse transacts in-between "major" and "minor" discourses to challenge assumptions about the borders that attempt to regulate experiences, subjectivities, and aesthetics of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Her transborder poetics represent a matrix of intentional, "illegitimate" transactions within transactions. Such juxtapositions compare geopolitical and racial borders and the subjects who cross them, and the aesthetic-ideological borders that dictate what constitutes (and who creates) art and culture.

Ultimately, Mullen's text rejects essentialist politics (cultural and otherwise) and instead strives to recognize and legitimate our profound interconnectedness as humans:

I would say that, yes, my text is deliberately a multi-voiced text, a text that tries to express the actual diversity of my own experience living here, exposed to different cultures. 'Mongrel' comes from 'among.' Among others. We are among; we are not alone. We are all mongrels (Bedient 652).

By recognizing that we create our identities out of our relationships with others, Mullen's muse demands that we "reconfigure the hybrid" (*Recyclopedia* 158). This reconfigured hybrid (whether it be a multi-voiced text or a multi-voiced body) becomes a radical opportunity for "collaborative reading and an occasion to unite audiences often divided by racial and cultural differences" as well as a critically engaged (tongue-in-cheek and often sneaky) dismantling of the numerous social scripts that would bind us (*Recyclopedia* xi).

¹ Nielson, Aldon Lynn. *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism*. New York: Cambridge U Press, 1997. Print.

² In her interview with Henning, Mullen says:

The linguistic, regional, and cultural differences marked by southern dialect, black English, Spanish and Spanglish are fundamental to how I think about language, and how I work with language in poetry. My attraction to the minor and the marginal, to the flavor of difference in language, has something to do with this sense of heteroglossia that was part of the environment of my childhood in Texas [...] The heterogeneity of these various communities has influenced me, often in complex, unpredictable and subliminal ways. I think of myself and my writing as being marginal to all of the different communities that have contributed to the poetic idiom of my work, but at the same time it is important to me that I work in the interstices, where I occupy the gap that separates one from the other; or where there might be overlapping boundaries, I work in that space of overlap or intersection (Henning 9).

³ What emerges from this multiplicity is a style of innovation based on “exploration” and “interrogation”—“[...] an open-ended investigation into the possibilities of language, the aesthetic and expressive, intellectual and transformative possibilities of language” (“Untitled” 11). In *Muse & Drudge*, Mullen’s language-centered quatrains invoke the traditional blues quatrain as well as the lyric and gather their dizzying momentum through word games and language play. (*Recyclopedia* ix).

⁴ Mullen says: “[...] being in between discourses, in between cultures, in between communities, with the possibility of movement back and forth between these different arenas and discourses, so that the poetry comes out of the resistance, the conflict, the struggle, the difficulty, the discomfort or awkwardness of that position (“Untitled” 12—13).

⁵ See Chapter 5 of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987).

⁶ Much of this scholarship focuses on *Trimmings* and *S*PeRM**K*T*, Mullen’s self-confessed attempts to respond to Stein’s use of “elusive poetic prose” as “meditation on the interior lives of women and the material culture of domesticity” (*Recyclopedia* ix-x).

⁷ Frost has characterized *Trimmings* as Mullen’s attempt to merge a Black Arts tradition and a Steinian poetic tradition (*Feminist Avant-Garde*). Thus Frost argues that Mullen signifies on Stein by extending her poetic awareness to historical, social, and political contexts and the way identities, primarily black female identities, are socially constructed.

⁸ See also Paul Hoover (2004); Calvin Bedient (1996).

⁹ Frost undertakes a comprehensive analysis of how Mullen revises and “hybridizes” the lyric tradition. Through her “mongrelization of cultural reference points” she transforms the personal lyric tradition into “[...] an experiment in collective reading and an assertion of the complexities of community, language, and poetic voice” (“Ruses” 466-67).

¹⁰ See Hollinger.

¹¹ See Mullen, “Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness.”

¹² Mullen’s first book of poetry, *Tree Tall Woman*, placed her “rather neatly within the category of ‘representative blackness’” (“Poetry and Identity” 28) and she noticed that

her audiences had “a lot of black people” as well as “white people and brown people and other people of color as well” (Griffin and Magee 47). Her next two books, *Trimmings and S*PeRM**K*T* reflected new interest in innovative poetics, but she immediately saw a change in her audience. She said: “Suddenly, when I went around to do readings of *Trimmings* and ‘Spermkit,’ I would be the one black person in the room, reading my poetry, I mean, a room which typically had no other people of color in it...and I thought, ‘How am I going to get all these folks to sit down together in the same room?’

¹³ In *Black Chant: African-American Postmodernisms*, Aldon Nielson echoes Mullen’s concerns: “too much current theorizing about black poetics secures its success with a critical readership by eliminating from consideration those poetic practices that might disrupt totalizing theories of what constitutes black vernacular” (Nielson 9—10).

¹⁴ As Allison Cummings has pointed out: “readers throughout the twentieth century came to associate African American identity and aesthetics in poetry with certain tropes and themes: ‘black’ dialect; folk and vernacular expressions conveying collective, regional racial identities; themes related to African American experience; line lengths and rhythms allied with jazz and blues; and allusions specific to African American history, art, music, and literature” (Cummings 13-14).

¹⁵ History, she says in an interview, “associates African-Americans with inarticulateness and illiteracy, or with an oral tradition that continually threatens to drown out any possible written tradition that we can claim as our own” (“Untitled” 11-12). Mullen argues instead, “Africans did write,” yet because “Africans may not have used writing in the same ways that Europeans did,” the history of African script has been erased. To ignore how the speakerly can also be writerly denies each generation “this history of innovation, formal experimentation, of a writerly text, that may also be speakerly at the same time, may also be musical” (“Untitled” 42). See also Mullen, “African Signs & Spirit Writing.”

¹⁶ As Mullen told Calvin Bedient in an interview, “I was interested in concentrating, distilling and condensing aspects of orality and literacy. [...] I’m interested in taking a speech-based tradition and transforming it through the techniques that are available to me in writing” (Bedient 656).

¹⁷ “The specificity of the modern political and cultural formation I want to call the black Atlantic can be defined, on one level, through this desire to transcend both the structures of the national state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” (Gilroy 19).

¹⁸ Instead of viewing citizenship and social relations solely on the North-South axis of the U.S.-Mexico border, Paredes documents the “unwritten history of the south Texas borderlands” as consisting of transnational communities and “movements of people from East to West and South to North (Saldivar, R. 59).

¹⁹ In *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Walter D. Mignolo defines “colonial difference” as “the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values” (Mignolo 13).

²⁰ When asked about her references to the Yoruba orishas in the poem, Mullen has said: “They work in the poem as allusions to the African Diaspora, cultures, and spiritual traditions. They expand the idea of blackness. They suggest both continuity and discontinuity” (Hogue 1999).

²¹ creole cocoa crazy (fem) / crayon gumbo mouth.

²² the powerful hand help me numbers dreams.

²³ I'm referring specifically to Fernando Ortiz's arguments in *Cuban Counterpoint* (1947) that the complex process of cultural innovation as the result of violent colonial encounters between European and Caribbean cultures is best described as "transculturation."

²⁴"The separation of a border defines an order that must be defended, and also presupposes a disorder that continually threatens order [...] Apparently we need boundaries, even imaginary or arbitrary ones, to define social organization and artistic form. Still, it's impossible to regulate absolutely the movement of people across borders, or even to define with certainty the difference between a work of art and a piece of garbage" (Kane 134).

²⁵ The poem responds to media stereotypes of black women "as welfare queens, drugs addicts, and skanky prostitutes on the one hand, or fabulous divas and fashion supermodels on the other," Mullen said in an interview. She connects these images with the heightened attention on "the war on drugs, the growth of the prison industrial system, and attacks on affirmative action, welfare, and proposals for universal health care throughout the 1980s and early 1990s" (Kane 131).

²⁶ For further information on the creation of "undocumented" and "illegal alien" categories see Nevins (2002).

²⁷ See Grace Chang (2000), Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992), Evelyn Hu-DeHart (2007), and Pirette Hodagneu-Sotelo (2002), among others.

²⁸ See Bedient 666—667. In this interview, Mullen says her wordplay with "mule," "muse," and "drudge" is in reference to a remark made by the grandmother in Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: the black woman is the mule of the world.

²⁹ alone/only, mysterious

³⁰ death

³¹ "Lady Redbone" references the Louisiana "Redbones," a pejorative term used up until the mid twentieth century to signify a "triracial" person of African, Native American and European blood-lines in western Louisiana (Gregory 162). Señora Rubia means blond lady in Spanish.

³² Mullen says she found the word "nubia" in a series of letters between two black women in the 19th century. Although the word technically refers to a lace collar worn by women in the Victorian period, Mullen likes its "Afrocentric" sound with its invocation of "Nubian." See Griffin, Farah and Magee 39-40.

³³ applying skin whitening cream.

³⁴ mulattos in the mole / i like my posole / little daughter of a Brown town / the conquest dances now

Three

Gente-fication: Encountering Los Angeles in the borderlands fictions of Helena María Viramontes and Karen Tei Yamashita

The denationalizing of urban space and the formation of new claims by transnational actors and involving contestations, raise the question—whose city is it?

-- Saskia Sassen¹

Do-it-yourself gentrification. Latinos had this word, *gente*. Something translated like *us*. Like *folks*. That sort of gente-fication. Restore the neighborhood. Clean up the streets. Take care of people.

-- Buzzworm from Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*

“Los Angeles is everywhere,” according to geographer Edward Soja (*Postmodern Geographies*). Soja aphorizes a common problem encountered by those writing about Los Angeles—where to begin and where to end when talking about a city that “broadcasts its self-imagery so widely that probably more people have seen this place—or at least fragments of it—than any other on the planet” (Soja 223). L.A. is *the* postmodern geography. It’s a conflicting chronotope in flux, an always already self-referential city that survives on making an industry out of image-making. For some, the rise of Los Angeles during the last century is representative of the cataclysmic ways global capitalism has shifted urban spaces; for others, Los Angeles’s unique relationship to the world renders it impossibly unrepresentable and constantly overrepresented. Enter postmodernism, whose fluctuations, deferred meanings, and multiplicities have seemed most appropriate for describing Los Angeles. In literary-cultural studies, critics often note how the subject and form of contemporary writing about Los Angeles reflects the postmodern geography of the city itself. Both Helena María Viramontes’s short story, “The Cariboo Café,” and Karen Tei Yamashita’s novel, *Tropic of Orange*, have been read as texts of a postmodern Los Angeles, not only because of what they say about the city but also because how they go about saying it.² Yet reading these texts together exposes the limits of interpreting their work solely through the theoretical lens of the postmodern city. To read both texts as **also** part of a tradition of decolonializing U.S.-Mexico border literature reveals how each text contests the on-going marginalization of Los Angeles’s immigrants, diasporic subjects, racial minorities, working class whites, and the homeless and offers unlikely connections between diverse peoples as a site of solidarity against oppression. The connections serve a decolonizing function by confronting and acknowledging the colonial history of the American hemisphere and on-going United States imperialism—a deadly imperialism that is as global and transnational as it is localized in the segregated social and physical spaces of Los Angeles’s urban geography. In their texts, Viramontes and Yamashita give voice to the voiceless victims of colonial and imperial violence and recover their stories from the margins of history. They show how the forces of globalization work through the different marginalized communities of Los Angeles in order to offer connections between groups that have historically been

segregated, separated, or even pitted against each other. To read a text like *Tropic of Orange* alongside Viramontes's now canonical Chicana borderlands text identifies the similarities between literature of the U.S.-Mexico border by Chicanos and Chicanas and an Asian American writer such as Yamashita, thus expanding our understanding of what constitutes borderlands literature and who writes it. Likewise, to read Viramontes's short story in conversation with Yamashita's novel can help us understand the differences between the two projects, particularly how Viramontes's more dystopic ending offers a more cohesive critique of oppression while Yamashita's ending glosses over the intriguing conflicts her narrative has introduced.

Both "The Cariboo Café" and *Tropic of Orange* are examples of *gente-fication*, to borrow a word from one of Yamashita's characters. *Gente-fication* writes from the margins of postmodern Los Angeles, but it is neither "sunshine" nor "noir," the two categories the Los Angeles culture industry has historically been divided along, according to Mike Davis in *City of Quartz*. It may include elements of both, but as fictional texts of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the Los Angeles portrayed in these two stories is both postmodern geography and transborder city—a transa populated by displaced people, people on the move, and the liminal, abject, and unhomey people for whom the mean streets of El Lay are a battlefield on which daily wars for survival are waged, often with deadly consequences. Like gentrification, *gente-fication* implies a transformation of space, but it's a transformation that happens, not from the suburban sites of white-flight or the new Starbucks in the old ghetto, but from the margins of difference. In these *gente-fictions*, Viramontes and Yamashita write back to the center of white hegemony and encounter the borderlands as simultaneously global and local, always already transnational yet bound by the local politics of geography in "the second largest city of México, also known as Los Angeles" (*Tropic* 211).

In their depictions of what José David Saldívar has called, in his analysis of "The Cariboo Café," "the harrowing underside of the glossy Los Angeles postmodernist culture" (Saldívar 102), both Viramontes and Yamashita are responding to dramatic shifts in the demographics of Los Angeles that were taking place during the 1980s and 1990s, when these texts were written ("The Cariboo Café" was written in 1984 and *Tropic* was published in 1997). These changes included the growing transnationalization of the economy and the diversification of population. As Mike Davis noted in *City of Quartz*, his well-known study of late twentieth century Los Angeles, whites officially became a minority during the 1980s, although they continue to maintain a vast share of the economic and political power (Davis 7). Since the 1960s, rapid expansion in high technology and defense industries, finance, banking, and low-paying service and employment jobs (such as garment manufacturing) have turned Los Angeles into what Soja calls a 'technopolis'—"the financial hub of the Western USA and (with Tokyo) the 'capital of capital' in the Pacific Rim" (Soja 192). Such changes have globalized Los Angeles, which has seen a huge influx of immigrant populations and created a minority majority of Latinos, Asians, and African Americans. According to López-Garza and Díaz, "The major pull has been a restructured economy with the resurgence of high-tech industries spurred by corpulent foreign and domestic investments, with an attendant and significant increase in informal establishments owned or staffed mainly by immigrants" (López-Garza and Díaz 1-2). Los Angeles is, indeed, a "global city," as Saskia Sassen has defined them: sites that "allow us to see the multiplicity of economics and work

cultures in which the global information economy is embedded” (Sassen xx). Global cities such as Los Angeles are places where corporate capital is overvalored at the expense of disadvantaged economic actors, such as immigrants, women, racialized minorities, and the working classes—those who lack power but have increasing “presence.” Sassen also notes that as much as the global city focalizes the bleakest forces of globalization, it is also “a strategic site for disempowered actors because it enables them to gain presence, to emerge as subjects, even when they do not gain direct power” (Sassen xxi). As the historically disempowered of Los Angeles gain presence (and, eventually, power), they bring with them a canon of cultural productions that narrate what Davis calls “an alternative experiential vision- in this case, of the huge Los Angeles Third World whose children will be the Los Angeles of the next millennium. In this emerging, poly-ethnic and *poly-lingual* society – with Anglos a declining minority – the structural conditions of intervention in popular culture are constantly in flux” (Davis 87-88). Within this alternative experiential vision, Davis wonders whether “the boundaries between different groups will become faultlines of conflict or high-voltage generators of an alternative urban culture led by poly-ethnic vanguards,” although he never actually mentions Chicano/as or Asian Americans in the book. “The Cariboo Café” and *Tropic* represent such an “alternative urban culture,” written from the shifting borderlands of Los Angeles. Both texts portray the boundaries between people as “faultlines” but also as powerful points of intersection where unlikely alliances recuperate lost histories, decolonize, and offer alternative visions for the future. Ultimately, Yamashita’s alternative future is one of regeneration through violence and excess where the American hemisphere may be redeemed by familial, interracial love while Viramontes’s story remains more darkly ambivalent about the capacity of human connection to transcend the violence of the state.

Helena María Viramontes’s short story, “The Cariboo Café,” was written in 1984 and published in 1995 as part of *The Moths and Other Stories*. The story, written from the shifting perspectives of an undocumented Mexican girl, a working class white man, and an El Salvadorian washerwoman narrates the series of dramatic events that bring the characters together in a seedy Los Angeles café. After losing her house key and then her way in the disorienting streets of a barrio, Sonya and her little brother, Macky, take refuge in the “zero zero place”—a hole-in-the-wall café run by a unnamed white café owner, who suffers physically and psychologically from a life of low-wage work, harassment from the police, and his son’s death in Vietnam. In the café, a washerwoman who has fled to Los Angeles after her son was disappeared by the Contras, mistakes Macky for her lost son, Geraldo, and kidnaps Sonya and Macky. The story concludes with a deadly confrontation between the police and the washerwoman who have tracked her down at the café.

Since its publication, the story has been the subject of many critical responses from a variety of literary critics, particularly Chicana feminist critics. For Chicana feminist Sonia Saldivar-Hull, “The Cariboo Café” “presents the Chicana feminist’s oppositional stance against the political power of the U.S. government and its collaborators south of the border” by connecting Chicanas to Central American refugees through a fractured aesthetics that reflects “the disorientation that the immigrant workers feel when they are subjected to life in a country that controls their labor but does not

value their existence as human beings” (Saldívar-Hull 144). For Saldívar-Hull, the story’s experimental form thus carries a deeply political content invested in forging connections between emerging groups in cities along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The story has also been theorized more broadly within the canon of Chicano/a literature and transnational U.S.-Mexico border writing. In *Border Matters*, José David Saldívar reads the story as part of the liminal borderlands, “a lived, socially symbolic space” (99) through which Viramontes offers a powerful critique of culture. In his analysis, he uses the work of anthropologists Leo Chavez, Victor Turner, Arnold Van Gennep to conceptualize “The Cariboo Café” as a site that illustrates the rites of passage shared by different border crossers: “‘The Cariboo Café’, in Chavez’s temporal, ritualistic terms, moves (in a non-linear narrative) through interstitial phases of separation, liminality, and (deadly) reincorporation” (99). He applies these stages of border-crossing to the three most clearly “displaced people” in the story: the Mexican children Sonya and Macky and the Central American washerwoman. Although the washerwoman desperately attempts to reconstitute her lost family, Saldívar contends that she “never acquires what Chavez calls the ‘links of incorporation—secure employment, family formation, establishment of credit, capital accumulation, competency in English’ ” (Saldívar 99). Because these immigrants are denied full access to American political and cultural life, they’re stuck in-between. Thus, for Viramontes’s characters, “liminality is a position, not a threshold.” Saldívar’s reading focuses on the story of the washerwoman, whom he describes as an urban Llorona wailing for her lost son. Viramontes’s experimental re-visioning of La Llorona reveals how border folkloric traditions are reinvented in the contemporary borderlands to unite diasporic and borderlands subjects. In Saldívar’s analysis, the story’s displaced migrants and border crossers bring their transnational histories into the space of the café, creating a “worlding” of Los Angeles where borders become bonds between people (107).

While critics have rightly discussed the story’s political and aesthetic border crossings within the canon of Chicana feminist and U.S.-Mexico borderlands studies, drawing useful comparisons between undocumented Mexican immigrants like Sonya and Macky and other diasporic peoples, such as Central American refugees, other useful comparisons can be made by looking closely at the story’s other narrative voice—the voice of the white café owner. The café owner’s low wage lifestyle, his daily laboring that includes cooking and cleaning for others, and the death of his son in Vietnam create ambivalent links between him and the washerwoman. These potential links, though, are complicated by the cook’s racism and sexism, as well as by his complicity in the larger system of surveillance and violence in this story. By placing the café owner in the historical moment of the American working class in the post-1970s era, it’s possible to see how Viramontes’s short story offers possible, if vexed, connections between a struggling white underclass and the racialized border-crossers in the story.

Jefferson Cowie argues that the 1970s saw a dramatic shift in the presence and power of the American working class, both in the realm of politics and culture. Successful “rank-and-file” movements in the first half of the decade, like the one organized by the Lordstown autoworkers in 1972 “became a national symbol for worker alienation and brought to prominence a new, young and enlightened working class” (Cowie 80). Cesar Chavez’s celebrated breakthrough with the United Farm Workers in 1975 suggested that the “age of the worker” had arrived. On the national political level,

presidential candidate George Wallace rallied around the issues of the “common man.” According to Cowie, “his common-man rhetoric spoke to themes that no one else on the national stage addressed, tapping into sentiments that paralleled the blue-collar insurgency along the way” (86). Popular culture responded, too, with a proliferation of TV shows, movies and music that celebrated “the multifaceted resurrection of blue-collar America” (90).

Despite such promises during the first half of the decade, Cowie explains how a variety of political and economic forces ultimately eliminated the promise of a true “age of the worker.” “The 1970s whimpered to a close,” he says, “as the labor movement failed in its major initiatives, deindustrialization weakened the power of the old industrial heartland, market orthodoxy eclipsed all political alternatives, and promising organizing drives ended in failure” (101). The failure had a dramatic impact not only on the visibility of the working class in politics and culture, but also on the individual worker’s sense of his/her ability to effect any change in a world of “politics as usual.”

The 1970s turned out to be the key turning point in the history of labor and the working class after the Great Depression, not because it fulfilled the promise of a ‘new era for the working man’—quite the opposite. The decade marked a type of defeat for working people that differed from the lost battles littering the historical landscape... a sense existed that it was not simply that specific groups of workers were defeated at specific places, but that the very idea of workers in civic and popular discourses was defeated. Strike rates plummeted to insignificance, wages and working conditions were restructured along management’s lines, politics took on an almost exclusively middle-class turn, and J.R. Ewing from *Dallas* replaced Archie Bunker as the media’s new totem for the next decade (102).

Thus, America’s upper and middle classes aerobicized their way into the Reagan and Bush years of the 1980s, largely ignoring or disavowing the presence of the American working class.

Disappointment, failure, and invisibility are the social conditions the café owner navigates daily. His bitterness, his racism and sexism, are not only unpleasant character traits, but also the result of his experiences in a system that pits men against each other, against women and racial minorities in the battle for wages and “quality of work life” (81). His son JoJo’s death in Vietnam functions as the most obvious and painful reminder that he belongs to a class that he is seen as expendable. The war was fought mainly by the working class and racial minorities, men who died in a foreign country defending a system that, for some, alienated, excluded, and oppressed them at home. Cowie notes how “the college draft deferment created a class divide between those who were forced to serve and not,” making Vietnam as much about domestic policies “at home” as it was about foreign policy. This sense of injustice and inequality was made all the more painful by the failure of the war to accomplish a clear objective, something to justify the deaths of so many young Americans. The violence and tragedy of the war came home, into the space of the American nuclear family. The café owner’s own family history serves as an example. Abandoned by his wife after JoJo’s death, the café owner has nothing left but the drudgery of his routine at the café, and the transitory pleasures of a six-pack of beer and *Hustler* magazine.

The café owner's narrative begins the story's second section and forms a crucial link between Sonya's more traditional third person narrative and the disjunctive and mythic narrative of the washerwoman. After leaving Sonya and Macky on the threshold of the "zero zero place," the story abruptly shifts into the café owner's first person narrative, a shift that takes several sentences before it's clear whose point of view we're in and where we are in the timeline of events. "Don't look at me," he says:

I didn't give it the name. It was passed on. Didn't even know what it meant until I looked it up in some library dictionary. But I kinda liked the name. It's, well, romantic, almost like the name of a song, you know, so I kept it. That was before JoJo turned fourteen even. But now if you take a look at the sign, the paint's peeled off 'cept for the two O's. The double zero café. Story of my life. But who cares, right? As long as everyone 'round the factories knows I run an honest business (Viramontes 68).

The dramatic change in tone and diction signal that we've left the labyrinthine, fear-dominated streets of the barrio, seen through the eyes of Sonya and Macky. The café owner's opening lines sound like a voice-over straight out of the Los Angeles *film noir* tradition, locating us in the seedy underworld of masculinity and violence that Davis discusses in *City of Quartz*. The fragmented sentences and gruff, colloquial speech also emphasize his working class origins—he's someone who had to look up 'cariboo' in "some library dictionary." Despite his easy-going, confidential tone, his early refusal of responsibility ("Don't look at me") hints at the dramatic events that will follow.

This opening paragraph also introduces several of the section's key themes. The curious juxtaposition between the tough tone, choppy syntax, and the café owner's confession that he liked the café's name because "it's, well, romantic" foreshadows his equally unexpected affection for Macky a.k.a. "Short Order" later on. He introduces his son, JoJo, and even before we know who he is, we know that the café owner uses him as a point of reference, a temporal structuring device that will reappear in his storytelling.

No matter how down-and-out the café owner's lifestyle may have left him, he's quick to distinguish himself from his customers. His place is "clean," which is "more that I can say for some people who walk through the door." He sums up his ambivalent world view when he remarks, "the streets are full of scum, but scum gotta' eat too is the way I see it." There is a gritty pragmatism to his business philosophy: "A dime's a dime as long as its in my pocket," he says. And, "so like I serve anybody whose got the greens" (69). While the owner may not be as explicitly racist as some, other parts of his narrative reveal the extent to which he has internalized prejudicial attitudes.

For example, in describing one of his regular customer's girlfriends, Delia, a woman of color, he focuses on her "unique titties. One is bigger than the other, and when she used to walk in with Paulie, huggy-huggy and wearing those tight leotard blouses that show the nipple dots, you could see the difference"(69). He also refers to Delia's breasts as "grapefruit" and "knockers." His objectifying male gaze extends to Delia's friends, the "illegals" who also "come in real queen-like." His reductive, racist labeling of the Mexican factory workers as "illegals" is one reason why Saldívar-Hull dismisses him as a "grotesque Uncle Sam," a "mouthpiece of Anglo America" (Saldívar-Hull 146). Yet one of the intriguing things about the café owner's voice is that while he is quick to make

racist and sexist comments, he often follows these assessments with self-conscious assurances that he's actually "a nice guy." His tendency toward qualifications and his thinly veiled sympathy for his customers and, later, his sincere attachment to Macky, render him more ambivalent and complex.

When Sonya and Macky show up at the café, he attaches himself immediately to Macky. Like the washerwoman, he sees a partially formed family and projects his own desire to replace his lost son:

The boy's a sweetheart. Short Order don't look nothing like his mom. He's got dried snot all over his dirty cheeks and his hair ain't seen a comb for years. She can't take care of herself, much less him or the doggie of a sister. But he's a tough one, and I pinch his nose 'cause he's a real sweetheart like JoJo. You know, my boy (Viramontes 70).

The café owner's gruff affection for Macky makes him sympathetic, while his crude dismissal of the washerwoman and Sonya reinforces his racism and sexism. In a symbolic act of claiming through naming, the café owner immediately gives Macky a new name—Short Order. Short Order, for short order cook, links the boy to the café owner, suggesting that he sees Macky as a diminutive form of himself, like the son he compares Macky to at the end of the passage.

The washerwoman has also seen in Macky a version of her lost son, Geraldo. Through flashback in the story's third section, we learn Geraldo was disappeared by militant guerillas while out running an errand for his mother. She subsequently decides to leave Central America for Los Angeles (by way of Mexico), creating what Saldívar has called "a worlding of world events," "from Cortés's Euroimperialism to the Reagan-Bush wars in Central America" (Saldívar 107). I would also add the United States' involvement in Vietnam to the "worlding of the world events" in the story because it's in the third section when the café owner, crying, confesses he doesn't know "what part of Vietnam JoJo's all crumbled up in" (77). Both the café owner and the washerwoman have lost their sons to wars directly or indirectly supported by the United States and its imperializing foreign policies. Reconfigured within a matrix of world events, political violence, and personal loss, the café owner emerges as a fellow victim of world events.

He's also deeply distrustful of figures of authority, particularly law enforcement agents, who have a tendency to harass him at his café, accusing him of pushing drugs and harboring criminals. When he realizes that the washerwoman has kidnapped Sonya and Macky he knows he should call the police, "But I don't know" he says, "Cops ain't exactly my friends." Paralyzed with the inability to act and his own distrust of the police, he gets drunk and falls asleep. As fate would have it, he doesn't need to call the cops because they show up the next day anyway. While the police are harassing the café owner by "looking up" his "ass" for a drug stash, he decides not to tell them about Sonya and Macky's visit in the company of the washerwoman the day before. He resents the police's invasiveness, their periodic harassment, and their assumption that just because he's , he must also be guilty of criminal activity: "If I was pushing would I be burning my goddamn balls off with spitting grease? So fuck 'em, I think. I ain't gonna' tell you nothing 'bout the lady. Fuck you, I say to them as they drive away. Fuck your mother." In some ways, the café owner's reaction to law enforcement is similar to the way many

immigrants and minorities react to being victimized at the hands of intense, discriminatory state surveillance on the streets of L.A. Just as Sonya and Macky have been trained that the “polie” are “La Migra in disguise and thus should always be avoided” (65) and have internalized a deep fear and distrust of the police, the café owner also experiences mental distress as a result of constant police harassment. He admits that his life is enough to make someone want to “go bananas” and his “mind fries with the potatoes” and by the end of the day, he’s “deader than dogshit” (71).

The story suggests that the café owner’s life of hard work with little reward creates a profound mental exhaustion and dis-ease that he takes out on the people lower than him in his social sphere—non-business owning men, women and racial minorities. That’s the reason why after he “swore” he “wouldn’t give the fuckin’ pigs the time of day,” he ends up turning in three Mexican factory workers who run to his bathroom to hide from the INS. Even though he turns them over to the police, he also reveals that he “didn’t expect handcuffs and them agents putting their hands up and down their thighs.” Caught between his sympathy for the women as similarly victimized by the police (after all, yesterday the police had been “looking up” his “ass” for drugs), and his racism and sexism, he feels “confused” and “all shook up.”

Similarly, the washerwoman’s difficult life and days spent doing dirty work for others has impacted her mental health, more dramatically and traumatically. As the washerwoman describes her life later on, she emphasizes her low status. Her life has consisted of “washing other people’s laundry, rinsing off other people’s dirt” until her hands “crust and chap” (74). She must “clean toilets, dump trash cans, sweep. Disinfect the sinks” (75). The description of her work recalls the way the café owner describes his job: “twisting the black crud off the top of the ketchup bottle” (70) and “cleaning out the crapper” where Paulie “vomits and shits are all over—I mean all over the fuckin’ walls”(71). Comparing the café owner’s daily rituals of cleaning and cooking for others to the washerwoman’s emphasizes the femininized nature of his work, and perhaps it’s this potential “feminization” that café owner overcompensates for with his hypermasculine voice.

In the shifting point of view of the third section, where the washerwoman’s first person narrative gives way to the jumble of third person point of views that constitute the story’s dramatic ending, the café owner experiences a complete breakdown when the washerwoman reappears with the two kids:

He can’t believe it, but he’s crying. For the first time since JoJo’s death, he’s crying. He becomes angry at the lady for returning. At JoJo. At Nell for leaving him. He wishes Nell here, but doesn’t know where she’s at or what part of Vietnam JoJo is all crumbled up in. Children gotta be with their parents, family gotta be together, he thinks. It’s only right. The emergency line is ringing.

This final breakdown strips the café owner of his touch-guy act. The café owner’s grief manifests itself in his sudden anger at JoJo for dying, at Nell for leaving, at a world that tears families apart. He may have envisioned a potential family unit in Sonya, Macky, and the washerwoman, yet he realizes that, like his own family, it was all an illusion. Like the washerwoman, he’s driven by the fundamental belief in the sanctity of the

nuclear family: “children gotta be with their parents, family gotta be together...it’s only right.”

The story ends as the washerwoman grabs Macky to her and covers him with her body as the cops open fire. She tries to “return him to her body” through Macky, effecting the ultimate act of relocation and reincorporation. The more utopian readings of Viramontes argue that the washerwoman’s act of resistance renders her “an eloquent symbol for indigenous peoples and victims of government repression on both sides of the North-South border” (Saldívar 107). Re-inscribed within the mythic narrative of La Llorona whose voice haunts the text, she gains a type of agency. The café owner, on the other hand, isn’t so lucky. In the end, he remains outside any of the possible family formations the text proposes. There is no relocation for him. While the washerwoman “re-conceives” Macky, the café owner is left “huddling” behind the counter, “frightened” and alone. The story’s end suggests that the washerwoman has been killed at the hands of the police, a violent act of oppression. Yet, as the washerwoman is “blinded by the liquid darkness,” she dies clutching Macky, believing that: “we are going home. My son and I” (79). This final assertion creates sympathy between the reader and the washerwoman, who if she must die as the result of state violence, at least dies believing she has been re-united with her son and will finally return home. The café owner, however, will live to cook, clean, and mourn his losses another day, alienated and disregarded.

To read the café owner in terms of his complex location both inside and outside the various systems of American representation (political, economic, cultural) once again brings us to the uneasy connection between him and the washerwoman. It brings us back to the liminal space of the café as an interstitial gathering place. The café owner’s status as a white male citizen grants him power over his customers, yet he’s all too aware that his class status makes it difficult to rely on this power all the time. Like the washerwoman, the café owner’s world order depends on the nuclear family as its safe foundation. “The Cariboo Café” narrates his “coming to consciousness” of the cracks in that order. As the story progresses, he becomes increasingly aware that his loneliness, alienation, and ambivalent position in society suggest serious contradictions in this world order, a realization that crystallizes when he learns the truth about Sonya and Macky’s kidnapping. He’s caught in-between, both hating and clinging to the dream of a world order that has betrayed him, trapped him in the hellish universe of the café’s kitchen.

While important differences remain between him and the other displaced characters in the story, Viramontes’s story also offers an alternative vision of the world where relationships formed across the boundaries of race, class, gender, and citizenship status could become sides of solidarity against state oppression. Formally, the story grants roughly equal narrative weight to all three perspectives. His inclusion in the story is politically significant, although perhaps not as significant as the voices of Sonya and the washerwoman. That Viramontes doesn’t simply vilify the café owner, but instead refuses to erase, dehumanize or stereotype his own subjectivity demonstrates the extent to which Viramontes’s writing crosses multiple borders at once and dramatically re-enacts a more nuanced portrayal of life in the multiracial Southern California borderlands. In a further act of formal connection, both the café owner and the washerwoman’s stories are told from the first person point of view (Sonya is narrated in the third person). Viramontes’s imagination thus occupies a variety of subjectivities who experience

different, and often multiple, levels of discrimination and marginalization. This quality of her writing reflects a U.S. women of color consciousness, with its emphasis on multiple and simultaneous oppression, which Chela Sandoval captures elegantly in her term “differential consciousness.”³ Viramontes’s differential consciousness allows her access not only to the perspective of the story’s immigrants and racialized minorities, but also how they are seen by the white café owner. Within this perspective, Viramontes exposes how subjectivities can be deeply ambivalent and contradictory, revealing the potential intersections between the story’s characters.

One of these points of intersection is the family and the parent-child bond. In the story, the family is a site that creates sympathy between unlikely people. It’s Sonya’s protective attachment to her brother that drives her to seek shelter at the café where she “refuses to release his hand” (78), even when violence erupts. And, as we’ve seen, it’s the washerwoman’s all-consuming love for her son that drives her north to Los Angeles and, finally, into the world of Cariboo Café. Likewise, the café owner spends his days in mindless routine and drudgery to relieve the pain of his broken and absent family. All the characters in the story are permanently or temporarily displaced from their families and it’s the desire to be reunited with lost family members that consumes their thoughts and motivates their actions.

Viramontes’s “The Cariboo Café” is a *gente*-fiction of the postmodern city where the global capitalist system pits minorities, immigrants, and the working classes against each other and against the hegemonic forces of the state that profits from this system. It’s also a text of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands where Los Angeles is rendered as a divided site of multiple border crossings by a variety of displaced peoples. In vigorously occupying the liminal, contradictory space of the Cariboo Café, characters bear witness to the effects of state-sponsored violence, dehumanizing low-wage work, and traumatic personal losses. Viramontes’s *gente*-fiction reclaims the means streets of Los Angeles, redrawing and uniting the lines between historically divided groups, demonstrating this potential connection as part of a decolonizing oppositional politics in the face of the dislocating forces of domination and control.

Karen Tei Yamashita, a Japanese American writer who was born and raised in California, has been difficult to place for many literary critics. Her fiction and multi-media performance pieces reflect the transnational quality of Yamashita’s own life—as a young woman she traveled to Brazil in 1975 to study the history and anthropology of Japanese migration to Brazil (Gier and Tejada 1). Her experiences in Brazil inspired her first two novels: *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (1990), a magically real exploration of contact between technology and rural, multiracial communities in Brazil; and *Brazil-Marú* (1992), a historical fiction about the rise and fall of a Japanese immigrant community in the Brazilian rainforest. Yamashita’s third novel, *Tropic of Orange*, continues her experimentation with the genre of magical realism to re-map the borders of Los Angeles, the United States, and the American hemisphere in a multi-voiced, multi-racial text written in the aftermath of NAFTA, the 1992 Rodney King race riots, and the O.J. Simpson trial.

As a result of the transnational circuits her fiction travels, her incorporation of multi-racial characters and her literary indebtedness to Latin American styles, like magical realism, Yamashita’s work hasn’t received the critical attention it deserves.

Because her novels don't center on Asian American characters and don't pursue as their main focus themes common in other Asian American writing (such as narrating the experiences of a racialized Asian American identity), her work has not often been read within a traditional canon of Asian American literary criticism. A growing interest in transnational Asian American literature, however, has encouraged many critics to focus on the transnational aspects of Yamashita's writing. While interesting critical responses to Yamashita, and *Tropic* in particular, have addressed issues such as the role of environmental justice and global ecology (see Sze 2002; Heise 2004) or the intricate temporal relationships between history and the future that *Tropic* explores (see Hsu 2006; Lee 2007), the most engaging writing addresses Yamashita's fascination with migration, border crossers, and her vision of an increasingly globalized society. As Pamela Thoma has summarized it, these scholars are attuned to issues of "global economic policies and inequalities, the migration of people, cultural flows and consumer culture, information and digital technology (i.e., 'informatics') or new types of knowledge, global ecology, the dynamic borders of nation-states, and the re-organization of the community" (Thoma 6). Of this critical canon, the most compelling readings of *Tropic* include essays by Molly Wallace (2001), Caroline Rody (2004), and Claudia Sadowski-Smith (2001; 2008). In "The Transnational Imagination:" Karen Te Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*," Rody argues that Yamashita's novel pushes the boundaries of "the multicultural vision" of American ethnic writing by exemplifying "the combined impact of the new transnational and interethnic paradigms on works of Asian American literature" (Rody 132).

In what is perhaps the most well known essay on *Tropic*, critic Molly Wallace reads the novel as a decisive condemnation of regional economic agreements that create deep inequalities between a developed core and a developing periphery. She argues:

Tropic of Orange explicitly interrogates the cultural, economic, and political borders of the territorial nation-state. Set in the broader landscape of post-NAFTA U.S. and Mexico, *Tropic of Orange*—a blend of magical realism, political satire, and postmodern metafiction—is particularly attuned to the materialities of the U.S. in a globalizing world, and offers a critique not only of the policies of NAFTA and globalization, but of the politics of the discourses surrounding these phenomena (Wallace 147).

Wallace goes on to use Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity At Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* to show how Yamashita's novel engages discourses of globality such as Appadurai's but moves them forward through a more nuanced attention to material specificity and language (Wallace 148). While Wallace's "Tropics of Globalization: Reading the New North America" is an excellent study of how Yamashita critiques regional economic agreements and the inequalities of globalizing economics, her essay remains largely in the realm of larger, abstract processes of globalization and doesn't fully account for the unique ways these processes work through the specific sites of the U.S.-Mexico border, such as a border city like Los Angeles. Thus, Claudia Sadowski-Smith's reading of *Tropic of Orange* is an excellent complement to Wallace's essay. In her work, Sadowski-Smith uses historical and socio-political lenses through which to situate *Tropic of Orange* as a "border fiction" that merges the politics of Chicanismo with

pan-Asian civil rights struggles. In her analysis, Sadowski-Smith locates the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically the Tijuana-San Diego-Los Angeles crossing point, within a longer and larger history of Asian migration to the United States in order to emphasize Asian Americans' "increasing affinities with Latina/o borderlanders" (Sadowski-Smith, "Write Back" 101). In this "new kind of globalism," Yamashita rewrites hemispheric colonial histories and offers alternative post-NAFTA realities via magical realism (Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions* 61). Sadowski-Smith's analysis brings the material specificity of the U.S.-Mexico border and the history of Asian migration to the United States, appropriately situating *Tropic* within a new body of U.S.-Mexico borderlands writing that includes and recognizes the similarities between different kinds of borderlanders, including Chicano/as and Asian Americans.

Drawing on work by Wallace and Sadowski-Smith, I suggest that *Tropic of Orange* moves from NAFTA-fication to *gente*-fication, depicting a fragmented Los Angeles borderlands where the city's various segregated social and physical spaces, represented through the voices of a cast of multiracial characters, come together through a series of dramatic events that link the characters to each other, and Los Angeles to Latin America and Asia. The tightly bound spaces of the barrio, ghetto, downtown, Koreatown, even Tijuana, are separated not only along lines of race or class, but also by the sweeping Los Angeles freeway system that disconnects people from each other and by a history of segregation and discriminatory housing/development projects. Yamashita's novel reclaims and re-visions urban spaces as points of interracial and intergenerational contact and connection, and as opportunities for a grassroots revolution. Ultimately, the novel redraws the borders of the American hemisphere as a one global continent united under a shared colonial past and hurtling forward into a dizzying future where the real, magically real, and virtually real are indistinguishable, and relationships between diverse segments of society rise in revolution against the growing commodification/NAFTA-fication of society.

Tropic of Orange opens with a series of prefatory matter, including two kinds of "tables of contents." The two "tables of contents" are labeled "Contents" and "HyperContexts." "Contents" maps the structure of the novel linearly, beginning with Monday (the summer solstice) and moving through to Sunday. Beneath each day of the week, the chapters are listed by title, but also by location. For instance, Monday moves from "Midday—Not Too Far from Mazatlán" to "To Wake-The Marketplace," with Koreatown, Westside, Jefferson & Normandie, Harbor Freeway and Downtown included in between. "Hypercontexts" remaps the novel's structure in a grid form where the days of the week are laid out across the top horizontally and the different characters are listed on the left side of the grid, from top to bottom. In this format, you can locate a specific chapter and location by using a day of the week and/or a character to pinpoint where they are at any point during the novel. Thus "Hypercontexts" creates a series of coordinates for mapping the novel in space, while "Contents" emphasizes the temporal structure of the novel. Read together, both pieces present an intricate map of the novel's temporal-spatial reworking not only of the Los Angeles cityscapes, but also of traditional narrative form.

In interviews, Yamashita has commented that her organizational choices for the novel were influenced by her experience reading and researching the fictional and non-fictional literature of Los Angeles. Looking for a way to give voice to those characters

left out of the traditional literature and to also somehow “piece together” all the information she had gathered, “This research was in different places: articles in boxes, and many of them in notes, in files, or on scraps of paper, and all of this had to come together. And yes, you’re right, it was my way of organizing the chaos” (Gier and Tejada 3). The “Contents” and “Hypercontexts” is an alternative map that redraws the spatial-temporal borders of the city from the margins “to bring in,” as Yamashita has said, “those who have been invisible in the literature of Los Angeles” (Murashige 340). She doesn’t “believe that there is any one voice that *can* represent the city” and wanted to “experiment with multiple voices” (Gier and Tejada 3). In mapping her book through seven different characters, each character represents not only a particular subjectivity, but also a certain location in space/time. The “Hypercontexts” map foreshadows how all these different visions will ultimately intersect. Yamashita’s novel self-consciously situates itself within a tradition of Los Angeles literature, but complicates this literature and pushes it forward by emphasizing the ways in which the city is shaped by the U.S.-Mexico border and its accompanying geopolitics. The most appropriate narrators for this project are thus: Rafaela Cortes, the Mexican immigrant/housecleaner; Bobby Ngu, Rafaela’s estranged husband and a Pan-Asian immigrant turned businessman; Buzzworm, the African American community organizer; Gabriel Balboa, the Chicano reporter and wanna-be *noir* hero; Emi, Gabe’s Japanese American girlfriend and a no-nonsense media executive; Manzanar Murakami, Emi’s grandfather and former surgeon turned vagrant who conducts traffic from the freeway overpasses of the city; and Arcangel, a magically real performance poet styled after the well-known Mexican performance artist and long-time California resident, Guillermo Gomez-Peña.⁴

The novel opens “not too far from Mazatlán” where Rafaela Cortes and her son, Sol, have gone to escape domestic unrest at home in Los Angeles between Rafaela and her husband. Rafaela has been hired by Gabriel Balboa to look after his vacation home: “It had begun one summer when Gabriel felt a spontaneous, sudden passion for the acquisition of land, the sensation of a timeless vacation, the erotic tastes of chili pepper and salty breezes, and for Mexico” (*Tropic* 5). It held another attraction: the land was cut through by the tropic of Cancer. A native of Culiacán, Mexico, Rafaela’s character represents the point of view of the Mexican immigrant: “About the time Gabriel was buying a piece of the Tropic of Cancer, Rafaela was crossing the border North. In eight years, while his Mexican project floundered, she had learned English, married Bobby, helped start their janitorial business, borne a baby, and got a degree at the local community college” (6). Rafaela’s immigrant success story, mirrored also in Bobby’s story, represents the kind of upward mobility available to some immigrants, but for Rafaela, her relative success in the United States has come at a cost. After spending years cleaning other people’s homes and businesses and sacrificing everything to build a small business, Rafaela and her husband have had a falling out over their employees. In community college, Rafaela has learned about exploitative labor practices, the globalization of capital, the internationalization of the workforce, etc (161), and she wants to pay her employees a decent wage and offer them benefits. Bobby, more hardened by his experience, doesn’t believe he should pay his employees more than the barest minimum.

When Rafaela suspects that she’s discovered important information about the illegal trafficking of human body parts from Mexico to Los Angeles, she takes Sol and

begins the trek back north, across the border. Thus, throughout most of the novel, Rafaela's story represents the dangerous terrain of the U.S.-Mexico border crossing, an experience marked by violence, terror, and populated by a range of magically real characters. As she inadvertently drags the Tropic of Cancer (which has become entangled in a magical orange that appeared on Gabe's property) north from Mexico into Los Angeles, Rafaela brings a host of other things north as well: "the graceful movement of free capital, at least 45 billion of it, carried across by hidden and free capital" (200). When Rafaela's magic orange attempts to cross the border, the performance poet Arcangel's improvises a poem that describes everything the orange represents:

*Then came the kids selling Kleenex and Chiclets
the women pressing rubber soles into tennis shoes,
the men welding fenders to station wagons and
all the people who do the work of machines:
human washing machines,
human vacuums,
human garbage disposals.
Then came the corn and the bananas,
the coffee and the sugar cane.
And then the music and its rhythms,
pre-Colombian treasure,
the halls of Moctezuma and all 40,000 Aztecs slain—
their bodies floating in the canals.
In slipped the burned and strangled body of the
Incan King Atahualpa in a chamber filled with gold.
And then came smallpox, TB, meningitis, E coli,
influenza, and 25 million dead Indians.
After that everything clamored forth:
the spirit of ideologies thought to be dead
and of the dead themselves—
of Bolívar, of Che, Francisco de Morazán,
Benito Juárez, Pablo Neruda, Sandino Romero,
Pancho Villa, and Salvador Allende,
of conquistadors, generals, and murderers,
African slaves, freedom fighters, anthropologists,
latifundistas, ecomartyrs, terrorists, and saints.
And every rusting representation of an
American gas guzzler from 1952 to the present
and all their shining hubcaps.
Then came the rain forests,
El Niño, African bees, panthers, sloths, llamas,
monkeys and pythons.
Everything and everybody got in lines—
citizens and aliens—
the great undocumented foment,
the Third World War,*

the gliding wings of a dream (200-201).

Rafaela's border-crossing orange comes to stand in for an entire history of movement, migration, and contact in the American hemisphere. Her travels across the border, into and out of Los Angeles, remind us how the city has been shaped by its colonial, borderlands history. Yamashita's novel links even the most unassuming commodity, such as an orange, to a larger, transnational history of unstoppable flows of people, ideas, commodities across genres.

One of the things that travel north with Rafaela and Arcangel is magical realism. In the novel's opening pages, Rafaela explains how every morning she sweeps "a small pile of assorted insects and tiny animals—moths and spiders, lizards and beetles [...] An iguana, a crab, and a mouse. And there was the scorpion, always dead—its fragile back broken in the middle. And the snake that slithered away [...] Every morning it was the same. Every morning, she swept this mound of dead and wiggling things to the door and off the side of the veranda and into the dark green undergrowth with the same flourish" (3). This excess and repetition recalls the endless parade of ants relentlessly combated by Ursula Buendía in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, a book that Yamashita references in various places throughout the novel. Rafaela's story also hinges on a mythic battle between herself and an evil smuggler, during which she is magically transformed into a serpent and the smuggler becomes a black jaguar. The two fight, make love, and ultimately, Rafaela-as-serpent devours the jaguar and frees herself from his deadly clutches. In this magically real episode, Rafaela enacts, as Sadowski-Smith has argued, a "feminist revision" of the myth of Aztlán, which is symbolized by an eagle devouring a snake. In *Rafaela Cortes*, Yamashita uses the mythic power of magical realism to render Mexican women not as helpless victims of a traditional patriarchal culture and a transnational global economy, but as empowered subjects capable of re-visioning history to acknowledge oppression and reclaim a space and a voice in an alternative, more equitable vision of the future.

Arcangel represents the transnational, oppositional art practices that have emerged in global cities, from Mexico City to Los Angeles, in reaction to the growing commodification/NAFTA-fication of culture worldwide. On the run from the evil smugglers, Rafael and Sol meet Arcangel on the bus to the border when he tows the pot-holed bus to safety by hooking cables through two holes in bodies, presumably where his angelic wings used to be. He describes himself as "actor and prankster, mimic and comic, freak, a one man circus act. [...] Across the border, they had a name for such multiple types: they would call him a performance artist" (*Tropic 47*). As Arcangel recounts his many memorable performances across the world, he recounts: "In one installation he wore wings and sat in a cage. Gabriel García Márquez himself came to the opening, drank martinis and tasted ceviche on little toasts in the society of society" (48). Here, Yamashita references García Márquez's well-known short story, "The Old Man with Enormous Wings," a story about a man thought to be an angel who travels from city to city as part of a traveling circus. As Arcangel travels to Los Angeles, he performs poetry, various small miracles, several rousing political speeches, and even an epic wrestling match between his alter ego, El Gran Mojado (The Great Wetback), and SUPERNAFTA.⁵ As El Gran Mojado, Arcangel challenges SUPERNAFTA's neoliberal promises of freedom and equality by recounting, through performance poetry such as the

piece above, the colonial history of the Americas, drawing a clear line between colonialism and neoliberalism to illuminate how colonialism works through social/political/economic structures in different ways in a transnational context.

Through Rafaela and Arcangel, Yamashita links Los Angeles and the U.S.-Mexico border both through their borderlands re-visioning of the magical realism genre and by connecting their personal migrations to a larger history of transborder movement and circulations. Ultimately, Rafaela and Arcangel become agents of a decolonizing imagination that refuses to be complicit with master narratives, instead re-writing them from the margins of feminism and oppositional political activism. Arcangel's performances represent alternative global art practices, the transnationalization of art and genre that happens in global and border cities. His Gómez-Peñaish visions of "freefalling towards a borderless future,"⁶ may ultimately be too heavy a dose of the kind of "happy hybridism" that Yépez is so wary of (see Chap 1), but Arcangel's improvised street performances reclaim and decolonize the streets of Los Angeles in a powerful form of *gente-fication*.

Opposed to Arcangel's mythic, magically real performances is Buzzworm, the Vietnam vet and African American community organizer who pounds the pavement in Central and South Los Angeles. Constantly plugged into his Walkman, Buzz encourages folks to take back the streets, educate themselves, and fight back against oppressive local, state, and national regimes that would keep people in poverty, addiction, or caught up in gang violence. He's inspired by the realization he had upon his return from Vietnam: "When he came home, he realized he was considered the enemy. If he stepped over the invisible front line, he could get implicated, arrested, jailed, killed. If he stepped back, he'd just be invisible" (217). His realization hinges on his position in society as an African American man, which structures and limits his opportunities based on his race and gender. Buzzworm rejects this social order and works hard to imagine alternatives, working from the level of the community first. Buzzworm coins the term *gente-fication* to refer to a self-gentrification "by self-made set of standards and respectability" (83). His *gente-fication* includes everything from planting palm trees to combat the "Bushes, dried-up lawns, weeds, asphalt, and concrete" of the ghetto to creating a new map of Los Angeles that includes his house—a more accurate representation of the city because "If someone could put down all the layers of the real map, maybe he could get the real picture" (81). Buzzworm directly responds to the mapping laid out by Mike Davis in *City of Quartz*. He recounts how Gabe gave him a map of the city "torn out of a book for him to study. *Quartz City* or some such title" (80). The map supposedly shows the territory of the infamous Los Angeles gangs, the Bloods and the Crips. But while Buzzworm respects the idea of the project, he calls it an "Old map." In an interview, Yamashita has said that she "really liked Mike Davis's book. It was one text I read that had gone beyond most of the discussions of the City" (Gier and Tejada 4). So when Buzz declares the map outdated, he's really "cogitating on this idea of what the map could really be. For him, there's a whole list of things that the map could possibly tell you, more than to say that the Crips and Bloods occupy this area, this is their territory. Mike Davis's map made me think about other possibilities for defining those territories." As Buzz "cogitates" on what a new map could include, he considers:

which police departments covered which beats; which local, state and federal politicians claimed which constituents; which kind of colored people (brown,

black, yellow) lived where; which churches/temples served which people, which schools got which kids, which taxpayers were registered to vote; which houses were owned or rented; which corner liquor stores served which people; which houses were crack; which houses banging; which houses on welfare; which houses making more than twenty thou a year; which houses had young couples with children; which elderly; which people been in the neighborhood more than thirty years (81).

Buzzworm's new map of the neighborhood is a map of structural inequalities and how inequalities between people based on race, class, and gender are manifested in the built environments of Los Angeles. His voice is a direct response to Davis and the other literature of Los Angeles, extending and expanding contemporary understanding of who occupies Los Angeles, and where they occupy it. Buzzworm's re-visioning of urban space enables a counterhegemonic, oppositional political lens through which to understand how power operates through space and extends from the macro-structural divisions of the city to the intimate spheres of family and community life. In linking the politics of race and class to space, Buzzworm acknowledges the coloniality of power at work in contemporary Los Angeles and offers a decolonizing vision of revolution on the "urban front line" where people really do take to the streets, *their* streets, re-claiming their space in solidarity against "the big guns" (216).

Rafaela's other partner, her husband, Bobby, represents a Pan-Asian identity that could only emerge from the streets of a globalizing border city such as Los Angeles. In interviews, Yamashita has said that Bobby's character is based on an actual acquaintance, "a Chinese who was raised in a Mexican-Central American area of Los Angeles" (Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions* 62). In the novel, Bobby's hybrid identity is summed up as: "Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown" (*Tropic* 15). After Bobby's father's bicycle business goes under in 1975 as the result of international competition, Bobby and his brother escape to the United States by posing as refugees from Vietnam and are granted political asylum under assumed identities. When Bobby reaches L.A., he establishes himself in the janitorial business and learns to speak Spanish with Chicano street slang accent. After years of hard work, he has put his younger brother through college, sent money home to father in Singapore regularly, and managed to own his own business and buy a house in Koreatown. Bobby and Rafaela have been working hard:

Washing dishes. Chopping vegetables. Cleaning floors. Cooking hamburgers. Painting walls. Laying brick. Cutting hedges. Mowing lawns. Digging ditches. Sweeping trash. Fixing pipes. Pumping toilets. Scrubbing urinals. Washing clothes. Pressing clothes. Sewing clothes. Planting trees. Changing tires. Changing oil and filters. Stocking shelves. Lifting sacks. Loading trucks. Smashing trash. Recycling plastic. Recycling aluminum. Recycling cans and glass. Drilling asphalt. Pouring cement. Building up. Tearing down. Fixing up. Cleaning up. Keeping up" (*Tropic* 78-79).

The gruff, choppy syntax in this paragraph is representative of Bobby's voice throughout the narrative, peppered by Chicano slang and curse words. His fragmented speech

reflects his fragmented identity, which cannot be accommodated by the structures of formal language. Here, the long litany of low-wage work reinforces its repetitive nature and the lack of personal pronouns indicates the degree of dehumanization that comes with manual or routinized labor practices. Although Bobby has been hardened by his experiences on the margins of society, doing thankless work that renders him invisible within the larger society, he has a compassionate side that combats the dehumanizing nature of his work. We know he sacrifices much to support his father and brother, and he also cares deeply for Rafaela, whom he helped smuggle across the border to be an employee before falling in love with her and marrying her. During the course of the novel, Bobby gets a call from a smuggler in Tijuana who supposedly is holding a young woman who claims to be Bobby's cousin from Singapore. Bobby goes to Tijuana to smuggle the young woman across the border and takes her to his home to care for her, at considerable cost and threat to his personal safety, even while he's ultimately unsure whether or not they are actually related. Through Bobby, Yamashita not only expands the site of the greater Mexico-Southern California border to include a diverse population of Asian immigrants, she also shows how compassion and connections with others works against the potential erasure of immigrant and exploitative labor in L.A.

On the other side of immigrant upward mobility are Gabriel Balboa and Emi. Gabe is the college-educated Chicano reporter who idealizes Rubén Salazar and hopes to continue his tradition of radical journalism. On the other hand, Gabe has a love affair with the Los Angeles *noir* genre and imagines himself a hard-boiled detective for the multicultural era: "Now I'm not so pretentious as to think I'm some kind of modernday Salazar, but remembering my roots can keep me on track [...] So I might be considered idealistic in that regard. On the other hand, I must say I keep a handle on the nitty-gritty. It's the detective side of this business that gives me a real charge, getting into the grimy crevices of the street and pulling out the real stories" (*Tropic* 39). Yamashita constructs Gabe's first person voice in the style of a *noir* film voiceover, similar to the café owner in Viramontes's short story. Yet Gabe's "nitty-gritty" voice is punctuated by his idealism—his romanticization of the Chicano nationalist movement and of his own Mexican identity. Gabe represents the kid who makes it out of the East L.A. barrio, who grew up in the shadow of the "East L.A. uprising" in the early seventies, but has an ambivalent relationship to his "roots" because of his education and middle-class status. While he wants to fashion himself as a reporter of *la Raza* like Salazar, he confesses to Emi that he only speaks Spanish with his family, his mother, and her priest (40) and even the workers he hired to maintain his Mexican property acknowledge that "speaking the language was not enough" to make this "young Chicano who had a college education" fit in (5). As Sadowski-Smith notes, Gabe has a somewhat "unexamined" attachment to Chicano culture and to an overly idealized Mexican heritage (Sadowski-Smith, *Border Fictions* 63). Perhaps because as much as Gabe wants to be a Rubén Salazar-type, he, like his girlfriend Emi, defines himself through his work and *what he does*, as opposed to his racial-ethnic background and *who he is*. After all, his "real charge" comes from playing detective on the mean streets. While Yamashita doesn't go so far as to propose "postracial" identities for Gabe or Emi, she does show the shifting vectors of identity for third-generation minorities like Gabe and Emi. As someone who grew up in East Los Angeles, works downtown, spends his days chasing down stories in the roughest L.A.

'hoods, and is building a vacation home in Mexico, Gabe's identity crosses the borders of both neighborhood and nation.

Always chasing the next big story, Gabe stumbles upon a lead that exposes the same transnational smuggling ring that Rafaela has stumbled upon in Mexico. As Gabe follows the story from Los Angeles to Mexico City, aided by Emi and her knowledge of the emerging power of the Internet, Gabe realizes that net "was a big borderless soup" and thinks, "Maybe the net was the ultimate noir" (246). Through Gabe, Yamashita revises the not only the Los Angeles *noir* genre, but also the classic Chicano nationalist narrative (such as Oscar Zeta Acosta). Gabe is what happens when *noir* meets the East El Lay *barrio* in the digital age. His story illuminates the inherent contradictions of globalization. On the one hand, the greater accessibility of information on the "borderless" Internet makes it possible to track down the nefarious activities of smugglers; on the other hand, the increasing ease of transborder flows and exchanges as the result of NAFTA and neoliberal policies, make it easier for smugglers and traffickers to take advantage of transportation networks to conduct illegal activity. The trafficking and smuggling of every sort of contraband is nothing new to the borderlands, of course. What Yamashita's novel speaks to is the changing nature of this activity in the mid to late 1990s, when society was just beginning to discover the power of the Internet (in the novel, folks still use fax machines, the Internet is still called "the net," and email is still relatively new).

On the cutting edge of this brave new virtually real world is Emi, Gabe's fast-talking girlfriend whom Yamashita describes as "so distant from the Asian female stereotype—it was questionable if she even had an identity" (19). While Emi takes a wicked pleasure in loud-mouthing anti-PC, anti-multicultural aphorisms, she does have an identity. She's "Westside," as her first chapter locates her, part of the glittering maze of Downtown Los Angeles, the center of industry and culture-making. She lives "at the very center of Westside power plays, cushioned in pastels and glass bricks and remakes of David Hockney."⁷ As a television producer, Emi has all ten fingers on the pulse of the Los Angeles. She moves fast, except when's she's stuck in traffic, "Doing the Joan Didion freeway thang. You know, slouching around L.A." (58). She curses, enjoys phone and cyber sex with Gabe, and is deeply suspicious about all the classic Los Angeles narratives and lampoons them with a witty vengeance: "That *L.A. is a desert paradise, sunshine blond people, insipid, romantic* is B.S. Nobody hearts L.A." (123). In fact, in her very first narrative act she tells Gabe: "That film noir stuff is passé. Don't you get it?" (18). She scoffs at what she calls "the New Age tan," her word for an entire host of L.A. stereotypes, from the macrobiotic diet and tattoos to screenwriting hopefuls and agents (235). She laughs at Gabe for being a wanna-be *noir* anti-hero, for being a wanna-be Chicano, for always "trying to be part of a book" (162). As part of Emi's nihilistic act, she asserts, "*El A is A-pocalypse*," a theme reinforced by her work editing the commercial slots for "Disaster Movie Week" at her station, where they are showing films that feature the destruction of Los Angeles all week long. Tragically, these references foreshadow Emi's eventual death at the novel's end, when a major explosion on a freeway ignites an army of homeless to begin a revolution just as Rafaela, Arcangel, and Sol drag their magic orange and the Tropic of Cancer into Los Angeles, a true apocalypse. As Emi lies dying from a police bullet gone awry, she jokes about *The Big Sleep*:⁸ "Just cuz you get to the end, doesn't mean you know what happened. [...] Maybe

the big sleep is a big digital wet dream. And life is just a commercial break” (252). Emi’s irreverence, cynicism, and rejection of anything or anyone that would attempt to contain Los Angeles remains intact at the novel’s end. Yamashita doesn’t rescue Emi from her cold-hearted ways through narrative closure (although she has the opportunity when Emi is re-united with her long-lost grandfather, the itinerant conductor, Manzanar Murakami). Yamashita rejects the sentimental plotline and Emi remains, until the end, deeply suspicious of narratives of all types, preferring instead the immediacy of digital media. Perhaps because she is better suited for the fast-paced anonymity and multiplicity of the virtual world, Emi cannot exist in the world of the novel, even an experimental one such as Yamashita’s. Her voice is the voice of an emerging urban generation who will remap the streets of Los Angeles from the virtual neighborhoods of the Internet, creating alternative communities and alternative narratives that will combat the seemingly impenetrable divisions between’s Los Angeles’s *noir* past and its apocalyptic future.

Mapping out the terrain of Los Angeles from the margins most dramatically is Manzanar Murakami, the former surgeon now homeless Japanese man who stands on top of freeway and “conducts” the traffic according to the music he hears in his head. His self-chosen name references the infamous Japanese “relocation center” Manzanar, where over 100,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans were imprisoned during World War II, and where Manzanar was born (110). While his name invokes the traumatic history of Japanese Americans as racialized outsiders, Manzanar’s character opposes this painful legacy through his deeply positive and transformative visions of the city. Yamashita has said that Manzanar’s work conducting traffic is “a celebration of the City. He can see the traffic and turn it into a romantic vision. This is life: to celebrate the traffic and the people, and humanity and all of those of the geography” (Gier and Tejada 3). While his granddaughter Emi may see chaos, apocalypse (the stuff that makes good Hollywood film), Manzanar creates a community of out the freeway confusion. His voice is lyric and visionary—he can see through time and space to understand the geological history that has created these “mapping layers.” He sees what “ordinary persons never bother to notice [...] A great theory of maps, musical maps, spread in visible and audible layers” (57). Manzanar maps Los Angeles a variety of ways simultaneously. He sees “the prehistoric grid of plant and fauna and human behavior” as well as “the historic grid of land usage and property [...] a thousand natural and man-made divisions, variations both dynamic and stagnant, patterns and connections by every conceivable definition from the distribution of wealth to race.” In one particular vision, Manzanar describes his “map of labor” that divides the neighborhoods of Los Angeles “into the garment district, the entertainment industry, the tourist business, the military machine, the service sector, the automotive industry, the education industry, federal, county, and city employees, union workers, domestics, and day labor” (238). His “map of labor” is a dramatic reenactment of the kind of urban plotting and geosocial history Davis recounts in *City of Quartz*. Yet, as the novel progresses, Manzanar’s visions expand from the specific terrain of Los Angeles to the entire Western Hemisphere. As that fateful orange travels north across the border, Manzanar sees “the great Pacific stretching along its great rim, brimming over long coastal shores from one hemisphere to another” (170). And his vision is as temporal as it is spatial. He sees:

The past spread out like a great starry fan and then folded in upon itself. [...] Now human civilization building upon building upon building the residue, burial sites,

the garbage that defined people after people for centuries. Manzanar saw it, but darkly, before it would shift irrevocably, crush itself into every pocket and crevice, filling a northern vacuum with its cultural conflicts, political disruption, romantic language, with its one hundred years of solitude and its tropical sadness (170-171)

In this beautiful, sweeping vision of the past, present, and future of the American hemisphere, Manzanar recognizes both the profound connections that unite humanity across civilizations, but also the particular disconnections that have created such deep divisions that the only solution he sees is a Macondo-esque fate of self-destruction and annihilation—a regeneration through apocalypse that Manzanar both celebrates and fears. Ultimately, Manzanar begins “to sense a new kind of grid, this one not defined by inanimate structures or other living things but by himself and others like him” (138). As the homeless rise in protest and the city erupts in chaos, Manzanar finds himself “at the heart of an expanding symphony of which he was not the only conductor.” Manzanar records “every scream and cry and shudder” that punctuates the soundtrack of war and “foul massacre” (240). Through Manzanar’s visions, we witness *Tropic of Orange*’s final paradox: it’s only when the world is collapsing in on itself after centuries of violence of all kinds that people previously disunited by race, class, gender, neighborhood, region, and nation can rise together in solidarity. Manzanar sees this and weeps for the world that he so deeply cherishes, a lone man brandishing his conducting wand amidst a sea of fire, bullets, and the screams of the dead and dying.

Yet Yamashita’s novel doesn’t end with Manzanar’s apocalyptic symphony but like Viramontes’s story, with the possible hope for a new kind of future, embodied in a re-united nuclear family. As the freeway system collapses around a dying Emi and a mourning Manzanar, Rafaela, Bobby, and Sol have re-united at the wrestling match between El Gran Mojado and SUPERNAFTA. Sol, rescued from the smugglers who attacked Rafaela in Mexico, has been traveling with Arcangel across the border, followed by Rafaela in hot pursuit after her lost son. Bobby, tipped off about his wife and son’s whereabouts, has found them at the Pacific Rim Auditorium where SUPERNAFTA defeats El Gran Mojado. Yet the story suggests that Arcangel/El Gran Mojado will be reborn when Rafaela feeds him pieces of the magic orange as he dies. Bobby spots her in the crowd and sees the lines of the Tropic, cutting through the orange. As the orange falls to pieces and threatens to sever the line, he grabs both sides and holds them together, his body stretching and sweaty, while Rafaela locates Sol and hold him close. Bobby looks at “his little family. What’s he gonna do? Tied fast to these lines. Family still out there. Still stuck on the other side. He’s gritting his teeth and crying like a fool. What are these goddamn lines anyway? What do they connect? What do they divide?” (268). So he lets go: “Go figure. Embrace.”

In a world defined by its excess, movement and border crossing, the novel ends on a similar gesture of connection—an embrace. Perhaps overly sentimental and heteronormative in the end, the final embrace suggests that intimate relationships between people are society’s best hope for survival. In this final symbolic gesture, divisions, lines, and borders are exchanged for the promise of the nuclear family. But it’s a multiracial family that’s better suited for the borderless post-apocalyptic hemisphere that *Tropic* hints at. It’s Sol, the son of an undocumented Mexican woman and an Asian

immigrant, who becomes the symbol of the future in the Los Angeles borderlands. It's an interesting, albeit predictable and normative, choice that locates the heir to this brave new world in a boy and not a girl, given the novel's other feminist impulses. Thus Yamashita's final reckoning is ultimately not incredibly radical—the answer to the commodification/NAFTA-fication of society turns out not to reside in the apocalyptic promises of the magically real, the ambivalent digitalized virtually real, or even the “nitty-gritty” realism of Gabe's “just the facts” reportage. Instead, it's love. The novel approaches, but perhaps doesn't fully arrive at the idea of revolutionary love. As Chela Sandoval has theorized, love can be a decolonizing method of social change—“ a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement” (Sandoval 139). Read within a hermeneutics of love as social change, *Tropic of Orange*'s most radical and oppositional potential might reside in the embrace—a familiar and seemingly harmless gesture that becomes a decolonizing tool in the process of *gente*-fication, which in Yamashita's world is nothing less than the complete reconstruction of the future of the Americas.

While both Helena María Viramontes and Karen Tei Yamashita's *gente*-fictions offer connections between unlikely groups as sites of solidarity against various forms of oppression, Yamashita's novel offers a more hopeful, if less cohesive, vision of the future. Both fictions end with the gesture of an embrace—the washerwoman's abject body protecting Macky from the police and Bobby embracing his family. Yet Yamashita's novel suggests that in a post-apocalyptic, post-globalized world of Yépez's “happy hybridism,” a multi-racial (but heteronormative) family might re-build the future, while Viramontes's story ends in violent death and ambivalent promises of connections that remain not fully realized. In the dark world of “The Cariboo Café,” connections between people are made visible but ultimately contained by state violence or attained only in the afterlife. Meanwhile, *Tropic of Orange*'s global excess overflows its own boundaries, spilling out into a more generous view of a society regenerated through violence. Viramontes's bleaker outlook is reflected in the difference in form between the two texts. While both are experimental narratives told from multiple points of view, Viramontes's story is non-linear and fragmented while Yamashita's novel is hyper-linear. The more non-linear style of “The Cariboo Café” reflects the broken and disrupted world of her characters. Yamashita's hyper-linear narrative speaks to the heavily mediated society her characters move through, navigating the dizziness of a technologically advanced society through a multiplicity of genres, styles, and voices. The more linear chronological structure of the narrative, organized by days of the week, reflects the forward progression of the Tropic into Los Angeles and the telos of regeneration through destruction. In the end, Yamashita's ending feels unresolved, perhaps too easy. For such an energized novel, which has brought the chaos and conflict of an entire hemisphere's troubled history into the space of the novel, her ending glosses over the narrative baggage in a sweeping gesture that borders on the sentimental and normative. Alternatively, Viramontes's darker vision reflects more cohesion between content and form. Thus reading the two texts together offers a richer theorizing of the borderlands of culture in a postmodern Los Angeles. Viramontes and Yamashita's *gente*-fictions illuminate the

spectrum of alternative narratives that respond to marginalization, globalization, and inequality in Los Angeles. These two texts expand our understanding of U.S.-Mexico borderlands writing to show how literary reclamations and transformations of space—from the segregated streets of Los Angeles to the space of the formal space of narrative—can become decolonizing tools. In their worlds, we encounter the city as a transa where the ambivalences, contradictions, and counter-forces of the transnational U.S.-Mexico border can be harnessed by writers from the margins to de-center sites of power historically occupied by global and national elites.

¹ Sassen, Saskia. *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money*. New York: The New Press, 1998. Print.

² See for instance José David Saldívar (1997); and Caroline Rody's "The Transnational Imagination: Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*" (2004),

³ In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval defines "differential consciousness" as a mode of oppositional consciousness that "enables movement 'between and among' ideological positionings [...] considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them" (57).

⁴ In an interview, Yamashita has said: "Oh, *Arcangel* is based on Guillermo Gomez-Peña. In fact, he says things that Gomez-Peña says. The first time I saw and watched him perform and read his work, I was fascinated. I've had this sensation that, in Los Angeles, he has been, in some ways, rejected—I'm not sure. *Arcangel* is a literary interpretation of Peña." (Gier and Tejada 4).

⁵ See, for instance, *Arcangel*'s counterhegemonic vision of the history of the Americas in Chapter 23 (pg 145).

⁶ See "Freefalling Toward a Borderless Future" in Gómez-Peña's *The New World Border*. Yamashita uses an excerpt from this poem as an epigraph in *Tropic*.

⁷ David Hockney is an English pop artist, famous for his paintings of Los Angeles swimming pools in the late 1960s.

⁸ *The Big Sleep* (1946) is a classic Los Angeles *noir* film directed by Howard Hawks and starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.

Four

All the Pretty Mexican Girls: Whiteness and Racial Desire in Cormac McCarthy's All the Pretty Horses and Cities of the Plain

I first encountered Cormac McCarthy's *Border Trilogy* in 1999. In 1999, Matt Damon and Penelope Cruz hadn't yet fluttered their dewy eyes on the big screen; *No Country for Old Men* hadn't been written or adapted for Hollywood by the Coen brothers; Oprah hadn't made Cormac McCarthy a household name, and the Pulitzer was nowhere in sight. In 1999, McCarthy was just emerging from decades of obscurity and McCarthy scholarship consisted of two edited volumes of conference papers on topics related to McCarthy's work.¹ Over a decade later, Cormac McCarthy has become one of the most iconic figures in contemporary American literature, known almost as much for his reputation as a recluse as for his gritty, apocalyptic prose. Equally adored and reviled on account of his notoriously difficult and heavy-handed style, McCarthy is now required reading for the culturally literate.² McCarthy scholarship has also gone from a seemingly tight-knit group of "old schoolers" who knew McCarthy when (i.e., anyone who had heard of him or read his any of "Southern" or "Appalachian" novels before the publication of *All the Pretty Horses* in 1992), to a burgeoning canon of scholarship from around the world. Yet despite the commercial success of the *Border Trilogy* and subsequent work (*No Country for Old Men*, 2005; *The Road*, 2006) and the increased critical attention paid to McCarthy, the scholarship remains woefully inattentive to issues of race, gender, and the operations of power. Given the *Border Trilogy*'s setting along the U.S.-Mexico border in the middle of the 20th century, the numerous international border crossings made by the characters and their interactions with a whole host of Mexican peoples, places, and things, the untranslated Spanish spoken by McCarthy's heroes, and John Grady Cole's propensity to fall in love with Mexican women, this neglect seems puzzling. Yet even a cursory glance at the major edited anthologies of Cormac McCarthy scholarship prove how marginal analyses of race and gender, particularly their intersections, remain.³

In this chapter, I address this gap in the scholarship by grounding my reading in a critical analysis of race and gender to critique McCarthy's stereotypical and often violent representation of Mexican women. I focus on the first and third novels in the trilogy, *All the Pretty Horses* and *Cities of the Plain*, to read the relationships between McCarthy's young cowboy hero, John Grady Cole, and his two adolescent Mexicana love interests: the high-class Alejandra and Magdalena, the whore with a heart of gold. While much criticism applauds McCarthy's "revisionist Western history" and examines how his unique prose style self-consciously revises the Western genre, I draw on Rosa Linda Fregoso's important work on the history of the visibility and invisibility of Mexicana bodies in culture, to argue that Cole's relationship with Alejandra and Magdalena reify stereotypes about the availability and hypersexualization of Mexican women on the U.S.-Mexico border in service of constructing a dominant, if ambivalent, white masculinity.

In focusing on the *ambivalent* qualities of McCarthy's border encounters, I'm responding in particular to readings such as José Limón's in *American Encounters*, which

celebrate John Grady Cole (and McCarthy) as an example of a progressive white masculinity that is also culturally “fluent” south of the border. I acknowledge the ways in which McCarthy’s white, male American characters do depart from some classic Western stereotypes, especially in their Spanish-speaking abilities and capacity for deep and lasting empathy with non-white people, while also highlighting how McCarthy’s problematic portrayal of Mexican women implicates his work in a larger and longer history of commodification and sexualization of women’s bodies along the border. Finally, this chapter also addresses how McCarthy scholarship tends to replicate McCarthy’s own shortcomings—reifying the marginalization and objectification of Mexico, Mexican women, and Native people. I’m particularly troubled by the obsession within McCarthy scholarship with a few passing references in *All the Pretty Horses* that compare John Grady Cole to a tribe of “vanishing” Comanches. In their otherwise important and insightful studies, too many scholars do not question the problems and limitations of such a comparison, going so far as to replicate the colonial and imperializing metaphors in their own work. The critical concerns this chapter addresses seek to re-situate McCarthy’s influential borderlands art within a more nuanced series of border encounters that locate his representations of the U.S.-Mexico border and the diverse array of people who inhabit it within the larger transnational transactions that interact in order to make available certain identities and modes of representation. Exposing the links between McCarthy’s representations and real-world material realities are crucial to this analysis because they reveal how McCarthy both accounts for and disavows the operations of power and history on the U.S.-Mexico border. McCarthy’s border novels represent an in-between space where Western history and the Western genre can be self-consciously invoked and revised, but only to a certain extent. John Grady Cole may be a more compassionate and “politically correct” John Wayne, better suited for the age of multiculturalism, yet McCarthy’s West is still a man’s world where women are fickle, absent, and dead. The violence, sexual and otherwise, perpetrated on the bodies of brown women in the *Border Trilogy* reminds us how much McCarthy’s white masculinities rely on such abject bodies in order to fashion their own ambivalent agency in the brutal world of McCarthy’s borderlands.

One of the most fascinating experiences in reading McCarthy criticism is the extent to which so many of McCarthy critics celebrate and praise the work. The world of McCarthy scholarship, like so many of his fictional worlds, seems to be a world hostile to outsiders who might offer less-than-laudatory readings of his work. For instance, in response to Daniel Cooper Alarcón’s excellent article on McCarthy’s Mexican representations, “All the Pretty Mexicos,” in which he identifies how McCarthy’s representation of Mexico upholds certain Manichean stereotypes found throughout U.S. American literature about Mexico, J. Douglas Canfield peevisly remarks that other critics, such as Edwin T. Arnold and Diane C. Luce, take McCarthy “more seriously” (*Companion* 258). He goes on to counter Alarcón’s observation that McCarthy’s Mexico is nostalgic, romanticized, and provincial with this outrageous claim: “I am willing to accept the trilogy’s locating of the spiritual in the people of Mexico, who, as anyone who has ever interacted with them knows, are a genuinely spiritual people” (266). Unfortunately, such problematic and thoughtless critical moves appear throughout the critical canon.

Perhaps this scholarly hostility is one reason why so few scholars of ethnic studies, Chicano/a studies, borderlands studies, or critical race studies have bothered with McCarthy's novels.⁴ When it comes to discussing the role of Mexico in McCarthy, Alarcón's article remains iconic, although John Wegner's analysis of the role of the Mexican Revolution in the novels is also strong.⁵ In general, McCarthy scholarship abstracts Mexico and the borderlands into metaphors for literary strategies or, in the case of John Blair, argue that Mexico exists simply as a foil for Western (i.e., white, American male) identity.⁶ Discussions of Mexican characters, including Alejandra and Magdalena, tend to focus solely on their functional roles in the various narratives and/or their significance to John Grady Cole and do not include a critical analysis of the difference race makes in their representations within the texts. Scholars of gender have gradually come to pay more attention to McCarthy's novels, particularly *Blood Meridian* and the *Border Trilogy*. Perhaps the most well-known work on gender is Nell Sullivan's "Boys Will Be Boys and Girls Will Be Gone: The Circuit of Male Desire in Cormac McCarthy's Border Trilogy." In this persuasive essay, Sullivan demonstrates how the absence of women in the novels (either because they have abandoned their men or died) makes it possible for the male characters to perform feminine roles themselves, rendering females unnecessary within the world of McCarthy's novels. Unfortunately, little attention is paid to the (albeit limited and stereotypical) roles that women **do** play in the novels, and by suggesting that female roles exist solely to be appropriated by men, Sullivan's article is no different than other articles that are ultimately all about men. In contrast, articles by Megan Riley McGilchrist and Molly McBride identify how land and the female body both function as territories that must be violently conquered by McCarthy's heroes.⁷ Yet McGilchrist's article doesn't consider the intersection of race **and** gender, and McBride argues that by portraying John Grady Cole as a conquering "marauder," McCarthy actually critiques cycles of imperial conquest. By shifting our critical focus away from the overly-fetishized hero, John Grady Cole, and placing Alejandra and Magdalena at the center, rather than the periphery, of our reading, we see how McCarthy's representation of Mexican women contributes to, rather than critiques, the cycles of imperial violence.

Alejandra de Rocha y Villareal is the teenage daughter of Don Héctor, the patrón on the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción, the paradisiacal ranch where young John Grady Cole finds himself employed after he has fled his hometown in San Angelo, Texas. Cole and his buddy, Lacy Rawlins, light out for Mexico after Cole's grandfather dies and the sole inheritor of the family property, Cole's fickle and absent mother, sells the cattle ranch and moves to San Antonio to become a stage actress (only after divorcing Cole's father, shacking up with another man, and leaving Cole with a whole host of Freudian complications. And speaking of Freudian complications, he's also been recently dumped by his girlfriend, Mary Catherine, for an older boy with a car...). Thus, Cole and Rawlins believe Mexico will be a place where they can carry on the good 'ol cowboy life they cherish, a lifestyle already seriously out of fashion in the industrializing West Texas of 1949. For instance, when they first the Hacienda, Rawlins says to Cole, "This is how it was with the old waddies, ain't it?" (*APH* 96). It's not too surprising that Cole chooses Mexico as his destination; aside from all the romantic and nostalgic representations of Mexico in the U.S. that Cole has more than likely been

exposed to, he also speaks Spanish fluently and has been practically raised by the old Mexican housekeeper he lovingly calls “abuela” (grandmother) and seems to be part of the close-knit Mexican and Mexican American community of ranch hands on his grandfather’s ranch.⁸ And so they strike out, and in typical picaresque fashion, adventures are had and companions and characters are met, the U.S.-Mexico border is crossed, and the two boys end up happily working as vaqueros on the hacienda and ready to stay put for “about a hundred years.”

As many scholars have noted, the Hacienda de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción seems to be someplace out of the boys’ nostalgic dreams, where wild horses still roam through the vast countryside and real cowboys spend their days herding cattle and breaking and breeding all those pretty horses for the patrón.⁹ Cole quickly makes a name for himself as a kind of horse whisperer who breaks sixteen wild horses in four days (a feat scores of more experienced Mexican cowboys apparently couldn’t manage) and becomes chummy with the patrón, who shoots pool and plays chess with the young cowboy, soliciting his advice on a breeding program he wants to start. Life seems to be pretty good for Cole and Rawlins...except that while Cole is sweating and roping cattle and jumping on the backs of greenbroke horses, he’s also not-so-secretly lusting after the boss’s daughter, the young and beautiful Alejandra who appears the very same day that Cole and Rawlins get hired on the ranch.

Like a vision or apparition, Alejandra makes her grand entrance into the narrative when she suddenly appears on horseback on a road near where Cole and the other vaqueros are herding cattle. McCarthy describes her as a “young girl” in English riding gear, astride “a black Arabian saddlehorse” that had recently been wading in water, because it’s lower half, including Alejandra’s boots, are wet. Likewise, Alejandra sports a “flatcrowned hat of black felt with a wide brim and her black hair was loose under it and fell halfway to her waist” (APH 94). The repetition of “black” emphasizes Alejandra’s exotic beauty—her dark otherness—while also linking the young girl to the wet stallion she rides. The emphasis on blackness in this passage recalls Toni Morrison’s arguments in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* that such metaphorical allusions to darkness represent a crucial “Africanist presence” in American literature. The “Africanist presence” is often an unconscious, metaphysical staging of various racial attitudes that constitute the American literary imagination and an American identity based on the repression, suppression, and fear of black people and racial others. These attitudes emerge through a variety of stylistic devices and an emphasis on color, particularly whiteness and darkness, is one such device. Building on Morrison’s reading of darkness, one could read McCarthy’s emphasis on Alejandra’s blackness as representing a repressed fear of her racial otherness and the threat her race poses for the stability of a white, masculine identity. Thus, the narrative chaos her presence introduces mirrors the racial disturbance and destabilization her potential union with John Grady threatens to create.

In a passage already dripping with sexual overtones, McCarthy’s Alejandra turns back to the vaqueros as she rides by and shoots them a smile—a smile that changes Cole’s world forever. Alejandra makes her second appearance after Cole and Rawlins have been working at the ranch for some time. This time, Cole is riding alone when Alejandra appears on the road beside him, once again astride her black Arabian. Cole keeps his eyes averted, but Alejandra rides five feet in front of him before turning “her

fineboned face” to look “full at” Cole. Cole notices her “blue eyes” beneath the ubiquitous “black hat” and her “long black hair” (109). McCarthy writes how “she sat the horse more than well, riding erect with her broad shoulders.” Later, when Cole meets her in town for a dance, McCarthy describes how she “wore a blue dress and her mouth was all red. [...] Her black hair done up in a blue ribbon and the nape of her neck pale as porcelain” (123). When she sees Cole, she smiles at him. In these passages, McCarthy describes Alejandra in terms of her physical traits—her clothing, appearance—and by the horse she rides and how she rides it. In nearly every scene in which she appears, McCarthy mentions her “black hair,” almost to the point of perversity. He contrasts her dark hair with her “blue eyes” and “pale” neck, as if to reassure us that Alejandra is dark enough to be exotic, but white enough to dispel any fears of miscegenation that might arise from a sexual encounter with Cole. In these early passages, she doesn’t speak, but she doesn’t need to because her body language conveys more tensile sexuality than any words could. Voiceless and rendered into the narrative entirely through the objectifying male gazes of Cole and McCarthy, Alejandra is virginal yet sexually open, dark yet blue-eyed, innocent yet an experienced horsewoman, aristocratic and “fineboned” yet reckless enough to ride unaccompanied and smile and stare at her father’s workers. In short, the perfect object of male desire.

After Cole and Alejandra have danced together in town, she (once again) appears as if out thin air, on horseback, while Cole is out riding the patrón’s prize stallion. In this particular passage, Cole has just finished breeding the stallion with one of the mares:

and the horse lathered and dripping and half crazed and pounding up the ciénaga road riding with just a rope hackamore and the sweat of the horse and the smell of the mare on him and the veins pulsing under the wet hide and him leaning low along the horse’s neck talking softly and obscenely. It was in this condition that all unexpectedly one evening he came upon her returning on the black Arabian down the ciénaga road (129).

The sexual overtones in the passage are blatant. It’s clear that McCarthy intends for us to associate the prize stallion’s robust libido with Cole’s lust for Alejandra—when he dismounts the stallion at Alejandra’s command “[t]he insides of his trouserlegs were hot and wet” (130). McCarthy tempers the intense masculine sexuality with Alejandra’s impulsive and coquettish behavior when she demands to ride the half-broke saddleless stallion back to barn, forcing Cole to return with her black Arabian and raising the suspicions of the vaqueros. If Cole is the prize stud stallion, bursting with barely checked sexuality, Alejandra is one of the wild “trembling” mares, “standing with her legs spread and her head down and the breath rifling in and out of her” (129). Despite Alejandra’s willful disobedience and blatant disregard for propriety (as evidenced in her solo rides through the campo, her un-chaperoned encounters with Cole and, later, her nightly visits to his room even when her aunt has forbidden their relationship), McCarthy invites readers to think of her as simply another one of the dark and wild mares that Cole will tame.

Perhaps because of the way McCarthy’s descriptions collapse the difference between Alejandra and the horse she rides, or perhaps because many scholars link Cole’s desire for Alejandra with his unspoken desire to inherit the ranch, critical treatment of

Alejandra often replicates the same problematic dehumanizing.¹⁰ In the two passages in Limón's work where he mentions Alejandra, she becomes collapsed into greater material (animal) possessions of the hacienda. Limón writes: "Even as he [Cole] is beginning to imagine the full extent of his desire for her [Alejandra], for the *hacienda's* prize stallion (purchased in Kentucky), and for the material possibilities of the estate [...]" (Limón 197). Here, Alejandra is nothing more than an item in a list of material possessions that Cole might have designs upon, her agency and humanity dissolve as she becomes little more than another symbol of the hacienda's economic and biological fertility. Later, after referring to Alejandra as one of "the beautiful women who comes with [the estate]," Limón claims that McCarthy "confounds" the expectations of the Western genre, "because save for some momentary fulfillment of his sexual desire and the correlated also momentary proximity to fine horse flesh, Cole gets nothing [...]" (200). After marginalizing Alejandra as little more than an accoutrement to the larger Rocha y Villareal estate, Limón essentially refers to her as "fine horse flesh." Although he's obviously aware that the McCarthy himself invites the comparison, Limón's flippant replication of this violent and dehumanizing metaphor doesn't question the racial and gendered power dynamics that make such a comparison available to McCarthy, to Cole, and even to Limón. Similarly, Gail Moore Morrison, one of the most well-known and well-respected McCarthy scholars, also contributes to this violence in her article, "*All The Pretty Horses: John Grady Cole's Expulsion From Paradise*" (in *Perspectives*). In this frequently cited piece, Morrison notes: "Like the native mares, Alejandra is described as small and slight" (Morrison 181). Morrison accepts the comparison at face value, going on to write (about Alejandra): "Ultimately, she is as wild and passionate as the native mares, a creature of the lake and lagoons, of the night and darkness, dark-haired, and dark-horsed." In this passage, Morrison clearly exoticizes Alejandra as a racial other—"a creature" whose darkness affiliates her with animals and landscape in a complete and total dehumanization. In describing her as "wild and passionate" Morrison invokes the common stereotype of Mexican and Latina women as fiery, emotional, and hypersexual, a stereotype that has its roots in racist and sexist ideologies that defines the limits of normative (white) female behavior and sexuality by representing non-white women as over-sexed. In other words, representations of Alejandra's sexuality, as for all women of color, is inextricable from her racialization within a world system that **must** mark the limits of the nation and the race through a violent process of racial and gendered othering and exploitation. Finally, James D. Lilley, another well-known McCarthy critic, also argues: "Alejandra is an undeveloped character because for John Grady she becomes, like the broken mares, a mirror in which he can watch his own Symbolic power growing" (Lilley 277 in *Myth, Legend, Dust*). Unquestioned and unexamined even by the most astute of critics, these examples demonstrate the power behind McCarthy's early representations of Alejandra as dark, pleasing, and available.

The power behind the comparison comes from a long and complex history of racial and gender relations on the border and in the asymmetrical power relations between the U.S. and Mexico. As Rosa Linda Fregoso notes in *meXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*, the bodies of brown women and the roles they play in culture have long been a part of establishing both the boundaries of the nation-state and the boundaries of white male and female sexuality. In the process of colonization, sexuality has long been one field where large concerns about national and

racial power play out. As Anne McClintock writes in *Imperial Leather*, “[s]exuality as a trope for other power relations was certainly an abiding aspect of imperial power” (McClintock 14). Often this trope appears as metaphors that link women’s bodies and land/territory and nation (i.e., the idea of a “mother country” or “virgin territory”). The equation of land or territory with the female body has long roots in the gendering of the nation as female (the site where citizens are reproduced). Within these cycles of representations, not only are geographic and ideological spaces, such as the nation-state, feminized, but women’s bodies also take on the symbolic role of land, territory, and nation, becoming sites through which colonial power can exert itself—what McClintock calls “the erotics of imperial conquest” (24). It is through the sexual conquest of Mexican or Mexican American women that white men on the border have symbolically conquered and claimed the land or territory they believe is their right. This old story combines belief in racial and gender superiority with colonial and imperial desire to mark the limits of white masculinity and the white U.S. nation-state through the bodies of women who are seen as open, available, and pleasing. Thus McCarthy’s emphasis on Alejandra’s sexuality draws from a history of representation that characterizes Mexican women as either sexually deviant and promiscuous (and in need of white men who will tame and conquer them) or innocent and chaste (thus theirs for the taking). In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa argues that this history has particular resonances along the U.S.-Mexico border, where the on-going penetration of the international boundary is mapped on the bodies of Chicanas and Mexican women in violent ways. For Anzaldúa, the border is a “wound” that “splits” her, as it has wounded generations of indigenous and brown women since the first Spanish colonizers arrived in the 16th century (Anzaldúa 24—27).

As Cole and Alejandra become closer and closer to consummating their illicit relationship, Alejandra is increasingly described as part of the natural landscape of the hacienda. When Cole sees her before she leaves for a visit to her mother in Mexico City (the next time he sees her, they will make love):

She was coming down out of the mountains riding very stately and erect out of a rainsquall building to the north and the dark clouds towering over her. She rode with her hat pulled down in the front and fastened under her chin with a drawtie and as she rode her black hair twisted and blew about her shoulders and the lightning fell silently through the black clouds behind her and she rode all seeming unaware [...] riding erect and stately until the rain caught her up and shrouded her figure away in that wild summer landscape: real horse, real rider, real land and sky and yet a dream withal (*APH* 131).

Alejandra becomes part of the “wild summer landscape” itself, inextricable from the “dark clouds” and rain that “shrouds” her. She’s linked to the darkening world with her “black hair twisted” around her. With her hat pulled down in front, her face is invisible, further emphasizing her lack of humanity and her shadowy presence. She is not a woman or a girl, she is a neutral “rider,” a label that depends on the animal ridden, the horse, for its significance. Again, we apprehend her through the metonymic Cole-McCarthy gaze, which constantly renders her in parts—horse, hair, hat—until she herself becomes one more element in the large and looming landscape. Because of its dreamlike quality, Cole

must reassure himself that the tableau he sees is real. He seems unable to make a place for Alejandra outside the lusty world (the word “erect” is repeated twice in the passage) of horses, dreams, and metaphors.

The scene where John Grady Cole and Alejandra finally consummate their forbidden passion seems itself like something out of a dream. They’ve taken to riding the campo together at night, when they believe no one is watching. One night, they ride to the lake and Cole strips naked and wades in where:

The water was black and warm and he turned in the lake and spread his arms in the water and the water was so dark and so silky and he watched across the still black surface to where she stood on the shore with the horse and he watched where she stepped from her pooled clothing so pale, so pale, like a chrysalis emerging, and walked into the water (*APH* 141).

The repetition of “black” and the emphasis on the “dark” water recalls the earlier descriptions of Alejandra’s dark hair, dark horse, the darkening stormy landscape, and the repressed racial anxieties her “Africanist presence” creates. Here the darkness threatens to consume Cole, and particularly Alejandra as she wades out to meet him, her paleness swallowed up by the dark water: “Her black hair floating on the water about her, falling and floating on the water.” We see her through Cole’s eyes as she walks toward him, “trembling in the water and not from the cold for there was none.” Her “trembling” invokes McCarthy’s description of the “trembling” mare after she’s been mounted by the stud, a comparison that would come naturally to Cole, whose always thinking about horses. We know that we are undoubtedly in his mind when McCarthy slips directly into his point of view: “Do not speak to her. Do not call.” Instead of calling out to her, Cole watches her body carefully as she approaches (without being summoned). He notices how she’s “so pale in the lake she seemed to be burning. Like foxfire in a darkened wood. [...] Like the moon that burned cold.” On the one hand, Alejandra’s dark hair threatens to subsume her completely into the dark water and the night, yet Cole’s emphasis on her pale body emphasizes the contrast between her whiteness and the dark. The tension between Alejandra’s darkness and whiteness the passage so gracefully illuminates reveals the racial tensions that surround her presence in the narrative. “Pale” appears three times within seven sentences, a repetition that perhaps reveals Cole’s desire to “whiten” Alejandra before he has sex with her, alleviating any racial anxieties about their union. In any case, in describing Alejandra’s pale body, Cole turns to the natural world for his similes, once again inscribing Alejandra within the landscape. She looks at the moon before she turns to Cole, with a face “[s]weeter for the larceny of time and flesh, sweeter for the betrayal.” When she finally speaks, she asks Cole if he loves her, in Spanish. He says yes: “He said her name. God yes, he said.” Although Cole is able to name Alejandra as they make love, it’s curious that McCarthy does not. Even though Cole has uttered it, her name remains largely unspoken through the entire narrative. McCarthy does not call her “Alejandra”—she is referred to only as “she” in all the narrative’s descriptions and dialogue tags. Perhaps we are meant to infer that from Cole’s point of view, there is no other “she” in the world and that the female pronoun automatically applies to Alejandra, but the effect within the text is a persistent dehumanization of Alejandra into nothing more substantial than a “she”—

interchangeable with any other dark-haired girl, a suspicion that turns out to be true by the time we meet John Grady Cole again in *Cities of the Plain*

In a predictable fashion, John Grady and Alejandra's love is not meant to be. Although they enjoy several weeks or months of midnight trysts, the truth comes out eventually. When the past comes back to haunt Cole, in the form of mistaken identity and fraudulent charges, the once-friendly patrón is only too happy to sell out Cole and Rawlins to the Federales who involve the boys in a series of violent escapades (including one very cinematic prison knife-fight where good conquers evil at the last possible second). Ever the hero, Cole survives and lives to clear his name and fight another day. Before he returns, heart-broken, to Texas, he and Alejandra meet in secret one more time where she sleeps with him and then confesses that she cannot betray the wishes of her father and leaves. We never hear from her again. She leaves the narrative suddenly as she entered it. Although Cole has good intentions (he begs Alejandra to marry him and she refuses), his failure to ultimately win the girl doesn't mean that his imperial project has failed or that his failure to acquire land, material wealth, or a woman is meant to be read as McCarthy's denouncement of imperial conquest, as McBride argues. Such a reading focuses entirely on Cole as the lens through which to gauge the extent of McCarthy's politics. It's more than evident that even though Cole may be an immensely sympathetic and likeable character, his journey into Mexico is made possible only by a long history of U.S. imperial interests in Mexico, in its many economic, political and cultural forms, that legitimates the way he imagines and desires Mexico (including Alejandra).¹¹ While Cole may return to the U.S. and, eventually, even return to Mexico, Alejandra must return to her father's home as used goods, a "fallen woman" whose reputation has been publically damaged. Within the tightly regulated patriarchal and class-based system of traditional Mexican culture, her options are few. It is likely she will become like her iconic aunt, the stately Dueña Alfonsa, who was also crossed in love and remains an unmarried spinster, stuck on her brother's hacienda until she dies. Cole will be fully incorporated back into U.S. society, even be publically exonerated in a court of law by a judge for his adventures in Mexico. He will find honest work and fall in love with another Mexican girl in Juárez. Such freedoms are unavailable to Alejandra, who has sacrificed her own desires for her family, according to the strict codes that dictate "good" female behavior (even if it might be too little too late). Her class position and gender limit her opportunities in ways that Cole cannot comprehend. Thus, reading the story of their failed romance from Cole's point of view may paint a rosier picture, but from Alejandra's perspective, it's a raw deal all round. Placing Alejandra at the center, rather than the periphery of a reading of *All the Pretty Horses* exposes the limits of McCarthy's "revisionary" Western genre. Although his cowboy hero may be culturally miscegenated as a result of his close affiliations with Mexican Americans in Texas and while his journey into Mexico results in no measurable personal or political gain, McCarthy's representation of Alejandra ultimately reaffirms violent and dehumanizing stereotypes about Mexican women and Latinas, in the same way that classic Westerns have marginalized and sexualized brown women's bodies in service of consolidating and legitimating a white, masculine authority.

Poor John Grady Cole, so successful in every other endeavor, is doomed to fall tragically in love with Mexican girls. We encounter him again in El Paso, Texas in the

Trilogy's third and final installment, *Cities of the Plain*.¹² The year is 1952 and John Grady Cole, referred to on the first page as the “all-american cowboy,” is still struggling to survive in a post-WWII world where cattle ranches are being bought up by the government for nuclear testing sites (*COTP* 1). The story goes that McCarthy wrote *Cities of the Plain* as a screenplay first and only adapted it into a novel at a later date.¹³ Perhaps that's why *Cities*, while still as dense and meta-literary as all McCarthy's novels, is the most cinematic and dialogue-heavy of the *Trilogy*. For instance, the book opens with Cole and his fellow vaqueros at a whorehouse across the U.S.-Mexico border in Ciudad Juárez (more on that later). The boys exchange some ribald banter at the expense of the whores while knocking back a few whiskeys, some good old-fashioned male bonding that places us squarely within the familiar landscape of the “yee-haw” genre. Ever the gentleman, Cole refuses to join in the teasing and abstains from the various temptations draping themselves languidly over the decadent and decaying salon. And then he sees her. In a scene so cinematic that it seems almost cliché, Cole spies a pretty young thing in the mirror behind the bar:

A young girl of no more than seventeen and perhaps younger was sitting on the arm of the sofa with her hands cupped in her lap and her eyes cast down. She fussed with the hem of her gaudy dress like a schoolgirl. She looked up and looked toward them. Her long black hair fell across her shoulder and she swept it slowly with the back of her hand (6).

The description invokes the ghost of Alejandra, but this is Magdalena, the whore with a heart of gold who Cole falls head over heels for as soon as he sets his eyes on her through the tarnished backbar mirror.¹⁴ From this first description, the similarities between the girls, and McCarthy's treatment of them, is obvious. Both are described as adolescents, with that intoxicating combination of innocence and experience. With her hands demurely “cupped” in her lap and her eyes downcast, Magdalena's innocent appearance clearly sets her apart from the other whores in the bar who aggressively approach the cowboys, tugging at them and persuading them to go upstairs. In fact, the simile comparing her to a “schoolgirl” is almost unnecessary because her appearance otherwise already calls into mind a catalogue of stock images of the sweet whore who will transcend her profession. And then there's the “long black hair,” which appears to be a special fixation of McCarthy-Cole's. Just like Alejandra, Magdalena is marked throughout the novel by the mention of her “long black hair,” until it becomes a metonymic device, standing in not only for Magdalena or Alejandra, but also for Mexican women in general.¹⁵

Wooing ensues, *en español* because our heroine doesn't speak English, and after the usual back-and-forth (Cole: “I love you.” Magdalena: “I'm not worthy.” Tear. Pout. Cole: “I don't care.” Pout.), the couple declare their love and Cole begins the process of trying to free her from her evil and conniving pimp, Eduardo. There's some tragic back story: she was sold into prostitution at age thirteen to settle a gambling debt and although she tried to escape to a convent, her pimp found her and beat her. She ran away again to the police who took turns raping her before her pimp found her and beat her. Oh, and she's an epileptic. Because we do learn more about her history and her life before she enters the world of the narrative, in some ways Magdalena is a more substantial character

than Alejandra. Certainly, she takes up more narrative space in *Cities* than Alejandra in *Horses*, although as Nell Sullivan points out, from the beginning she doesn't seem to belong to the land of the living and is doomed to be "contained, reduced, and ultimately relegated to the margins" of the story (Sullivan 233, in *Companion*, Luce and Arnold, eds.).

Cole begins by saving and borrowing enough money to try and pay off her pimp and by restoring an old cabin on the ranch where he works to serve as a homestead for him and Magdalena, once he marries her and gets her across the border to the U.S. Because she's, as Cole's boss Mac puts it, a "Mexican Mexican," Cole faces a series of hurdles and expenses in arranging for Magdalena's escape. Ultimately, despite the fact that Cole offers to pay Eduardo \$2,000 for Magdalena, using his trusty bud Billy Parham as a go-between, his offer is refused and Cole must resort to an elaborate escape plan involving the usual pay-offs and alibis. But, of course, Eduardo is in love with Magdalena himself and makes it his business to thwart Cole's plans. All goes tragically awry and Magdalena ends up dead, her throat cut and body dumped along the banks of the Rio Grande. Cole, grief-stricken, challenges Eduardo to a truly epic knife-fight, which is as much a battle of wits as it is brute strength (where Eduardo clearly bests Cole). Ultimately Cole defeats Eduardo in a climactic thrust of knife, but Eduardo has mortally wounded the young hero, who dies in Billy's arms. As he cradles his best friend's bleeding and broken body, Billy curses: "Goddamn whores" (*COTP* 261).

Although the story doesn't end with Billy's curse, his indictment of Magdalena, and women in general, speaks to the violence perpetrated on Magdalena within the narrative. From the beginning, Magdalena's profession invokes a history of perceived sexual excess on the border between the U.S. and Mexico and a corresponding cultural tradition that represents Mexican women on the border as prostitutes. In *meXicana Encounters*, Fregoso documents the history of this representation, showing how early white colonizers perceived differences in sexual customs and bodily behavior by Mexican women to be signs of racial inferiority (Fregoso 142-43). By the nineteenth century, "'Mexican woman' was synonymous with 'prostitute'" (143). As a crucial part of the ongoing process of racial formation during the twentieth century, such associations were widely disseminated in culture, especially popular forms which often portrayed Mexican women as prostitutes or otherwise sexually deviant (for example, wearing revealing clothing or engaging in flirtatious behavior). Of course, these representation didn't (and don't) just reflect prevailing ideologies but also helped to shaped and consolidate them: "The racial and sexual othering of Mexicans in cinematic space was part of a system of representation obsessed with regulating white women's sexuality, identities, and desires in the early twentieth century" (147). In this system, representing Mexican women as racial and sexual others was crucial to the stabilization and control of white femininity and, by extension, the boundaries of the nation. As part of the nation-building process, the U.S. has historically expressed anxieties over policing and containing the international border and the threats (real or perceived) that its proximity creates for citizens. Since the Prohibition era, during which gambling halls, saloons, and prostitution blossomed along Mexican border towns, the U.S.-Mexico border became synonymous with excesses and vices that were seen as threats to the U.S because they might "spill over" and contaminate the nation. As Joseph Nevins points out in *Operation Gatekeeper*, "[p]ossibly the greatest perceived threats from Tijuana and, by extension,

Mexico were those relating to vices” (Nevins 57). Thus, processes of racial formation, based on notions of racial and gender inferiority, went hand in hand with socio-economic changes along the international boundary which all contributed to associations that linked the border with vice and excess (especially sexual) and Mexican women as prostitutes.

McCarthy’s narrative does little to disavow or challenge such stereotypes. Even though we are told some of Magdalena’s past, her story still hinges on her sexual slavery. She is both the fragile epileptic and the tragic whore, both roles that are given meaning only when Cole shows up to try and rescue her from both. In doing so, McCarthy’s narrative follows other patterns of representing relationships between white men and Mexican women that Fregoso identifies in her survey of Mexican women in film. She argues that when cross-racial relationships are represented positively, their plots fall into one of two categories: “(1) rescue fantasy, where the white male protagonist saves the Mexican female from the excesses of her culture (embodied in either a possessive father or degenerate lover; and (2) romantic conquest of a Mexicana, involving white male triumphant over one or more Mexican males” (Fregoso 139). Cole and Magdalena’s relationship fits both categories. Eduardo, the pimp, fits the stereotype of the degenerate Mexican lover. First, he’s a pimp. He’s also described as a flashy dresser, fastidious, who smokes cigars, speaks elegantly and elliptically, and moves languidly through the scenery with an effeminacy that contrasts sharply with the gruff and taciturn cowboy masculinity of Cole and Rawlins. He represents the worst excess of Mexican border culture and degenerate Mexican masculinity, which must be removed and contained by the conquering hero. In arranging for Magdalena’s flight from the whorehouse, Cole is rescuing her from a culture of excess—“a world of adornment only,” as Eduardo describes Mexico during their epic knife fight. And, as a rival lover who has considerable control over Magdalena, Cole’s triumph in securing her affections also falls into the second category. In both cases, the Mexican woman stands in for her inferior culture/nation and her rescue or conquest by a white man represents a larger assertion of cultural and political authority.

As a character who must be both rescued and conquered, Magdalena creates narrative disorder, a related trope in the representation of Mexican women in culture that Fregoso identifies. Very similar to Morrison’s “Africanist” presence, Fregoso argues that the “Mexicana” presence in a narrative is often used to create disorder or chaos “into the worlds of both the white nation (the world of culture) and the native nation (the world of nature) [...] Her role in the plot is purely instrumental, serving to consolidate the white nation’s authority on the frontier as well as its claims to property in the West” (130). On the one hand, Magdalena’s role in the narrative is most certainly marginalized to being simply the agent of Cole’s demise, thus fulfilling a variety of stereotypical roles, as we’ve seen. Yet, unlike the traditional Western, Cole does not ultimately and absolutely triumph over the forces of darkness and ride off into the sunset. He dies on the streets of Juárez and the remaining thirty pages of the novel are devoted to Billy (who, unable to find ranching work during the second half of the 20th century, ends up as an extra in cowboys movies). In this sense, it’s true Cole’s Mexican lovers do not absolutely consolidate his authority, raising intriguing questions about what McCarthy’s novels suggest about the construction of white masculinity. For instance, as critic Katherine Sugg suggestively asks, why does this interrogation of whiteness and masculinity “play out” on the U.S.-Mexico border (Sugg 147)? In her essay on the *Border Trilogy* and the

popular film, *Lone Star*, Sugg reads Cole's failure as McCarthy's rejection of the classic "nostalgic or regressively racist representations of white masculinity" of the genre Fregoso investigates. While Cole's cross-racial romances might be read by some as a recognition of the need for new social relations—a multicultural future to replace the bounded and sterile world of homosocial cowboy relations—, McCarthy doesn't give this future a chance because Cole and Magdalena are both dead at the end of the trilogy and Billy Parham wanders the blasted southwestern landscape alone. If McCarthy's border novels are, as Sugg suggests, a response to revisionist histories and the political culture of multiculturalism that attempts to find a place for white masculinities, the location of that identity remains profoundly ambivalent at the end of the trilogy. Therefore, from Cole's point of view, it's easy to read any imperializing project as ultimately futile, abandoned on the mean streets of Juárez when Cole dies.

But, again, if we shift our focus from Cole to Magdalena, things are much less ambivalent. When we read the extent to which race, gender, nation, and power operate within the texts through the perspectives of both Alejandra and Magdalena, it's clear how both women fall victim to a racialized and gendered violence that roots itself in the asymmetrical relations between the United States and Mexico. For instance, Magdalena's gruesome death is perhaps one of the most powerful moments in the entire trilogy. When her pimp discovers the plot to rescue Magdalena, he intervenes and just as Magdalena thinks she's crossing the Rio Grande into the arms of her lover and safety, her taxi driver turns out to be Eduardo's agent and drives her to a remote location where Eduardo slits her throat and dumps her body. When Cole searches for Magdalena (after it's clear that something has gone awry), he eventually finds her body at the coroner's office:

The girl to whom he'd sworn his love forever lay on the last table. She lay as the rushcutters had found her that morning in the shallows under the shore willows with the mist rising off the river. Her hair damp and matted. So black. Hung with strands of dead brown weed. Her face so pale. The severed throat gaping bloodlessly. Her good blue dress was twisted about on her body and her stockings were torn. She'd lost her shoes (*COTP* 229).

The images in the passage invoke many things: *Hamlet's* Ophelia and, in the contrast between her black hair and pale skin, the scene where Cole and Alejandra consummate their love. But, given the setting in Ciudad Juárez and the time in which the novel was written, it's also impossible to read this description of Magdalena's death without invoking the contemporary femicide tragedy in Juárez. Magdalena's brutally murdered (and certainly sexual abused) body, shoeless and abandoned, recalls the bodies of the hundreds, possibly more, brown women who have been violently murdered and whose bodies have been dumped in the desert and other areas surrounding the city since the early 1990s. The women targeted in these killings share common traits: they are "poor, slender women with long dark hair" and are often light-skinned (Biemann 114, in Sadowski-Smith). This incredible violence against Mexican and indigenous women in Juárez is accompanied by public and private discourses that accuse the dead and missing women of leading "loose" lives or out being prostitutes outright.¹⁶ In actuality, the majority of the Juárez victims are employed at the transnational assembly plants, or maquilas. The industrialization of the U.S.-Mexico border in general and the growing

presence of maquilas in particular has much to do with decades of U.S. pressure on Mexico to open and liberalize its economy so that the U.S. might benefit from lowered tariffs and access to cheap labor while ostensibly opening Mexico's markets to increased foreign investment, a supposedly positive change.¹⁷ Yet, these changes have come a great cost—a cost paid by Mexico's poor, indigenous, working classes, and women. As a woman of color and as a prostitute, Magdalena's body, like the contemporary bodies of the maquila workers who work the assembly line, is seen as disposable. Feminist scholars such as Fregoso and Biemann agree that feminicide in Juárez is inextricably linked to larger processes of global and national domination and control. As Fregoso writes, “[f]eminicide in Juárez makes evident the reality of overlapping power relations on gendered and racialized bodies as much as it clarifies the degree to which violence against women has been naturalized as method of social control” (Fregoso 2). By locating the cause of the violence in power relations, Fregoso exposes the numerous ways in which different groups operate to marginalize women of color: transnational corporations and the circuits of global capitalism, states, the rich and elite, whites, men and a corresponding national cultural of patriarchy. In this equation, Magdalena was doomed from the get-go. Like the Juárez victims, she is set against a patriarchal national culture that limits the roles and opportunities for women and caught between an imperializing nation and the object of its imperial desire, both of which depend on the marginalization, exploitation and/or elimination, and containment of women's bodies to succeed. Magdalena is caught in a transnational web of power relations that do not accommodate her presence.

When we read the Cole/Magdalena love story from Magdalena's perspective and remove her from the margins of the narrative, we can more clearly see how forces of domination and control are working in ways that are neither ambivalent nor vexed. In McCarthy's representation of Alejandra and Magdalena, both women's roles are constricted by violent stereotypes that dehumanize, marginalize, racialize and ultimately eliminate them. These stereotypes draw on powerful histories of the relationships not only between men and women, whites and non-whites, but also between the United States and Mexico along the international border. These stereotypes work to contain women of color in the service of consolidating power—racial, gender, national, and transnational. While the status of white masculinity might be up for grabs in McCarthy's world, he has done nothing radical or revisionary in his representations of Mexican women. Alejandra and Magdalena's stories demonstrate the extent to which women of color must be abjected in service of constructing larger stories about masculine desire in the borderlands. Reading the *Border Trilogy* through the eyes of Cole's Mexican lovers illuminates how both characters depend on a complicated web of real-world transactions that always already limit their roles and opportunities. A truly revisionist and decolonizing “Western” would recuperate the lost and silenced histories, voices, and experiences of heterosexual and queer Mexican women and Latinas—a process that Chicana historian Emma Pérez calls “the decolonial imaginary”—exposing the limits of white masculine and imperial desires while placing such alternative identities at the center, as opposed to the margins, of our narratives.

In discussing the extent to which McCarthy's novels contest or reify the imperializing desires of much of the “Western” genre, it's interesting to see how critical

responses to the *Border Trilogy* have fixated on a few passing, yet important, references to Native Americans in *All the Pretty Horses*. While Native people play a large role in McCarthy's infamously violent *Blood Meridian*, a novel that depicts the interracial violence along the U.S-Mexico border in 1849-50, they are a significantly smaller presence in the *Border Trilogy*. McCarthy mentions Indians in two short passages that frame the novel: at the very beginning and at the very end of the novel, John Grady Cole is riding alone in the West Texas countryside and either imagines or encounters Indians. As the novel opens, shortly after his grandfather's funeral, Cole rides out in the evening along an old Comanche trail:

At the hour he'd always choose when the shadows were long and the ancient road was shaped before him in the rose and canted light like a dream of the past where the painted ponies and the riders of that lost nation came down out of the north with their faces chalked and their long hair plaited and each armed for war which was their life [...] nation and ghost of a nation passing in a soft chorale across that mineral waste to darkness bearing lost to all history and all remembrance like a grail the sum of their secular and transitory and violent lives (*APH* 5).

In this passage, McCarthy clearly paints a heavily nostalgic and romanticized image of the Comanches, depicting them as "ghosts" of a nation doomed to pass out of history. The Comanches, as Cole imagines them, are long dead, fixed in time, and become symbols of a bygone era when the West was still wild. A few pages later in the novel, Cole's dying father makes the comparison explicit when he tells his son: "We're like the Comanches was two hundred years ago" (25-6). Cole's father means that that the world is changing in the aftermath of WWII and that cattle ranching has become an unprofitable venture, giving way to a growing industrialism. As many critics have observed, these two early passages establish the nostalgic, elegiac tone of the novel: John Grady Cole emerges as the last of a "dying breed" of cowboys, a hero born too late and destined to spend his life searching for a way of life that is irreconcilable with the changing, modern world.

McCarthy reinforces this idea in the novel's final pages when Cole has returned, briefly, to West Texas. As he's riding alone through the landscape he encounters a group of Indians who are "still" camped on the plains and McCarthy writes how "[t]hey stood and watched him pass and watched him vanish upon that landscape solely because he was passing. Solely because he would vanish" (301). The encounter revisits the earlier comparison between Cole and the Comanches and draws its strength from the assumption that readers will understand that, like the Indians, Cole will also surely "vanish" from the landscape and be forgotten from history. Both passages rely on pervasive stereotypes of Native people that freezes them into a romanticized past and "vanishes" them from history without accounting for their resistance, persistence, and survival in the modern world. Furthermore, in likening Cole to the Comanches, where Cole essentially takes on aspects of Native culture (i.e., a perceived tragic and transitory identity) McCarthy's hero performs a form of what Native scholar Shari Huhndorf has called "going Native." Adopting or emulating Native practices or identities, Huhndorf argues, "has served as an essential means of defining and regenerating racial whiteness and a racially inflected vision of Americanness" by "constructing white identities, naturalizing the conquest, and

inscribing various power relations within American culture” (Huhndorf 5-6). As a twentieth century phenomenon, going Native became a particular response to “widespread ambivalence about modernity and modernity’s ills” as well the military conquest of Native America (8). Going Native provides “self-justifying fantasies” about the conquest that conceal the violence of European America’s origins by creating representations of “Indianness” that portray them as noble, but doomed to pass away to make room for a superior race of European Americans. Thus, when McCarthy compares Cole to the Comanches because they are both “vanishing” ghosts of a bygone era, Cole is “going Native.” This problematic move collapses the important differences between the Indians and Cole, namely his position of power and privilege as a white man in the West. In longing for a past that he, indirectly of course, helped destroy, Cole experiences what Renato Rosaldo has called “imperialist nostalgia”—the nostalgia the colonizer feels for a pre-conquest world or a world where imperialists mourn what they have killed off and destroyed. To compare Cole to the Comanches disavows the racial difference between them and obscures the colonial and imperial history of white men in the winning of the West. By romanticizing the pre-conquest era and portraying the Indians as a noble but primitive race doomed to vanish, McCarthy naturalizes the violence of conquest as part of a necessary process of history. Embedded within the comparison are histories of power relations between Native and non-Native peoples, relations based on historical and on-going colonial conquest and violence that make it possible, even natural, for Cole “become” a Comanche but foreclose any opportunity for a Comanche to “become” Cole.

On their own, these passages trouble the limits of McCarthy’s “revisionist” potential, but they are essentially brief and passing moments within the overall narrative. However, the Comanche “episodes” have taken on a larger than life presence due to the extreme attention given to them by McCarthy scholars. At least thirteen of the major scholarly articles I surveyed mention one or both of the Comanche passages in a way that doesn’t question or critique their textual representation or the relationship to Cole that McCarthy poses (including José Limón’s brief chapter in *American Encounters*). In fact, the attention paid to these passages is so common that it becomes a *trope* within the critical canon, almost to the point of fetishization. It seems as if in order to write a critical piece on *All the Pretty Horses*, you have to open, close, or mention either of these two moments. Dianne C. Luce’s article, “The Vanishing World of Cormac McCarthy’s Border Trilogy,” accepts the comparison at face value, basing her reading of the world of *All the Pretty Horses* as a “vanishing” one because of the way in which McCarthy links Cole to the Comanches. In Gail Moore Morrison’s reading of the two passages, “the juxtaposition of the two sense evokes the history of a defeated and decimated people (and links John Grady with them through the image of the sun ‘coppering’ his face” (Morrison 180). Morrison’s commentary problematically refers to Native people as “defeated and decimated” and reinforces the erasure of differences between Cole and the Indians by arguing that the sunlight temporarily darkens his skin. Obviously, no amount of tanning will ever make Cole an Indian, not to mention how reductive it is to locate an essentialized understanding of “Indianness” in skin color. It would be one thing if such criticism invoked these passages in order to critically evaluate how race and power are working in McCarthy’s Indian representations, but all of the articles I surveyed accept the comparison for what it is and do not question the violent and imperializing tendencies

these passages engage in, going so far as to replicate and reinforce these tendencies within the body of McCarthy scholarship itself.

Despite Limón's claim that McCarthy has entered a "different moral and political place" with the publication of *All the Pretty Horses*, a critical reading that situates itself in the important transactions between race, gender, and power reveals the profound limitations of McCarthy's revisionist Western project. Although McCarthy clearly plays with the conventions of the genre and self-consciously evokes stereotypes and motifs from the Western genre occasionally in order to challenge, revise, or poke fun at them, his *Border Trilogy* ultimately does not offer a satisfying revisionist vision of U.S. Western and borderlands history, which would not only acknowledge the violence of conquest, but link violence to power across the intersecting axes of race and gender. When we shift our critical focus away from the white, male heroes and towards the *Trilogy's* abject—women of color and Native people—we expose the violent and imperializing projects still at work in the novels. John Grady Cole's most profound encounters with Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border occur through his relationships with Mexican women, demonstrating the extent to which his white masculinity still relies on encounters with racial and sexual difference and desires in order to assert its ambivalence. Even though Cole fails to secure happiness with Alejandra or Magdalena and dies at the hands of a jealous Mexican pimp, he still succeeds in "conquering" the two women and destroying or dooming them in the process. Cole's relationships with Alejandra and Magdalena are linked to a history of social relations and cultural representations that fix U.S. racial and political hegemony by portraying Mexicans as inferior and Mexican women as sexually available and disposable. McCarthy's novels illustrate how the coloniality of power works through intimate and sexual relationships in order to consolidate identities and positions of power. To read the *Border Trilogy* through the lens of power relations means exposing the complex web of transactions that make possible the various identities that are tested, redefined or eliminated within the violent world of McCarthy's borderlands.

If McCarthy's novels represent one articulation of the possibilities and limits of cross-racial relations on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands where ambivalent white masculinities are defined through the relationships with Native people and Mexican women, the music of Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers offers another alternative, still ambivalent, but more directly engaged with a political process of decolonizing hearts and minds through shared art forms, such as music.

¹ For a thorough recap of McCarthy's personal and literary history up to the publication of *All the Pretty Horses*, see the introduction to *Perspectives on Cormac McCarthy*, Arnold and Luce, eds.

² There is a curious divide between journalists who review McCarthy and scholars who critique him—reviewers often express anti-intellectual objections to McCarthy's perceived high-literary pretensions (see, for example Michiko Kakutani's 1998 review of

COP for the NY Times) while scholars often rationalize and celebrate his problematic idiosyncrasies.

³ For example, in all six of the major edited anthologies of McCarthy criticism to date, less than five articles discuss gender or mention Cole's two Mexican female lovers as more than a passing reference.

⁴ Limón's brief section on *All the Pretty Horses* in *American Encounters* is one of the most significant discussions of McCarthy by any ethnic studies, borderlands or Chicano/a studies scholar (Cooper Alarcón's is another).

⁵ See "México para los Mexicanos" in *Myth, Legend, Dust*.

⁶ See Busby (2000) in *Myth, Legend, Dust*, Wallach, ed; Soto (2002) in *Literature and Ethnicity in the Cultural Borderlands*, Benito and Manzanos, eds.; John Blair, "Mexico and the Borderlands in Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*." Additionally, Mark A. Easton's "Dis(re)membered Bodies: Cormac McCarthy's Border Fiction" reads McCarthy more positively as a "post-national" and "hybrid" contact zone, but is overly enthusiastic about McCarthy's ability to transcend the old traps of the Western genre.

⁷ See Molly McBride, "From Mutilation to Penetration: Cycles of Conquest in *Blood Meridian* and *All the Pretty Horses*" and Megan Riley McGilchrist, "The Adversarial Feminine in McCarthy's Western Landscapes" in *Uncharted Territories*, Chollier, ed.

⁸ Limón has an excellent discussion of Cole's Mexican cultural affiliations in *American Encounters*.

⁹ See Gail Moore Morrison's "All the Pretty Horses: John Grady Cole's Expulsion from Paradise" in *Perspectives*.

¹⁰ See Diane C. Luce's "'When You Wake': John Grady Cole's Herosim in *All the Pretty Horses*" in *Sacred Violence*, Wallach, ed.

¹¹ For a thorough account of the history of U.S. imperial activities in Mexico and their corresponding cultures (including how imperialism shaped how Mexico and Mexicans were represented in the U.S. cultural imagination), see Gilbert A. González, *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, & Mexican Immigrants, 1880—1930*.

¹² The second novel, *The Crossing*, introduces the character of Billy Parham, who will reappear as Cole's best bud in *COTP*. The novel follows Billy's adolescent adventures as he crosses and recrosses the U.S.-Mexico border on a series of quests. Women, of any kind, are essentially absent from this narrative.

¹³ See Edwin T. Arnold's, "First Thoughts on *Cities of the Plain*" in *Perspectives*.

¹⁴ Her name is clearly meant to invoke Mary Magdalene, the New Testament prostitute who reforms and becomes a close follower of Jesus Christ and was the first to discover Him risen after the Crucifixion. Interestingly, when Cole and Magdalena first converse, he assumes that "Magdalena" is her "nombre profesional" (professional name), but Magdalena assures him that it's her "nombre propio" (her real name) (*COTP* 67).

¹⁵ When Cole and Magdalena first spend the night together, McCarthy writes how Cole "[...] gathered her black hair in his hand and spread it across his chest like a blessing" (*COTP* 70).

¹⁶ See Fregoso, 10—15. Also Ursula Biemann, "Performing the Border: On Gender, Transnational Bodies, and Technology" in *Globalization on the Line*, Sadowski-Smith, ed.

Five

¡Americano!: Roger Clyne and rock n' roll *en la frontera*

All musical listening is a form of confrontation, of encounter, of the meeting of worlds and meanings, when identity is made self-aware and is, therefore, menaced through its own interrogation.

--Josh Kun¹

When I first heard the music of Roger Clyne as a teenager, on a mixed cassette while cruising the streets of southern California in an old Toyota, Clyne was frontman for a band called The Refreshments, notorious in the Tempe, AZ college scene and briefly famous for their radio pop single, “Banditos.” Since The Refreshments’ first indie release album in 1994, Roger Clyne has become a staple on the independent music scene in Arizona and the U.S. Southwest. The Refreshments disbanded in 1997, but Roger Clyne and his long-time friend and drummer for The Refreshments, P.H. Naffah, quickly formed a new band—Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers. The Peacemakers, known as RCPM to fans, released their first album, *Honky Tonk Union*, in 1999. The band has since undergone several transformations—a series of bass players and, recently, a new lead guitarist. Yet, throughout the band’s various permutations, one thing has remained constant: Clyne’s determination to bring to life, through his music, a loud, insurgent, and compassionate testimony to our profound interconnectedness as humans in a violent world. While Clyne’s music may occasionally lapse into happy stereotypes and romanticized depictions of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, his representation of a transnational musical utopia, including the incorporation of Mexican musical traditions and Spanish language in his music and characters who refuse stable national or cultural identities, combined with his passionate advocacy for “peace, love, liberty, dignity, humanity” represents an alternative cultural politics on the border (*Leave an Open Door: A Look Inside ¡Americano!*. Dir. Jason Boot.). Like Cormac McCarthy’s novels, Clyne’s music posits an ambivalent white identity for borderlands subjects. Yet while McCarthy’s ambivalent white masculinities depend upon racial and imperial desires to construct their meaning, the transnational identity Clyne creates is less hyper-masculinized and violent, and more inclusive and vulnerable. Clyne’s music reflects a new form of cultural politics that embraces the in-betweenness of transnationalism and demonstrates the imperializing limits of ‘nation’ and ‘citizen.’ For Clyne, such categories ultimately fail to capture the complexity of the human relationships that Clyne’s music celebrates as compassionate alternatives to violence and disconnection.

Roger Clyne’s earnest, yet roughed up and passionate voice often masks a clever and sophisticated use of wordplay and form in his songwriting. Clyne’s lyrics satisfyingly subvert listeners’ expectations in playful and self-referential ways. His semantic subversion is at its best in songs such as “Broken Record” off The Refreshments’ second studio album, *The Bottle & Fresh Horses*: “So I took a walk around my neighborhood/ To get you off my mind like I knew that I ought to,” or “So

you took another guy on that Caribbean cruise/ While I stayed home and cried in my bottle of pills.” In both cases, Clyne sets up listeners for a predictable rhyme (“should” with “neighborhood” and “booze” with “cruise”) only to substitute unexpected non-rhyming words. Clyne’s wordplay calls attention to the act of songwriting—a writerly move that juxtaposes linguistic complexity with deceptively simple pop guitar chords and easy percussion in this upbeat song.

Perhaps the most important wordplay is, of course, in the name of the band itself. “Peacemaker” was the nickname given to the Colt .45, manufactured in 1873. The Colt .45 became known as the gun that “won the West.” As historians such as Patricia Limerick, Ron Takaki, Ramón Gutierrez, Ned Blackhawk, and many others have proven, the “winning of the West” consisted of a series of violent confrontations between white settlers and the various non-white groups they encountered. The “peace” the Colt .45 made was an uneasy one, and came at a very high cost. Clyne, who holds a degree in Anthropology and Psychology from the University of Arizona, knows the history of the Peacemaker and consciously invokes the term in order to re-define it. Clyne and the band draw upon the violent history of the west symbolized by the Colt .45 not to erase or re-write histories of violence, but to acknowledge them and offer an alternative vision for their listeners. Although Clyne’s songwriting engages legends and symbols from the stories of the Wild West frontier cultures out of which the Colt .45 gained its notoriety, Clyne and his band believe that their role as musicians is to advocate for peace and understanding through shared art forms that cross the borders of cultures. Or, as Clyne puts it, to move beyond passion to compassion (Clyne “Personal Interview”).

Popular music is also a socially symbolic cultural text. Song lyrics tell stories about who we are, who we’ve been, or who we want to be. Although the aural, musical elements of a song are crucial, it’s the combination of the lyrics—the words and stories—and the music that creates a song. Josh Kun has called music’s function “utopian” in its ability to create not only an aural experience, but a “space that we can enter into, encounter, move around in, inhabit, be safe in, learn from...” (Kun 2). Music gives us space to encounter and confront ourselves and our difference—we hear ourselves in our favorite songs and come to know and build our identities through our relationships with music. Yet, because as Kun, Paul Gilroy, Eric Lott and others have noted, music constantly travels, crossing and recrossing the borders of cultures, music is also a space of difference.² Music “is always from somewhere else and is always en route to somewhere else. It is always post-whatever context or circumstance defines it. It has always the potential to defy you, move beyond you, be something you never thought it could be. It is made of difference and speaks to difference” (20). Kun calls the analysis of music and lyrics an “audiotopia.” Audiotopias have “a dual function: to focus on the space of music itself and the different space and identities it juxtaposes within itself, and to focus on the social spaces, geographies, and identities that music can enable, reflect, and prophecy” (23). As a result, music can serve a utopian function, reflecting outward to suggest a place where difference is not essentialized or erased, but, as Gilroy argues about black music across the African diaspora, refracts the multiple meanings of culture and identity and the transnational circuits out of which they are produced and reproduced.

Similar to Kun, I emphasize the effects of the music and lyrics on the listener, but without forgetting that music is also a performance both by those who create it and those who blast it from their cassette players, CD players, iPods and car stereos. Clyne’s music

engages in a complex re-mapping of hemispheric American space, creating cultural spaces that cannot be consolidated, in both contesting and reifying stereotypes, and in the new possibilities for a transnational cultural politics it offers. While Kun's audiotopias can be found all over the American hemisphere, Clyne's music is deeply rooted to land out which it's created—the geography of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Even though Clyne's borderlands might be transnational, global (even, to some extent, universal), their scenes of engagement are local, homegrown, and inextricable from the American Southwest. Undoubtedly invested in the construction of certain social, cultural, and artistic spaces and inevitably linked to a transnational set of coordinates, Clyne's music is not only spatial, but also temporal. In the music, we encounter history and tradition, continuity and change. Clyne welcomes a world where violence and hate are replaced with peace and love at the same time he longs for a romanticized pre-modern time when things were simple, less complicated. In his music, the U.S.-Mexican borderlands become the chronotope where his ambivalent whiteness is performed, questioned, re-mixed. At times, Mexico becomes Clyne's idyllic, romantic escape from the pressures and hassles of contemporary life in the United States, where "everything's slowing down, flowing counterclockwise." This desire to flee out of time and space to Mexico competes with Clyne's desire to stand and fight in order to change the world, progress, and evolve. "Out here on the border," as he sings in the song "Interstate," Clyne doesn't find easy reconciliations, just an honest commitment to music as a tool to bridge divides and unite people in peace and mutual understanding.

If, as Kun argues, music in America is the story of ethno-racial difference and nation formation and de-formation (Kun 19), Clyne's music intervenes in these processes. In his transnational rock where American rock n' roll, southern and country western honky tonk, and Mexican norteño music collide, Clyne's America is a place and time defined by border crossings where categories of belonging and identity are necessarily multiple, messy, unfinished. In a review for *All Music Guide*, music journalist Thom Jurek writes that Clyne delivers his message "into the red sunset of an American mythical identity that's become a confounded shadow of its former self—not only on the world stage, but in its own backyard" ("¡Americano! 4.5 Stars (Out of 5)"). Clyne confronts the very fabric of American mythology, from both sides of the border, at once ripping it apart at the already-fraying seams while also mourning the lost simplicity and passion of those ideals. The United States does not disappear entirely in Clyne's music, but neither is it aggressively reaffirmed in the face of Mexican difference. Clyne, who is aware of the privileges of his race and gender, confronts the racial difference of the borderlands with an open heart and an open mind. His troubadourish, love-conquers-all ideology may threaten to oversimplify important differences between people, but Clyne's music dreams of days when political borders have become obsolete and humanity has united in common cause to fight injustice and celebrate life. In its most utopian moments, his music subtly questions the ability of 'the nation' to contain and regulate the mobile allegiances of its people. Thus, Clyne's music looks outside the boundaries of the nation, which often exists merely to constrain his characters, and towards a more utopian transnational space where music unites people across the borders of race, class, gender, citizenship, and musical taste.

“The Living Frontier”

If Clyne’s music is inextricable from the geography of the borderlands, it’s also inextricable from the life of Roger Clyne. To talk about his life story is to talk about the themes and images of the music itself. Clyne was born in Tucson, Arizona, the son of a schoolteacher and a cowboy/rancher. He started writing music at the age of five, participating in school musicals and choirs (Brackpool). He spent a large part of his childhood on a ranch, where he worked along side Mexicans and Chicanos and learned to speak Spanish from them (Lustig). He told me:

some of my earliest recollections are out there visiting my grandparent’s ranch, which my father lived on and grew up and I learned to do all sorts of great stuff like saddle a horse and herd cattle and basically all the cowboy skills that people need to learn on a ranch, I learned early on and I remember a lot of times working with what were probably then migrant workers [...] and that’s where I learned a lot, uh, well a little Spanish, probably the real guttural stuff when I was kid. My roots, you know, go deep there, in that land where the grass and cacti meet and that’s what I remember (Clyne “Personal Interview”).

It was socializing and working on a ranch with migrant Mexican workers that influenced Clyne’s understanding of the U.S.-Mexico border and the relationships between different people in the borderlands. He learned, he said, that his geography could be a place where racial interaction was more of a “coalescing:”

That’s what it always was, you know. I never thought...I never really had an us/them distinction. A U.S./Mexico... there was no national identity that I understood to be different in the borderlands there where I was growing up there. It was different...we’re all just people and there was this line we had to cross and that thing is still there. And it’s not been until recently that I paid any attention to that line until I had to start dealing with trade issues and bringing a show down to Mexico and acknowledge that there’s a national line, work permits and all sorts of stuff like that. But I didn’t grow up with an us/them distinction.

On the one hand, Clyne is certainly overly idealistic and dismissive of the international boundary, which has real and profound effects on the every day lives of people. He doesn’t account for the difference in power between himself and the migrant workers he worked alongside. While Clyne doesn’t acknowledge his racial and class privilege, these early relationships did play a formative role in how Clyne understands race and cross-racial relationships. By sharing work, stories, music, and language with the Mexican vaqueros, Clyne learned that love and friendship represent some of the only truly “colorblind” relationships.

Clyne’s early conception of the borderlands as having “no national identity” recalls certain post-national hybridity theories, like Guillermo Gomez-Peña’s, which

celebrate the demise of national borders and national identities in favor of more mobile, global ones.³ Certainly one of the limitations of Clyne's work is his tendency to lapse into liberal humanist ideologies of a colorblind world where our divine connections as humans trump any "us/them distinction." Yet, Clyne's ability to apprehend the world through interconnectedness when faced with racial and ethnic difference is a profound departure from the racist and nativist responses that have defined and continue to define cross-racial interaction in the United States. That Clyne learned respect, and not derision, from his interracial childhood experiences gives us reason to hope that racial violence is not inevitable and that those in positions of privilege are not necessarily doomed to repeat the sins of history.

Specifically, listening to the music the Mexicans were playing on the ranch and in their cars were early influences on Clyne's development as a musician. He heard plenty of Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Hank Williams and "all the cowboy perennial," but he also remembers listening to a lot of *norteño* music:

I didn't understand the words, even sometimes now, but I speak, *como niño*⁴ [...] Um, there was always the mariachi music in there and I loved--I was always fascinated, and still am to this day, how mariachi sounds the best when it's breaking the speakers. It probably had an influence on how I present our music, it's really too loud...I can't present my music without being passionate about it. And now in my career I've gone beyond passion to compassion, which is a really fun road for me. I enjoy it very much. But I remember specifically wondering how long the speakers could last when Jose's got it cranked up it like that; it was just really cool. [...]so I grew up on *ranchera* music and the mariachi stuff that was around and cowboy perennial and country western kind of stuff and it's all in there, I'm sure you can hear it in the storytelling and I'd love to incorporate more ethno-mariachi, horn, shakers and stuff in our music.

Instead of disavowing or rejecting difference, Mexican music and its corresponding racial-national codes play a constitutive role in the development of Clyne's personal and artistic identity. Yet, the story is also a familiar one in the history of American music—a story, as Eric Lott has put it, of love and theft. Just as the history of American rock n' roll hinges upon the appropriation of black musical innovations by successful white musicians, critics of Clyne accuse him of appropriating Mexican cultural forms and using them to his advantage. George Lipsitz argues that even though this kind of appropriation may not be a maliciously intended conscious act, it contributes to sustaining white privilege. Because, historically, white musicians have indulged in a "romanticism" that separates real life from art and aesthetics, it's been easy for white musicians to appropriate aspects of minority experiences for their benefit without having to acknowledge the material conditions that create very different opportunities for whites and nonwhites in the U.S. (Lipsitz 120). Art, according to Lipsitz, is not above or outside "the collective, material, and political dimensions of our lives" (129). Thus, it's important to always keep in mind the racial privilege that enables Clyne's music, even as he disavows this privilege for a more utopian identity.

When I asked Clyne how he responds to critics who accuse him of cultural appropriation, he argued that he'd rather been seen as an "advocate" as opposed to an "adversary." He said, "I consider myself someone who's involved in advocacy and I'm not there to exploit. [...] There's diversity, which is great [...]--here's the cruel paradox of the modern world. We have to celebrate diversity at the same time engineer or steward unity" (Clyne "Personal Interview"). Thus, Clyne's choices to incorporate Mexican musical forms into his music results not only from his exposure to the music at an early age, but also from his conviction that peace can be achieved through shared art forms, such as music. He believes "our ability for compassion, tolerance, benevolence is what creates culture."

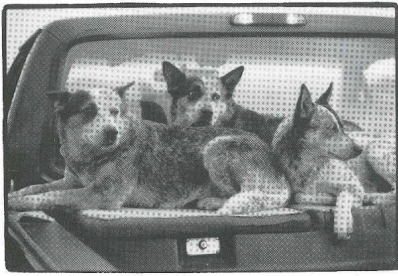
Clyne's music, because of its multiple influences, makes it hard to place for critics. It's not quite country, not quite American "roots" folk music, not Mexican *norteño*, but it's got enough regional sound to make it distinct from classic rock 'n roll. In *Paste Magazine* Thom Jurek put it nicely when he wrote that the band seems "to exist in the seams between rock n' roll's tough rootsy past, its desperate present and uncertain future" ("Still Burning"). Patrick Ferucci of the *New Haven Register* called the band, "More straightforward than cow-punk and more complex and distorted than typical American roots rock" ("What It Feels Like"). The music's resistance to being located within one single musical genre—it's musical border crossing—not only reflects Clyne's various musical influences throughout his life, but also a conscious attention to how the U.S.-Mexico border functions as both a physical location of personal rootedness and as a metaphor for dynamic culture. Wherever the music may travel as it crosses borders, both literal and figurative, it's undeniable that Clyne's music begins in the landscape of the southwest. "Here on the fringes," he told Jurek, "the music expresses something about the way we live everyday" ("Still Burning"). Clyne celebrates the "unique physical ecosystem" and "the mixture of colors and textures and sounds when American and Mexican cultures come together," he told Steve Wildsmith of the *Tennessee Daily Times* ("Roger Clyne"). That "ecosystem" connects Clyne to the land he grew up in, a connection that takes on a spiritual importance in his music. "I can't separate myself from here," he said to Wildsmith, "and that's what I tend to write about—a shot glass, a wooden bar, a smoking gun [...]. I was born out here, and though the desert soil is thick and rocky, my roots grow deep. I grew up with landscape in my heart and my eyes ever since I could see the light." Clyne told me that at some point in his career he had to confront himself to try and understand why his music kept going back to characters, experiences, and sounds from the border: "I learned that's where I come from and those are the characters I sing about, inside and out, all come from those borderlands, both metaphorically and literally. And it's a great place...and so now I get to, in my art and music, I get to use where I come from, the physical location...as a good metaphor for talking about crossing lines, institutional or otherwise [...]" (Clyne "Personal Interview"). Clyne's music transforms the specificities of landscape into transcendent creeds. "Speaking anthropologically," he said in the *Orange Country Register*, "our central mountain is Arizona, is the Southwest, is Mexico. That's where our mythology stems from, but the stories, the characters, the heroes, the villains, could be anytime" (Harbrecht). Clyne sings the landscape he knows, but "the landscape of the human heart is everywhere" (Brown).

The music rests uneasily (but provocatively) on this central tension between the physical reality of landscape and the fluidity of metaphor. Clyne claims that the border “is more of an idea than a thing, and people and ideas and spirits flow fluidly back and forth” (Wildsmith). In other interviews, he referred to Mexico as “the landscape of the heart” or “the living frontier” and a place where “there are still banditos around and potholes in the road and unpredicted lunar eclipses, and everyone who goes there comes back most enriched and with adventurous tales to tell” (Armstrong; Orf, “Peacemakers celebrate”; Wildsmith). Within a romanticized storytelling tradition, the border becomes an imagined chronotope from which Clyne explores how the international border “doesn’t divide a culture; it defines it...if I have any influence on artists of the world, I want to be able to break down barriers...so I use the border as a metaphor quite a bit” (Wiser). As Clyne and his music have matured, metaphors of border crossing have become an increasingly vital part of Clyne’s spiritual worldview: “we need to move back and forth across our borders until they finally disappear, but there’s a spiritual thing in it [...]I think unity is a divine concept, I think it’s truly a divine concept” (Clyne “Personal Interview”). While Clyne continually asserts that diversity is a good thing, he’s passionate about respecting and acknowledging the qualities that unite people as humans because he believes unity connects us to the spiritual and divine. Thus, Clyne asks, “how do we maintain diversity and respect for divine and at the same time rid ourselves of the things that keep us from unity? It’s a good question and I’m trying to work through it.” As part of that work, Clyne hopes his music invites listeners to ask the same hard questions: “I don’t want to stop having fun and drinking tequila and enjoying life on earth,” he said, “however, my art is currently—not explicitly, not overtly creating unity—but opening my self and hopefully the listener to the possibility of it in all aspects of life.”

“”All the Pretty Horses Come Runnin to Her”

The Peacemakers’ first two studio albums, *Honky Tonk Union* (1999) and *Sonoran Hope and Madness* (2002), develop the themes and images from the borderlands that Clyne first explored with *The Refreshments* and that become more fully synthesized in their third album, *¡Americano! Honky Tonk Union*, as suggested by the album’s title, reflects Clyne’s cowboy past and a blue collar/working class ethos. The album opens with “Beautiful Disaster,” a love anthem filled with big rigs, diesel fumes, and the open highways of the American West. Subsequent tracks follow lovelorn cowboys, “rodeo clowns,” and their “3-legged dogs” through dive bars, pick up trucks, and pastures where they make heroic stands for love and lament their losses through the bottom of shot glasses. Pictures in the liner notes show dogs in the back of a pickup truck, horses, and band members posed against the shells of old, busted up trucks and walking through fenced in pastures—all the “cowboy perennial” images of honky tonk music.

1. beautiful disaster - ... een La Salvadera, Oh sweet catastrophe, sss siren song, our captain says there's nothing wrong. As I crash my ship upon your shore A mad drunk and reckless troubader... 2. city girls - ..se come on whiskey sour. Come around and lay me low. She's spending her nights under city lights, and I'm sure she ain't alone..



3. easy... I den't smoke no more, but I'll smoke with you. I den't drink no more, so let's just have one or two.. 4. honky tonk union - They honytonked in a pick up truck. Theyr seme hay in the bed so that they might stay up all night, and laugh with the stars and the moonlight...

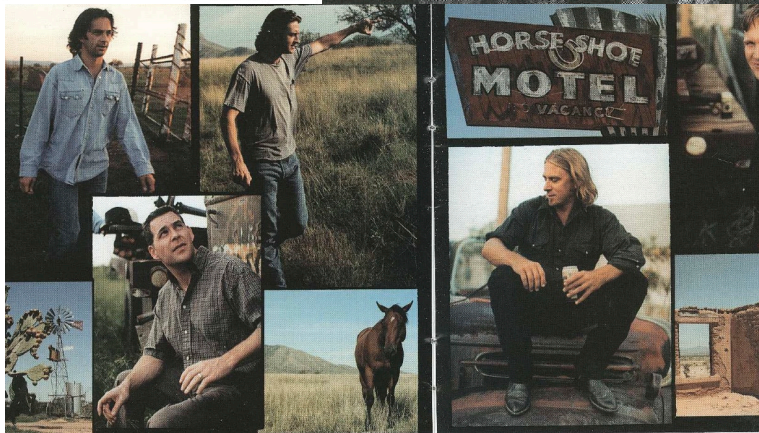


Figure 1 (Source: RCPM *Honky Tonk Union*)

Although *HTU* maintains a solid rock n' roll base throughout, the guitars have more twang and the ballads both engage and poke fun at the traditions of the country western love ballad. The popular track "Jack vs. Jose" narrates the regional culture clash the hero finds himself in when he tries to order a shot of tequila at a saloon in Memphis. The bartender kindly informs him: "Sonny, we don't use that junk round here for nothing, except, well maybe thinning our paint." Or apologetic hero claims "the dusty Mexico borderlands" as his stomping grounds--"born and raised in Arizona, dontcha know"--and declines the whiskey saying, "Me and my friends be more likely to be found drinking what they serve down in hell." The refined southern gentlemen in "white-felt Stetson hats and gatorskin boots" sipping whiskey at the bar take offense to the hero's crude ways, and a bar brawl almost ensues. Clyne finishes the song with a long bilingual apology (usually improvised at live shows) in which he code-switches between Spanish and English proverbs ("A Dios rogando y con el mazo dando,⁵ Katie, bar the door, pass the gunpowder and praise the Lord [...] Cuando A Roma fueras, haz lo que vieres or when in Rome, do as the Romans do, and when the barbarians arrive here at your gate, treat us not with fear and hate for we come not to conquer or be rude, but raise a glass and say, *salud!*" is a typical excerpt). Clyne's speaker shares a language, geography, and liquor preference with Mexicans, while the well-dressed (presumably white) southern gentlemen are defamiliarized and hostile. Thus, the song uses liquor as a cultural marker

to suggest that regional cultures, not necessarily racial-ethnic identities, define people in the greater transAmerican geographies of the south/west.

HTU also contains Clyne's most popular love ballad, *Green & Dumb*. This waltz opens with a reference to Cormac McCarthy: "Daisies stand up on their tiptoes and all the pretty horses come runnin to her." Similar to the novel the lyrics reference, the song's main character is a young ranch hand who falls in love with the woman he works for, and while he watches her stealthily from the "bunkhouse," he laments that he's too "green and dumb" to be her lover. Thus, the song's narrative trajectory follows McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*, but without the explicit racial desire and violence (Clyne's characters are not racially identified and the song is more about unrequited love than humanity's inherent brutality). The song's $\frac{3}{4}$ time creates a nostalgic tone and the lonely, plaintive guitar chords that open the song and preface each chorus reinforce the song's prevailing mood of regret and longing. But while McCarthy's nostalgia in *All the Pretty Horses* seems to be for a pre-lapsarian world where men could be men and progress hadn't corrupted masculinity, Clyne's nostalgia in "Green and Dumb" is more innocent—the world the song mourns is a world where love is pure and conquers all. Clyne's sampling of McCarthy is typical of his storytelling, which turns stories of violence into stories where love and compassion consistently triumph over humanity's darker side.

"Gringo Corrido"

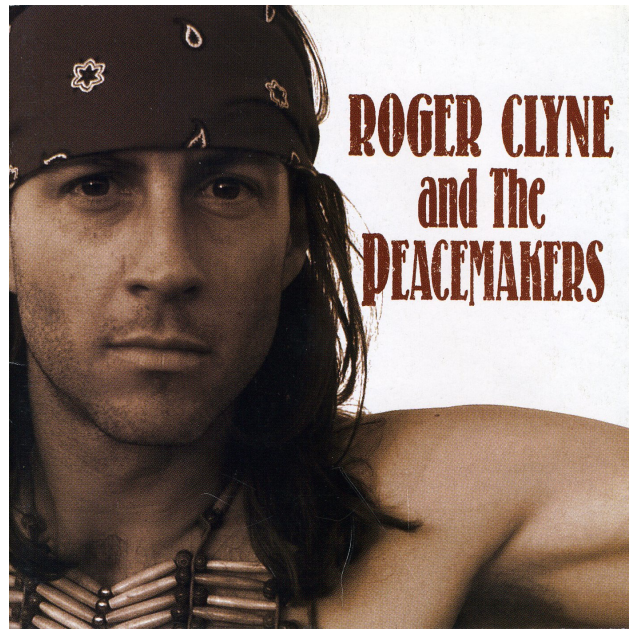


Figure 2 (Source: RCPM *Sonoran Hope and Madness*)

Sonoran Hope and Madness, as the title track announces, is a celebration of landscape and a critique of what Clyne identifies as man's dissociation with nature (Clyne "Personal Interview"). It's a landscape that offers both hope and madness to the characters who populate the stories the album's songs bring to life. Madness takes a variety of forms—in "Buffalo" it's the confusion colonialism creates for a Native American warrior, and in "Ashes of San Miguel" it's the madness of grief as the result of

the tragic death of Clyne's best friend. Hope, as always in Clyne's music, is embodied in romantic love and community. More than any other album, *SHAM* invokes icons, imagery, and voices from Native American culture. The album's cover consists of a close-up photograph of a bandana-clad and shirtless Clyne, his hair falling around his shoulders, wearing a bead necklace. His naked left arm is outstretched, reminiscent of the famous picture of Jim Morrison on the cover of The Doors *Best Of* album. The reference to Jim Morrison is not accidental, as Morrison had a well-known fascination with Native American culture. In "Buffalo," Clyne appropriates the voice of a Native American warrior confronting the changes wrought by colonialism—"trust no more the forked tongues / of the great chiefs in Washington." The warrior promises to "learn to speak the old language" and "fall apart/ from the world of machines / regain my feet and my pounding heart." As this lonely warrior disavows "the hardtack, sugar, or the coffee or the bacon fat" and "won't trade [his] pony for the iron rail / no freeway stack for the game trail," he takes refuge in the "green grass, runaway roans" and buffalo that will deliver him from "some invisible thing" which has become the enemy. The song emphasizes Clyne's point about reconnecting with the land, a connection that Clyne sees as vital and sacred. Although "Buffalo's" heart-wrenching sadness and the wandering notes of the lead guitar speak truly to the destruction of native culture, the song's images celebrate "tradition" in a way that threatens to romanticize Native American culture and celebrate everything pre-colonial as pure and true and denounce modernity as corrupt. This static representation locks Native American culture and identity in a distant past and makes no room for change and adaptation. In addition, using a Native American voice to comment on our modern dissociation with land facilitates the stereotype of indigenous peoples as more inherently "closer to the land" than others, a stereotype that ultimately flattens the complexity and diversity of native experiences and identities. In his appropriation of a Native voice, Clyne is "going native."⁶ In using a Native voice to mourn man's disconnection from the land as the result of a modernizing world, Clyne is envisioning an idealized version of himself. His Native American speaker/subject embodies the values and virtues that have been lost in the Western(izing) world. As a cultural performance, "Buffalo" actually reveals more about the status of an ambivalent white/colonial identity. Similar to the way that McCarthy and McCarthy critics align John Grady Cole with the "vanishing world" of the Comanche Indians, Clyne's "Buffalo" mourns a pre-conquest world—the "sadness that drives the wrath"—without explicitly acknowledging the role that race and colonization have played in transforming modern society. Critics like Huhndorf and Renato Rosaldo posit that such masking speaks to a deep ambivalence within Western society about their role in colonization, an ambivalence that actually plays a constitutive role in a modern, white (Western) identity.⁷ Although Clyne might be more sensitive to the operations of race and power in history than someone like McCarthy, songs like "Buffalo" reveal his occasional tendency to lapse into romantic and romanticizing stereotypes that disavow racial-colonial violence and power differences in order to recapture or celebrate a spiritual unity between peoples and the landscapes they inhabit.

The most intriguing song on *SHAM* is "The Ballad of Lupe Montosa," Clyne's interpretation of the Mexican folk border ballad, or *corrido*. A traditional *corrido* narrates the epic struggles of a revolutionary male hero (usually of humble origins) who, as José Limón says, must defend "[...] his political and civil human rights, and by

extension those of his community, against social tyranny and oppression” (Limón 104). These struggles are almost always staged along the U.S.-Mexico border and often center on border violence (for example, Gregorio Cortez’s pursuit by the evil *rinches*, or Texas Rangers, in the famous “Ballad of Gregorio Cortez”). The *corrido* has received extensive scholarly attention since the great proto-Chicano scholar Américo Paredes published *With His Pistol In His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero* in 1958. *With His Pistol In His Hand* chronicles the history of the well-known “Ballad of Gregorio Cortez” and has become a definitive text on the *corrido* form. Subsequent scholarship by John McDowell, Maria Herrera-Sobek, José Limón, and José David Saldívar continue social analyses of the significance and influence of the *corrido* on Chicano and regional borderlands cultures, while studies of contemporary revisions of the traditional ballad, such as the narco-*corrido* (songs about drug trafficking) bear witness to the *corrido*’s enduring legacy as an integral part of borderlands culture.⁸

Paredes argues that the *corrido* emerges out of various other ballad traditions, primarily the Spanish *décima*, but has a history unique to the conflict and cultural confluence of the Lower Rio Grande border region. In Paredes’ account, the events surrounding the Mexican Revolution helped create the epic *corrido* form that was the dominant until around 1930, when commercialization led to what Paredes saw as “fall” or “decline” of the true folk ballad (*Folklore* 138-39). The circumstances of the Revolution established many of the *corrido*’s themes. Paredes notes that “the outlaws against the Díaz regime were the first important *corrido* heroes of Greater Mexico” because they were symbols of class struggle (*Pistol* 143). Thus, *corridos*’ heroes are typically noble proletariats struggling against the tyrannies of the ruling classes and political elites. In the *corrido*, the outlaw-hero, according to Paredes, gets re-cast as a peaceful man defending his rights against the injustices of law enforcement or corrupt authority figures. Although the Revolution ushered in a “golden age” for the border ballad, Paredes notes that “the Revolution was never as important a theme as border conflict [...] The *corrido* of border conflict assumes its most characteristic form when its subject deals the with conflict between the Border Mexican and Anglo-Texan” (147). As in “Gregorio Cortez,” Anglo law enforcement, such as the villainous Texas Rangers, is the primary force against which the ballad hero is pitted.

The historical trajectory of the *corrido* form and the changes it has undergone through the twentieth century are helpful in understanding how Clyne revises the border ballad in “The Ballad of Lupe Montosa.” Clyne’s ballad is by no means a true *corrido*, but it undeniably reflects the Greater Mexico ballad tradition, even to the extent in which Clyne re-visions the form for his own aesthetic purposes. Like the true *corrido*, “The Ballad of Lupe Montosa” can be read and heard as a social text that hinges on conflict, illegal activity, and tragedy. The song narrates the death of “poor ol’ Lupe” at the hands of an anonymous “they” as punishment for being a bootlegger:

(chorus)

Well they shot poor ol’ Lupe Montosa
they gunned him down up at the Bootlegger Spring
they stole his only silver ring
they wrecked all his distillin’ things
and made a widow of his sweet lil’ wife Rosa

The reference to the Bootlegger Spring and the illegal distillery locates the historical moment of the ballad in the Prohibition Era. Temperance movements in rural America were widespread as early as the turn of the century, while official Prohibition began in January of 1920 and lasted through 1933. Thus, the historical frame of “Lupe Montosa” corresponds with the rise of the *corrido*. The term “bootlegger” referred not only to someone who manufactured illegal spirits, but was also used to describe someone who smuggled booze across the Canadian or Mexican borders into the United States. Such outlaws and smugglers were popular heroes of border ballads that idealized and romanticized smuggling, according to Paredes (*Folklore* 24). Folklore along the border, he argues, had long valorized smugglers like the tequilero (someone who smuggled Mexican tequila into Texas). Through the *corrido*, “The smuggler [...] and the border-conflict hero became identified with each other in the popular mind” (27).

The relationship between the smuggler, or tequilero, and border conflict came from the stereotype of the smuggler who risked his life against the Anglo law enforcement. Thus because the activities of the smuggler involved an intercultural dimension, “they became a kind of coda to the *corridos* of border conflict” (28). Although Lupe’s murderers are not identified as either Mexican or white in Clyne’s ballad, their seemingly unprovoked violence makes it easy to sympathize with their law-breaking victim. As Paredes and Saldívar have noted, one of the most important ways in which the *corrido* functions as social critique is how the outlaw hero engages listener sympathies, thus drawing us into a whole “world of sociopoetic or subaltern myth” (Saldívar 62). The listener, who may or may not share the same background with the hero, becomes momentarily aligned with him, seeing the world through his eyes. From this perspective, the listener views the world through the gaze of the subaltern—a position that has the power to shift consciousness. And “poor ol’ Lupe” is nothing if not sympathetic. Because the killers stole Lupe’s “only silver ring,” he emerges as a proletariat hero whose plight represents the plight of the community. He’s cast not as a lawbreaker, but as a victim of brutality. The presence of his “sweet lil’ wife Rosa” and, in the next stanza, his son Lupito, are meant to downplay Lupe’s illicit lifestyle and render him as a member of a community, a family man on whom innocent and defenseless figures depended and who’ve now been left without protection and support.

Here Clyne’s ballad takes an interesting twist on the traditional form. Instead of narrating the slaughter of the brutal law enforcers at the hands of a proud avenger such as “Gregorio Cortez,” Clyne’s ballad rallies the community around the peaceful protests of a priest and lets irony do the avenging:

they found an old curandero to bury the mescalero
while his family cried for thirteen nights and days
and when Lupito asked his momma why
his papa had to go and die
she said, ‘Dios works in the most loco of ways.’”

and so the Padre tried to settle down
the angry mob that’d gathered ‘round
he said, “Let no more tears flow, let no more blood spill...”

people, doncha take revenge...in time the Lord will surely avenge this crime
for Lupe and the untimely death of our still!”

when they found the men who shot down poor ol’ Lupe
well, their lives were just barely a flicker
you see they’d all lost their minds
each one went permanently blind
from drinkin’ too much of poor Lupe’s good liquor!

Although the community’s first response is to form an angry mob, the Padre manages to channel their anger into Christian pacifism, trusting in the Lord to do the final settling of scores. This is also consistent with Rosa’s response to Lupito’s question, which by way of a code-switching proverb diffuses Lupito’s grief into spiritual resignation and acceptance. Her interlingual response is just one of many markers of border culture and identity that appear throughout the song, including identifying Lupe as Mescalero, of the Mescalero Apache tribe of southern New Mexico.

With the protests of Lupe’s community peacefully channeled into assertions of faith, there’s no one left to avenge Lupe’s death. Irony, then, swoops into the narrative and finishes off the murderers. We discover that the men signed their own death warrants by drinking “too much of poor Lupe’s good liquor.” As a morality tale, the ballad suggests that the murderers are ultimately ruined by their own greed and violence and thus the community’s faith in a just God is rewarded. A more literary reading privileges the ironic twist as the proper ending. In this reading, the storyteller (or balladeer) is Lupe’s real avenger because his clever subversion of formal expectation brings us to the conclusion we want.

These thematic departures, as well as the formal differences such as the repetition of a chorus and the irony of the ending (which calls attention to the form of the ballad in a postmodernist style) represent a considerable revision of the traditional *corrido*. Perhaps the most dramatic re-visioning Clyne offers in “Lupe” is, of course, that the song is written and performed by white musicians. Although Paredes argues that Anglo-Texans did not have a corresponding ballad form as part of their folk culture, in *American Encounters*, Limón argues that certain kinds of Anglo cowboy poem-songs do constitute a folk (i.e. communally shared) expression and he calls them *gringo corridos* (Limón 106-7). Limón’s *gringo corridos* are not simple inversions of the Mexican form where heroic cowboys defy and conquer Mexican outlaws. For Limón, *gringo corridos* consist of a sexual encounter between a white cowboy and a Mexican woman—either a high class “Spanish lady” or a prostitute—and the cowboy’s ensuing laments when his racial desire goes unfulfilled or thwarted due to barriers of race and class. I argue that Clyne’s “Ballad of Lupe Montosa” offers another kind of *gringo corrido*, not one that tells the story a white man’s desire for a Mexican woman and its corresponding codes of racial and sexual domination (ala McCarthy), but a conscious engagement with and revision of the *corrido* form, in which border conflicts and violence are resolved through peaceful alternatives and formal techniques, such as irony. Instead of reifying the violence of border conflict, Clyne’s *gringo corrido* suggests that community and faith are viable alternatives to racial violence. Furthermore, in Clyne’s *gringo corrido*, the balladeer emerges as the true hero because his crafty storytelling techniques are ultimately more

powerful than vengeance. The power of the balladeer to revise and reinterpret demonstrates Clyne's constant belief in the power of art to resolve conflict and promote peace.

¡Americano!

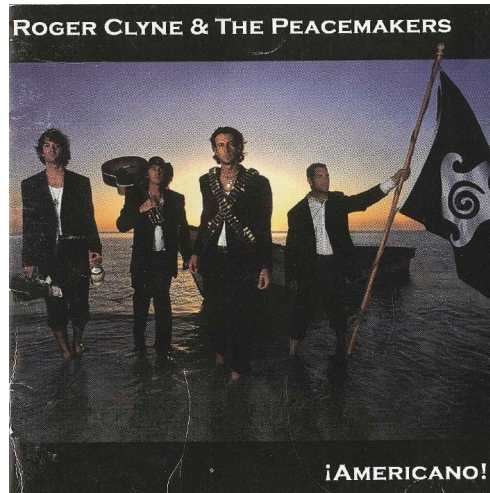


Figure 3 (Source: RCPM ¡Americano!)

While Clyne and the Peacemakers built their reputation on their unique blend of traditional and regional American music forms, their status as a band of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands became undeniable with the 2004 release of band's third studio album, *¡Americano!*. More than any other album, including RCPM's more lackluster recent work, *¡Americano!* explodes with sounds, styles, and stories of the borderlands in a more confrontational and politically engaged way. Written by Clyne in Cholla Bay, Mexico in the aftermath of 9/11 and the U.S.'s second invasion of Iraq, the album decries a world at war and more aggressively advocates the necessity of peace in an age of nativism, separation, and violence. Clyne's reaction to the war was negative. He felt the U.S. was "awful aggressive, and very, very imperial. And it seemed we had lost compassion and track of the truth, to be frank" (Wiser). Thus, the album intervenes not only with a political message of opposition, but also with an attempt to rediscover and celebrate compassion, truth, and human dignity. In several interviews, Clyne has commented on how *¡Americano!*'s conception and birth in Mexico influenced the album's overall tone and messages. The album is a sad, searing, and sultry investigation into what it means to be an American during an imperial war. Clyne has said that the album grew out of his sense of America's failure to live up to its promises to citizens and the world: "I believe in the Constitution and the American ideals. But I've got to say I don't think we're living up to those things. [...] The album is about being very confused in a very complicated time" (Brown). The war and Clyne's self-imposed displacement in Mexico forced him to think about his own role: "I began to focus on where I stood as a citizen and as a man, as a father and as an artist. (*¡Americano!*) could be viewed as a proud declaration or as a pejorative" (Lustig). Clyne's vibrant, if ambivalent, assertion of a transnational border identity—*¡Americano!*—intervenes in U.S. American and borderlands cultural studies by

suggesting that transnational identities (and art forms) can be lived and experienced in complex ways by a variety of complex people, including white Americans who are often left out of discussions of oppositional transnationalisms. In *¡Americano!*, culture doesn't just flow from north to south, from the hegemonic U.S. to a subalternized Mexico, nor does it only travel from the south to *el norte* with Mexican migrants and immigrants. Instead, *¡Americano!* testifies to a series of transnational flows and circuits, where cultures converge, conflict, and occasionally coalesce. Declaration or pejorative, *¡Americano!* announces a more hemispheric cultural politics. Although Clyne's music does not completely avoid stereotypes and romance, *¡Americano!* represents an alternative transnational rock soundtrack to contemporary life in the borderlands.

The album's title track and first song, "¡Americano!" opens with a pounding drum beat, followed by high-energy guitars that build and then drop as Clyne's rough voice enters the track. "¡Americano!" is a gut-busting rock n' roll border anthem that tells a shady tale of the main character's questionable adventures in Mexico. Clyne has said that this song is about "awakening to [...] individual or national course of empire" and recognizing the consequences of our actions and taking responsibility for them (Wiser). While the song may camouflage itself as rowdy and playful gringo narco-*corrido*, as the speaker tells his story, he's "awakening to what it really means to be part of a nation" where simple actions have "global consequences." Thus, the character in the song embodies an ambivalent "American" identity, struggling to come to terms with his place in a decidedly transnational geography:

Scorpion sting
I hear the mission bells ring
Another night of running' is another day
I don't dance the hangman's swing
All roads lead back to Tucson
Pray Maria, I don't find the noose on
La Policia's asking questions
Say you don't know nothin'
and you ain't seen a thing

(chorus)
"Ave Maria!"
I pray
"Ave Maria!"
I pray

They say the blood is on my hands
'Cause I put down the money
and I made up the plans

Blues eyes
White lies
Straight teeth and a crooked soul
Let the red blood and the green dinero flow...
¡Americano!

Maria these things I do
Every night they cut me in two
It's in my blood to live for the kill
But God only knows
that I want to stay and love you
Full moon is on the rise
Patron saint of love and lies
The payoffs and the alibis
Shotgun shells and four-wheel drives

(chorus)

I can burn like a wildfire
Disappear like a ghost
Dagger in my cloak
I'm a rich and gracious host
Don't fear my ill-repute
The sweetest fruit is stolen fruit
And if you're feelin' dirty, cruel or mean
Let a little more money make your conscience clean

(chorus)

Key nouns in the first verse--“scorpion,” “mission bells,” “Tucson,” “Maria” and “La Policia”--are imagistic map coordinates that locate us without question in “the dusty Mexican borderlands.” The presence of the “mission bells” brings the history of Spanish conquest and subsequent racial violence into the subtext of the song. Within the song’s own narrative, this history is not irrelevant, as the violence the song alludes to is racialized. Clyne plays with colors (and the layers of meaning invoked by such imagery) to suggest a violent relationship between “red blood,” “green dinero,” “blue eyes,” and “white lies.” In the song’s chorus, the speaker prays “Ave Maria!” and the embedded outlaw narrative alludes to subversion, corruption, criminality, and banditry. The “payoffs and alibis” and the “shotgun shells and four-wheel drives” in the second verse play off the classic representations of border trafficking and illegal activity (think of the opening scene in the film *No Country for Old Men*). Clyne doesn’t give us the specifics of the character’s escapades, as we would if this were a narco-*corrido*. The chorus references a “plan,” “green dinero” and “red blood” as the only allusions to his shady activities. Instead of emphasizing the illegal activity, as a true *corrido* or many popular films do, Clyne foregrounds the speaker’s internal conflict and ambivalence. Although the character seems destined to life as an outlaw, he acknowledges that his actions “cut [him] in two” every night. He confesses that while he can “burn like a wildfire / disappear like a ghost / a dagger in my cloak,” he’d rather “stay and love” Maria. In the confessional/prayer form that the song takes, the character acknowledges his thirst for blood while being drawn to Maria as a source of absolution and love. As part of the song’s ambivalence, we’re not sure if his Maria is the holy Virgin Mary, a romantic love

interest, or a conflation of both. The song toys with the sacred and sacrilegious, mixing Catholic prayer with a border ballad's mythologizing, a dizzying combination of celebratory bravado, invocation, prayer, and regret.

The song's ambivalent tone creates an appropriately ambiguous atmosphere for displacing the racial and national identity of the character. When he sings about the "blue eyes/white lies/straight teeth and a crooked soul," we're not sure if the character is describing himself, denouncing his partners in crime, or ranting against his adversaries. The uncertainty alludes to one of the main questions the song raises: who or what is an ¡Americano!? Is Clyne's ¡Americano! a celebratory exclamation of a U.S. American white identity—the *norteamericano*—; is it a curse directed at the wealth-obsessed and greedy U.S. by a bitter, double-crossed Mexican bandit; or is it a more hemispheric label used by the speaker to identify himself as an *Americano* of the transnational borderlands? Within the song's narrative, any or all of these possible interpretation would satisfy, but as the album progresses, it becomes clear that Clyne's "¡Americano!" refuses to finally arrive on either side of the border. "¡Americano!" introduces a transnational borderlands identity, marked by ambivalence and conflict, but directed towards more inclusive and vibrant articulations of culture where peacemaking replaces domination and fear.

Border Culture Flows Counterclockwise

In the album's punchy second track, "Counterclockwise," Clyne embeds an intriguing message about the transnational movements of people, identities, and culture in a seemingly simple song about the pleasures of tourism and the touristic gaze. In this song, Clyne's character buys a "poncho and sandals" and heads to the beach in Mexico—a typical tourist scene. The character watches the "gringo boys in their dark sunglasses" checking out the girls on the beach, but instead of participating, he and his friends are laughing because:

Some of the Americans are ugly Americans
But we know we ain't all that way
So we nod and we smile
and we wait a little while
Because they never stay anywhere
very long anyway

By differentiating themselves from the "ugly American" stereotype of loudness, rudeness, cultural insensitivity, and transience, Clyne asserts an alternative *Americano* identity that refuses such stereotypes. In the song's chorus, Clyne relaxes to the sound of the sea "singin' lullabies / And everything's slowin' down / flowin' counterclockwise." In live shows, this is when Clyne spins counterclockwise with his guitar on stage while audience members make counterclockwise motions with their fingers in the air. The chorus's lyrics reference the pervasive romantic stereotype of Mexico as a place where things run at a slower pace—a tourist escape from the hustle and bustle of modern life. Yet given the transnational context of the album, the song is deceptively simple and actually suggests something far more complex. Unlike Jimmy Buffet's infamous "Margaritaville," Clyne's song is more than a celebration of tourist trap Mexico where American tourists can unwind. The image of a counterclockwise flow represents a

reversal of expectations, the unexpected, opposition, and difference. Like the *¡Americano!* identity on the first track, “counterclockwise” becomes a trope for the entire album, a way of describing the cultural alternatives Clyne’s music explores; for example, challenging what it means to be a “gringo” in Mexico. Clyne’s music argues that to be a “gringo” isn’t necessarily the same as being an “ugly American.” Instead of viewing Mexico through a top-down touristic gaze, the song invites listeners to consider the possibility of a “counterclockwise” gaze. An oppositional “counterclockwise” gaze not only reverses the touristic gaze to comment back on the U.S. from a certain U.S.-Mexico borderlands point of view, although *¡Americano!* certainly does this in ways both explicit and implicit, but also describes a point of view that is fundamentally transnational and unable to be contained by national borders. Clyne expresses his counterclockwise Americano identity throughout the rest of the album in his troubling questions about national allegiance and belonging, his depiction of interracial friendships, his use of Spanish, the incorporation of Mexican music forms, and an oppositional politics that denounces U.S.’s imperial wars and advocates justice for all people.

As the album progresses, Clyne continually circles back to the “gringo” tourist as a site from which he questions what it means to be a citizen. In the meditative, existential angst-filled love song, “Your Name on a Grain of Rice,” Clyne once again reaches into the bag of Mexican border stereotypes, this time referencing a ubiquitous souvenir found in every border tourist town—rice jewelry that has been delicately painted with a name or a small design. The well-known slogan “Your Name on a Grain of Rice,” used to advertise the service, becomes an incantation to the speaker’s muse, a yearning for love, and a symbol of possible redemption and restitution for a fragmented, ambivalent identity. The speaker describes himself in parts: “a father, a son, a restless spirit” who can “see the light” but can “never get near it.” Filled with doubt and uncertainty, he goes to Mexico for some soul-searching: “now my second home is a third world cantina.” Overcome with loneliness, when he sees a man “sellin’ silver and souvenirs,” he says he’ll pay “full price /for your name on a grain of rice.” The lover’s name inscribed on a grain of rice becomes the inspiration the speaker needs to find himself. As the final line of the song’s chorus, the phrase itself takes on the incantatory power of the unnamed lover. Clyne transforms a simple and unsubstantial commodity—a grain of rice—into a talisman of love and redemption. Of course, what the song obscures are the greatly disparate power relations between the Mexican vendor, whose daily existence depends on the sale of tourist trinkets, and the white male tourist who can easily forgo the haggling and “pay full price.” It’s perhaps easier for Clyne to abstract a grain of rice into a symbol because he doesn’t face the same material challenges as his racial foil—the Mexican man pounds the pavement of a tourist town not as part of an existential quest, but in order to make his living and survive.

In running to Mexico to escape the hustle and bustle of his life in Arizona, the song also participates in a legacy of Anglo writing about Mexico that invokes romantic stereotypes in order to represent Mexico as an “infernal paradise,” a place where Anglo protagonists go to relieve spiritual suffering on a quest for purification that usually involves some kind of real or symbolic death and subsequent regeneration (see Walker). Such stereotypes oversimplify and romanticize Mexico and Mexican culture and within them, Mexico becomes nothing more than a stage upon which the protagonists’ inner

dramas are played out. In its most naïve moments, Clyne's music engages this legacy and participates in (re)circulating stereotypes of Mexico as an idyllic landscape wherein the troubled Anglo artist can reconnect with his visions. Yet while many of the other Anglo writers who use such stereotypes travel to Mexico from other parts of the world, experiencing various levels of displacement on their quests for spiritual fulfillment, Clyne himself is native to the borderlands and thus is less of a cultural outsider. He is also more aware of his position as a white, male citizen of the United States than others in the tradition. His self-awareness adds a layer of cultural sensitivity to his writing that is often lacking in other Anglo writing about Mexico. A superficial listening might suggest that Clyne's music belongs to the same genre as Jimmy Buffet, but a more nuanced investigation into the music's subtexts and a careful consideration of Clyne's personal biography and politics reveal a more ambivalent rendering of Mexico and the borderlands. While Clyne's songs rock to the rhythms of beaches and booze, unlike "Margaritaville," Clyne's border towns are populated by diverse populations (not just gringo protagonists) who are, like himself, working through passion to compassion and embracing a much larger and more complex worldview. "Margaritaville" collapses all Mexican tourist towns into a single site of spiritual unease for Buffet's gringo speaker, but the various borderlands spaces/places traversed by *¡Americano!* are never abstracted completely into metaphors or flattened into an "infernal paradise." They are decidedly transnational spaces populated by transnational subjects who often struggle to find belonging between and across the allegiances of nation, culture, and the human heart.

While "Your Name" demonstrates the racial and class privileges the white male tourist wields in Mexico, the song also reflects a deep ambivalence about the character's national allegiance and sense of belonging. The song opens as the speaker describes a lonely, bleeding landscape where the sun "settin' over America" reminds him of his own "bleedin' corazon." The reference to America is not accidental. One of many questions plaguing the character in this song is how he feels about the U.S.'s involvement in Iraq: "I see the fighter planes tearin' across the desert sky / Do I curse them or cheer them on? / I still can't decide... / But the silence they leave behind / Sounds like what I feel inside..." The use of synaesthesia emphasizes his deep ambivalence. The explosive visual and aural display of military power fails to stir the speaker into a patriotic frenzy, but it also fails to fully rouse his anti-war sentiment. Instead, he finds nothing but an agonizing silence, broken only by his lover's name on a grain of rice. Away from home, the speaker is increasingly aware of the U.S.'s global presence, yet his displacement doesn't cement his national identity as much as it troubles it. In interviews, Clyne has said that this song was inspired by his experience watching the second Iraq War unfold on a TV screen in a cantina in Puerto Peñasco, Mexico and seeing how differently people responded. He noted, "the Mexican people looked largely disapproving and very worried and some of the Americans there had the same expression, but others were standing up and cheering [...]." The character's ambivalence thus reflects Clyne's own position "as a citizen of one country, watching this in another country" who is deeply aware of his in-between status. For Clyne, this could be because he views his identity as more fluid, incapable of being fully defined by citizenship or national identity. While he often recognizes his privileges as a white, male U.S. citizen, Clyne's allegiance is as spiritual as it is deeply regional—a transnational identity that, as we see throughout *¡Americano!*, refuses to identify ultimately with one side of the border or another. Perhaps this why he

finds nothing but an ambivalent silence in the spectacle of the U.S. fighter jets—as someone who doesn't identify himself primarily in national terms, he can neither fully rally around nor fully protest such an explicit display of national power. Perhaps that's also why the song deflects these troubling questions of patriotism and nationalism into a love ballad. In place of a sense of national belonging, Clyne takes refuge in the closer, more immediate bonds of love and human relationships. While the song appears to resolve the speaker's crisis through the invocation of the lover's name, left unresolved are a series of provocative questions about the speaker's refusal to fully implicate himself in any one narrative of national belonging.

¡Americano! counters "Your Name's" ambivalence with Clyne's hard rocking, gritty anti-war anthem, "God Gave Me a Gun."¹⁰ In this bitter, angry reaction to the self-righteousness of war, Clyne satirizes the hypocrisy of zealots who use God and religion to justify violence:

Military issue

now I can trust you're never gonna

raise another fist at me again

this is how I'll kiss you

hollow-tip to tissue

stronger than the sword and

so much faster than the pen

(Chorus)

Fare thee well to the infidel

your God's name's not spelled the same

God gave me a gun

God gave me a gun

might makes right now

whom shall we smite now

bullet through the barrel

thy will be done

God gave me a gun

Screaming of the engines

bringing down the vengeance

hell from the heavens is state of the art

tell the ones you love

that the hawk's killed the dove

and I can save your soul

with a bullet through the heart

(Chorus)

Made me in his image

bade me do some damage

now the grapes of wrath

are ripe on the vine

kill to make us holy

kill to make us free

take an eye for an eye

and make the whole world blind

(Chorus)

“God Gave Me a Gun” opens with a series of short, explosive percussion beats and rough guitar chords that mimic gunfire (as does the tough alliteration of the title, repeated three times in every chorus). Throughout, the Steve Larson’s lead guitar maintains a more aggressive presence than on most of the album’s tracks, serving as an effective accompaniment to Clyne’s scratchier, angrier vocals. Written in the direct aftermath of 9/11 and the second Iraq War,¹¹ the song invokes that moment’s rhetoric of infidels, the just and moral imperatives of righteous vengeance, and the holiness of ethno-religious

cleansing. It's a rhetoric that cuts both ways, and Clyne uses it quite poetically and passionately as an indictment of both the Taliban jihadist propaganda as well as the hyper-nationalist war cries of the U.S. As he's said: "Any ideological entrenchment, whether it be political or religious, it's still an entrenchment. No ideology should give one the right to take a life on the name of God or country" (Mehrazar). In his highly satiric invocation of wartime rallying calls, the song engages the similarities between both sides, a risky move given the nation's political atmosphere at the time of the song's recording and release in 2002-2003. The song contrasts archaic and familiar language of religious texts, quoting and paraphrasing well-known Biblical references,¹² with more graphic descriptions of violence: "this is how I'll kiss you / hollow-tip to tissue" and "bullet through the heart." The juxtaposition is meant to shock. Clyne's song rips back the veil of religious rhetoric that masks the true nature of war—violence and death. "God Gave Me a Gun" protests such denials and goes as far as to trivialize the differences both Christians and Muslims claim as all important: "your God's name's not spelled the same." Clyne's reductive indictment in the chorus ironizes the differences we rally ourselves around during war (and peace). His overall and not-so-subtle message highlights the profound irony of holy wars: "kill to make us holy/ kill to make us free / take an eye for an eye / and make the whole world blind." The killing sanctifies no one, frees no one, and ultimately destroys all of humanity, accomplishing nothing but the complete opposite of what it claimed to do. "God Gave Me a Gun" is Clyne's most openly political and confrontational of all of his songs to date. Located at the core of the album, the song captures the spirit of the entire collection—Clyne's unrelenting passion for peace before war, love before violence, and our fundamental interconnectedness as humans before any and all of the borders that would seek to ultimately divide and define us.

Like the tourist-citizen and the lover, the outlaw character reappears throughout the album. "Switchblade" is another Clyne border ballad that narrates the story of three outlaws. The grief-stricken speaker regrets the day he "went down to Mexico on the Fourth of July" and bought switchblades for his two friends, Pablo and Dan, who never return from their exploits in Mexico. Armed with their new switchblades, Pablo and Dan told the speaker they had a plan to get rich: "pull the double cross / on a double crossin' narco snitch / Just a dirty little two-man job / but it's a sure-fire win / And brother when we cut him down / we gonna cut you in." Over a year later, the speaker hasn't heard from his unlucky "brothers" and finally gets a call from the authorities to come identify his friends' bodies—stabbed to death with switchblades. In this slow, sweet, and heart-wrenching ballad, Clyne invokes the stereotype of the Mexican switchblade as a symbol of border violence and banditry and re-writes it as a symbol of friendship, loss, cruelty, and grief. In the chorus, the speaker laments that his ill-conceived gifts were: "sharp enough to stab / another hole in the sky / Hard enough to make the proudest diamond sigh / Faster than the rockets on the Fourth of July / Strong and cruel enough / to make a statue of Mary cry...". The speaker personifies the blades, perhaps as more of a eulogy to his fallen friends, who are symbolized by the blades throughout the song. Clyne emphasizes the speaker's loneliness and regret instead of valorizing his friends' illicit activities. Pablo and Dan are portrayed more as luckless victims of a violent, lawless world than as instigators or perpetrators of such violence. In fact, their illicit scheme even has a righteous ring to it—Pablo and Dan were out to trick a "double crossin' narco

snitch” whose own betrayals seem to justify whatever actions the two men were going to commit. The world of border banditry Clyne depicts is not a simple gunslingin’ (or blade-wielding) landscape of the John Ford Westerns, defined by easy morality, clear-cut wrongs and rights, and John Wayneish heroes. Government agents can as easily subvert the law as uphold it, and mercenary bandits can take advantage of lawlessness for easy profits. Yet, unlike McCarthy’s world, similar in its depiction of corrupted humanity and rampant lawlessness, Clyne tempers his universe with sentiment and the deep connections forged between people. Pablo, Dan, and the speaker form an interracial “brotherhood” that crosses national borders and is solidified through the course of the song, not, as one would suspect, through their shared illicit activities, but through the speaker’s pathos as he narrates the tale.

Set against the backdrop of Fourth of July celebrations, the song implicitly contrasts the celebration of revolutionary violence as the result of U.S. nationalism and imperialism with the violence of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The song suggests that Fourth of July celebrations ultimately obscure the on-going violence of U.S. imperialism and hegemony, responsible for much of the contemporary and historical conditions that create violence in the borderlands. The transnational switchblades are, after all, “faster than the rockets on the Fourth of July,” whose puffy, showy, and self-congratulatory displays are no match for the subversive thrust of a subtle knife. While the U.S. celebrates a national identity forged from the crucible of interracial contact and conquest, “Switchblade” posits an alternative transnational identity, also defined by violence and conquest, but tempered through the bonds of friendship and love—a classic Clyne technique.

“Mexican Moonshine” is the only song on *¡Americano!* (but not in the entire RCPM catalogue) that uses what Clyne calls an “ethno-mariachi” sound.¹³ The track features guest musicians on accordion, trumpet, and piano in order to create a typical *norteño* sound, with slow and wailing trumpet and accordion solos, shakers on the percussion and stringy guitars. In this somewhat indulgent ballad, Clyne accompanies the *norteño* beats with high and slow vocals. The song revolves around an extended pun on the word “moonshine.” Clyne invokes the history of bootleg Mexican liquor (“moonshine”), but literalizes the term in an ode to the sublime south-of-the-border moonlight. The song compares drunkenness to the “surreal, sublime” intoxication Clyne feels under the Mexican moon: “Mexican Moonshine! I fell under the spell / when I stumbled over the line... / Mexican Moonshine! Let your heart and your cup overflow / Under the glow of the moonshine!” The verses encourage listeners to “Soak in the silvery light” of moonshine because it, accompanied by love, will ease worldly troubles. Clyne sings: “I need amor more than dinero /In any language every day.” Clyne’s interlanguage plays with rhyme and sound in both languages, rhyming ‘amor’ with ‘more’ and using the long ‘o’ sound in ‘dinero’ to emphasize the assonance of the entire line. This type of interlingual play reflects Clyne’s fluency in Spanish, a fluency that’s constantly in tension with English, creating a kind of Spanglish that Clyne has laughingly called: “gringlish, it’s Spanglish, it’s the gringo lingo, you know? I think it’s okay, as long as it’s an honest effort, and I’m really trying not to be an expert, I’m showing that I’m trying to bridge cultures. If I make a mistake so be it” (Wiser). Typical of Clyne’s humility, he understates his ability. On *¡Americano!*, Spanish appears scattered throughout, in the form of simple words, mostly common nouns (including in the title of

the very fun and sultry track, “Loco to Stay Sane”). Yet, in other songs he uses entire phrases and sentences in Spanish, and particularly during live performances, Clyne will code-switch back and forth between the two languages, often carrying on entire conversations with the audience in Spanish. During my personal interview with him, he spoke to me quite fluently in Spanish. Clyne’s interlingual identity and his casual expression of it into his music is, I believe, one of the most defining aspects of the transnational cultural politics his music represents—a cultural politics that exists (uneasily) across and between ethno-racial identities.

His facility with Spanish is certainly more deft and nuanced than your typical Spanglish speaker, and the point he makes about attempting to bridge cultures is significant. Substantive work in Chicano/a Studies has studied how code-switching between Spanish, English, Spanglish and various Chicano/a dialects (such as *caló*), often constitutes a politicized expression and assertion of marginalized and borderlands identities.¹⁴ As Gloria Anzaldúa famously argued in *Borderlands/La Frontera*: “ethnic identity is twin skin to my linguistic identity—I am my language” (Anzaldúa 81). Here, Anzaldúa lists the various languages and dialects she speaks and she eloquently demands the freedom to speak and code-switch between them all without always having to accommodate English speakers. This linguistic freedom forms one of the core elements of the “new mestiza consciousness” (a “consciousness of the Borderlands”) she theorizes (99). In ways both similar and different, Clyne’s linguistic identity forms an essential part of his identity as a borderlands subject. To be clear: Clyne’s Spanish language ability does not align him with Chicanos and Chicanas like Anzaldúa who have suffered the enduring wounds of colonial and patriarchal language controls meant to denigrate, regulate, and silence. At the same time, Clyne, like Anzaldúa, wants the freedom to express himself in both languages (and his interlingual “gringo lingo”), even if his Spanish abilities are limited as a non-heritage speaker. For Clyne, not only is his familiarity with Spanish part of his identity as someone native to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, his use of Spanish is also a socially conscious symbolic act, his attempt to “bridge cultures” through language. An interesting study, I believe, could compare Anzaldúa’s desire to “break down the subject-object duality” that binds the mestiza as part of her new mestiza consciousness with Clyne’s belief in the struggle towards achieving divine unity while maintaining respect for diversity (102). Both Roger Clyne and Gloria Anzaldúa are similarly invested in the terrible and beautiful mythology of the borderlands that includes both immense suffering and rich opportunities for spiritual fulfillment.

¡Americano! closes with Clyne’s passionate and earnest political ballad, “Leave An Open Door.” The song begins as the character watches the silhouette of a loved one retreat through a lighted doorway. He pleads: “Leave an open door behind you,” but as the speaker’s heart goes “runnin’ after” the departed lover, the song quickly shifts registers from a lonely love ballad to a call for collective action and a desperate insistence that love will triumph over oppression. After the first stanza, Clyne abandons the first person for the more collective “we.” He urges: “Sing about the dawn / in the middle of the night” and “Stumble through the dark / so that we might see the light.” In these verses, the “we” is the collective voice of a downtrodden humanity:

Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers,

We never run out of hope when we love one another!

When they raise the price of bread

When they lower the wage

Together we hold our key inside of their cage!

Carry on...

Clyne depicts a population united through the universal bonds of family and also through a shared oppression at the hands of an ambiguous “they” who control the price of essential goods and the level of wages. He seems to make a classic Marxist appeal to the proletariat who suffers from the dehumanizing effects of wage labor and a capitalist market economy. Yet, instead of dwelling on the corruption of the capitalist fat cats who get rich by squeezing every last peso out of underpaid laborers, Clyne’s vision calls for collective action and love in order for the masses to unlock their “cage.” He describes a process of change in this rhyming litany:

Destitution...
Persecution...
Retribution...
Revolution!
Restitution!!
Absolution!!!
Evolution!!!!

As a vocal reinforcement of the punctuation used in the liner notes, Clyne’s voice begins as shaky and hesitant and builds in intensity throughout the litany, which is the song’s climax. Clyne identifies a process of collective action that begins by recognizing despair and responds with retribution and revolution. But Clyne’s vision for social change is not violent revolution; revolution is just one phase on the way to a more transcendent alternative. He offers a model of change which progresses through revolution and violence to absolution and, finally, evolution. This model is entirely consistent with the worldview Clyne expresses in numerous interviews—the road from “passion to compassion”¹⁵—in which borders are ultimately broken down by the power of love and compassion, moving humanity along on a spiritual trajectory towards a deeper sense of interconnectedness. While his political agenda does tend towards the abstract and idealistic, “Leave An Open Door” is indeed a song of opposition that decries the subordinated status of laboring people in a global capitalist market and attempts to rally listeners around a call to action. The title and chorus invoke implicit political messages about U.S. foreign policy. Although first proposed by American politicians with business interests in China who wanted to lower trade barriers in Asia after the War of 1898, the idea of an “open door” versus a “closed door” policy has significant resonances for U.S.-Mexico relations. The rhetoric of an “open door” has been used to describe the removal of trade barriers between the U.S.-Mexico and the liberalization of Mexico’s economy,

particularly through the NAFTA agreement. It has also been used to describe the nature of the U.S.-Mexico border itself, as an “open door” that allows thousands to cross illegally into the U.S. every year.¹⁶ Given the rootedness of Clyne, his music, and *¡Americano!* in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, it’s difficult *not* to read this song outside of the political implications of the “open door” rhetoric. In “Leave An Open Door,” Clyne embeds a message about U.S. border policy: borders, like doors, should be left open. Instead of criminalizing border crossers, we should recognize how a broken system implicates all of us and calls on all of us to recognize that we “hold the key” to social change if we can move beyond the borders that attempt to bind and separate. As Clyne strums his way through new articulations of an *¡Americano!* identity, delivering his transborder rock message of peace from the uncomfortable places where nations grate against each other and bleed,¹⁷ Clyne confesses: “It’s not like there is a deep answer here, it’s just one song at a time, keeping a focused view of the land, the music and its people, instead of trying to find the answers in a strip mall” (“Still Burning”).

Roger Clyne and his music open and expand the field of U.S.-Mexico borderlands studies by articulating a new borderlands cultural politics that includes alternative possibilities for progressive white borderlands subjects attempting to locate themselves in and across the borders of nation, culture, and identity. Clyne’s rock embodies the ambiguities and complexities of the border—it’s subversive, circuitous, unexpected and sometimes too familiar transactions between identities (man, citizen, tourist, traveler, lover, dreamer, human...). It’s music that’s incapable of comfortably resting within any one American music genre and is fundamentally rooted to the transnational geographies of the U.S.-Mexico border. His songs reach outside their frames of reference, which are often too imperializing, too violent, or simply too limiting for the stories his characters need to tell. If, as Josh Kun writes, “All music listening is a form of confrontation, of encounter, of the meeting of worlds and meanings, when identity is made self-aware and is, therefore, menaced through its own interrogation” (Kun 13), Clyne’s music encounters an ambiguous alternative whiteness that is simultaneously challenged and upheld by the experiences of living on the border. Confronted with two nations, one imperializing and one the object of imperial desire, Clyne’s music is an interrogation of what it means to be live in the borderlands during a time imperial violence and international ambivalence about what it means to call yourself a citizen. Roger Clyne and the Peacemakers assert that a transnational borderlands identity--*¡Americano!*—does indeed exist as an alternative to the “ugly American” stereotype. As *¡Americano!*, Clyne calls on us to respect our differences while working together to achieve spiritual prosperity. To listen honestly to his music, keeping an open heart and an open mind, is to encounter an *¡Americano!* identity that rejects imperial violence, racial hatred, and the borders that would divide humanity. At the same time, being an *¡Americano!* means respecting those borders necessary to the creation and celebration of complexity. In Clyne’s music, we encounter a borderlands whiteness with a difference. Unlike McCarthy’s replications of racial and imperial desires that obscure and limit the histories and experiences of women and nonwhites in the borderlands, Clyne’s music testifies to the profound interrelationships forged out of the fires of violence and the constant threat of disconnection on the U.S.-Mexico border. These interrelationships offer new possibilities for cross-racial alliances through shared cultural expressions, such as music

listening, and point toward a more positive future where borderlands subjects are united in struggle, moving beyond passion to compassion as we confront and create new worlds of meaning.

¹ Kun, Josh. *Audiotopia: Music, Race, America*. Berkeley: University of CA, Press, 2005. Print.

² See Kun (2005); Gilroy (1993); Lott (1993).

³ See, for instance, Gomez-Peña's *New World Border*.

⁴ like a child.

⁵ God helps those who help themselves.

⁶ Focusing on European-American performances of and representations of nativeness in culture, Huhndorf argues that such performances express a "widespread ambivalence about modernity" (Huhndorf 8). This ambivalence caused by "the vast changes sweeping a rapidly modernizing American society created a nostalgia for origins, now embodied in the cultural imagination as 'primitive.' Idealizing and emulating the primitive, modernity's other, comprised in part a form of escapism from the tumultuous modern world" (14). She acknowledges that many instances of "going Native" are performed by those who claim benevolence for Native people, but by imagining and romanticizing a pre-colonial past, European-Americans obscure the violence of conquest and reaffirm a colonizing hegemony. See Chap Four.

⁷ See Rosaldo's idea of "imperialist nostalgia" in *Culture and Truth*.

⁸ See McDowell (1972); Herrera-Sobek (1990; 1993); Saldívar (1997); Limón (1998); Edberg (2004).

⁹ Bond, Thomas. "Tempe's Roger Clyne & The Peacemakers to Release Fourth Album ¡Americano!. *Get Out*. 16 January 2004. n. pag. Web. 15 April 2006.

¹⁰ In an interview with Sammy Mehrazar of Arizona State University's *Web Devil*, Clyne asserts that "God Gave Me a Gun" is "an anti-war song, period."

¹¹ See *Leave an Open Door: A Look Inside ¡Americano!*. Dir. Jason Boots. DVD. EmmaJava, 2003.

¹² Clyne references and paraphrases the following Biblical passages: "thy will be done:" Matthew 6: 9-13; Luke 11: 1-4; "grapes of wrath:" Revelation 14:19; "eye for an eye:" Matthew 5:38; Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21; "Made me in his image:" Genesis 9: 5-7 (New International Version).

¹³ See p10.

¹⁴ The most well-known and groundbreaking scholarship in this field is Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987). See Chapter 5: How to Tame a Wild Tongue.

¹⁵ "And now in my career I've gone beyond passion to compassion, which is a really fun road for me" (Clyne "Personal Interview" interview).

¹⁶ See Douglas Massey, "Closed-Door Policy: Mexico vividly illustrates how U.S. treatment of Immigrant workers backfires." *The American Prospect*. June 30, 2003. n. pag. Web. 10 Jan 2010.

¹⁷ Anzaldúa (25).

¹⁷ For more on the history of Mexico's turn to neoliberalism, which culminated in the NAFTA agreement, the role of the U.S., and its effect on the border region, see Chapter 1 and Jeff Faux's *The Global Class War*.

Afterword

The Border Beyond Boundaries: Gloria Anzaldúa, Always and Again

“But it is in the cracks between worlds and realities where changes in consciousness can occur. In this shifting place of transitions, we morph, adapt to new cultural realities.”

---Gloria Anzaldúa (*Interviews / Entrevistas* 280)

What unites movements must be breath. In the spaces between these chapters, in the gaps they cannot occupy, what remains are adaptation and transitions. *Nepantla*. *Conocimiento*. *El Mundo Zurdo*. Those psychic-spiritual places that Gloria Anzaldúa revealed in her writing, her art, her spiritual practice, her teaching, and her activism. In *Entre Mundos/ Among Worlds*, AnaLouise Keating explains:

During nepantla, individual and collective self-conceptions and worldviews are shattered. Apparently fixed categories—whether based on gender, ethnicity/ ‘race,’ sexuality, economic status, health, religion, or some combination of these elements and often others as well—begin eroding. Boundaries become more permeable, and begin to break down. This loosening of previously restrictive labels and beliefs, while intensely painful, can create shifts in consciousness and opportunities for change (*Entre Mundos* 1).

This is the border—the borderlands—beyond boundaries. From the interior, where the scarline cuts us into various patterns. Where we cannot cover what is missing. Where we have no map of our countries, only the distant rumble of stone, the cracked and heated earth. Where once our continents were roped like a bridge and we fought the stilling earth. Now distance advances according to our own logic. No amount of memory consolidates our pain. We are a number of homelands. Briefly, splitting.

In the cracks and fissures, we awake to new consciousness, says Anzaldúa. To imagine the border beyond boundaries means shifting our focus from the lines that divide and occupy to the interstitial spaces between and within. This requires a certain kind of lens—a vision—seeing through what Anzaldúa called “*la facultad*,” a deepening of perception born out of oppression. From this space of *nepantla* and *conocimiento*, comes an epistemology of connection and collective action. It is a gathering. A (re)awakening. A way to heal the wounding.

This dissertation has attempted to gesture towards a border beyond boundaries by situating itself in the uncomfortable and the in-between spaces of genre, identity, and location. Like Anzaldúa, who understands that we must break down before we can rebuild, this collection of chapters attempts to deconstruct our perceptions about the U.S.-Mexico border—who can claim it, who can write from it or about it, what it means to be a ‘border writer,’ what it means to be an ‘American.’ In these essays, we find challenges and hard questions. Re-evaluations and unexpected connections. We also find disconnects and disappointments. The wounds of history and failed promises. There are uncomfortable gaps between them, disalignments that rest uneasily or refuse to rest at all. In bringing together a diverse and unlikely collection of artists, it has been my challenge to resist the urge to force these chapters together, to create a seamless and

natural unification between the various articulations of the U.S.-Mexico border—a “*fronteridad*,” or border theory, that fuses and unifies. Instead, we find fissures. Tiny cracks and gaps as the result of movements and shifts. There is fision. Part of the process of writing has been to work into, not against, the junctures and disruptions, to dwell in the discomfort and acknowledge the unfinished nature of these ideas and to let them be because it’s along these faultlines where transformation begins. Where surface traces mistake wind for hair, voice for hunger. Down where motion originates, we find fractures and the dip and sway of bedrock. We find unfinished intersections. We find breath. We move forward.

Much of this process has been about moving backward in order to move forward. I read Gloria Anzaldúa for the first time in a Latino/a literature class at New York University ten years ago. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I encountered myself as a feminist, and also as a white, middle-class heterosexual citizen of the borderlands. I was forced to understand my privilege and I was compelled to read more, to try and understand, and to become part of Anzaldúa’s fight for social justice and spiritual awareness. A decade later, I find myself returning always to Anzaldúa. She haunts these pages. She is there in Yépez’s fision and Tijuana’s *transas*; she is there in Mullen’s hybrid poetics and Viramontes’s and Yamashita’s decolonizing multi-voiced re-visionings; she is there in Magdalena’s pain in McCarthy’s *Cities of the Plain* and the vast Texas landscapes; she is there in Clyne’s spiritual vision for a world that moves beyond borders from passion to compassion; she is there in the shared humanity that each of these texts reveals. What this project gestures towards is a more fully realized understanding of the relationship between Anzaldúa’s work and the promises for future U.S.-Mexico borderlands studies.

In order to begin the process of understanding how Anzaldúa’s writing can inform an analysis of artists such as Cormac McCarthy or Roger Clyne or Heriberto Yépez, we must first understand that *Borderlands/La Frontera*, especially the oft-cited first section, is only one part of a larger process and larger body of work that Anzaldúa continued to articulate up until her death. As Chela Sandoval and AnaLouise Keating have argued in recent books about Anzaldúa,¹ to focus solely on the important ideas of “the Borderlands” and “mestiza consciousness” in the first section of *Borderlands / La Frontera* “prevents us from grasping the radical nature of her vision for social change and the crucial ways her theories have developed” (Keating 4). For example, until recently, no scholarship existed that addressed the second half of *Borderlands*, the section of Anzaldúa’s poetry that was actually the genesis of her *Borderlands* project.² Anzaldúa’s later work on autohistoria-teoría, nepantla, conocimiento, and spiritual activism are, as Linda Garber has argued, “only fully visible” in *Borderland’s* poetry (*Entre Mundos* 214). A closer reading of Anzaldúa’s borderlands poetry can help us understand how she understood her work a radical epistemology interwoven from poetry, prose, memoir, and critical analysis that was fluid and on-going, shifting and re-creating itself out of *nepantla* and the Coatlicue state.

In 1985 Chicana feminist Norma Alarcón wrote: “to date, poetry has been the single most important genre employed by Chicanas in order to grasp and give shape to their experience and desire” (Alarcón 85). Yet, so often readers of Anzaldúa overlook her poetry in favor of the more accessible political and identity narratives. Such a reading threatens to flatten her radical form into a vessel for radical content and denies

the political function of her hybrid form.³ By reading both halves of the book together, as interrelated and mutually constitutive texts, a fuller, more layered understanding of her project emerges. Both sections of the book constantly interact with each other, challenging the manuscript's own ontological borders, highlighting their artificial and constructed nature. By examining how Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness works through (or toward) autohistoria teoría, it's possible to recuperate *Borderlands/La Frontera* as a deeply political, deeply personal example of more holistic, transformative vision of social change.

In Anzaldúa's autohistory theory, self-writing emerges alongside "collective, personal, cultural, and racial history," to create and enact a theory of socio-cultural change. She draws on the double meaning of the Spanish word *historia*, which signifies both history and story, to ask who gets to speak, who gets to make history/story, but also what gets spoken and recorded. By collapsing the public and private, the official and the unofficial, the "real" and the "constructed," Anzaldúa transforms her autohistory theory into an oppositional poetics: "there are analogies between how one compiles, arranges, formulates, and configures one's identity and how one solves problems and how one creates a work..." In fact, "identity," she writes, "is very much a fictive construction" (*Interviews* 269). For Anzaldúa, to write the self from between the gaps means embracing multiple identities, and it also means that these identities must be understood, not as complete (or completing) narratives, but as fractured and constructed terrains of meaning. Thus, the silences, ruptures, gaps and wounds in those identities are also visible on the page as poetic strategies.

Autohistory is part of mestiza consciousness. Mestiza consciousness means being in a constant state of "mental nepantlism, an Aztec word meaning torn between two ways" (*Borderlands* 100). But Anzaldúa goes further to argue that this in-betweenness (*nepantla* or Coatlicue state) exists in the interstices of *multiple* sites, where "a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" develops. It's a painful process to "break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended" (102). This can be accomplished only by "reinterpret[ing] history and, using new symbols, [...] shape new myths" (104). As she demystifies and re(mystifies) language, she experiences a "constant changing of forms" (113).

The idea of changing forms—shape shifting—is both a psychic reality and poetic strategy for Anzaldúa. She describes how she transforms the raw material of experience into writing through a process of dismemberment: "The act of writing for me is this kind dismembering of everything I'm feeling—taking it apart to examine and then reconstituting or recomposing it again but in a new way" (*Interviews* 257). Elsewhere, she says, "In composing, you take things apart and everything is fragmented, then you struggle to put things together" (269). This process gets represented formally on the pages, which cross-genre and code-switch between multiple languages and dialects without warning. The form, or shape, of the book constantly changes, continually asking the reader to shift and reinterpret her position to the many texts.

As a result of this formal shape shifting, Anzaldúa's writing enacts and becomes the in-between state of the *nepantla*. The artist/poet thus transforms into a kind of shaman (a *nahual*)⁴ who mediates "between various communities in the 'normal' worlds

and nepantla in the other worlds” because it’s in the cracks and “shifting place of transitions” where changes in consciousness create new poetics and new languages.

The pain, discomfort and struggle in reading *Borderlands* and “creating your own meaning,” reflects the pain of writing. Wounded and bleeding, Anzaldúa writes in “*la tinta de mi sangre*” (the ink of my blood) (*Borderlands* 93). If “entering into the serpent” (mental nepantlilism) often means entering the wound, Anzaldúa’s hybrid writing, by embracing gaps and ruptures, also performs this wounding for the reader. Her work reminds us that to reside in shifting places where meanings are constantly reinvented is not a disembodied experience of postmodern intellectualism (nor a libratory, pleasurable space of “making it new!”). Instead, it can be a physically wrenching space where new meanings are created through a violence that is simultaneously physical, gendered, historical, cultural-political, linguistic, and poetic.

In the second half of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa distills the theory of mestiza consciousness into her poetry. She asks what’s permissible in poetry, what borders and boundaries can be crossed or maintained. The second half concentrates and transforms what has been introduced in the first half of the book. Anzaldúa accomplishes this distillation by using poetry to create a pictorial language. This pictorial poetics reflects Anzaldúa’s interest in pre-Colombian thought, particularly the pictograms of the Aztec *códices*. The writing of the *códices* enacts a spiritual and epistemological process:

for the ancient Aztecs, *tlilli, tlapalli, la tinta negra y roja de sus codices* (the black and red ink painted on codices) were the colors symbolizing *escritura y sabiduría* (writing and wisdom). They believed that through metaphor and symbol, by means of poetry and truth, communication with the Divine could be attained, and *topan* (that which is above—gods and spirit world) could be bridged with *mictlán* (that which is below—the underworld and the region of the dead) (91).

The “path of red and black ink” precedes analytical knowledge or consciousness and becomes what Anzaldúa calls the “deep structure” of her writing. This “deep structure” becomes more fully visible in book’s first half when read as one part of a dynamic conversation between both sections. But if image-thinking structures her writing, she says it also “textures” it. She sees “numerous overlays of paint, rough surfaces, smooth surfaces” in her writing. The surfaces are translated into “a hybridization of metaphor, different species of ideas popping up here, popping up there, full of variations and seeming contradictions...” (88). Thus, in structuring and texturing her poetry, Anzaldúa takes a traditional Aztec form and refashions it, hybridizes it, fractures it. She describes *Borderlands* as a “mosaic pattern (Aztec-like)” and:

an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several leitmotifs...now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. The whole thing has a mind of its own, escaping me and insisting on putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will...Though it is a flawed thing—a clumsy, complex, groping blind thing—for me it is alive, infused with spirit. (89)

That visual multiplicity of form that Anzaldúa describes as a “mosaic,” a “beaded work,” a “puzzle” and a “dance” does not disappear or collapse in the second half of the

book. Anzaldúa uses narrative, chant, song, dialogue, mythology and prose poetry to interrogate how the poet can use poetry to “think in pictures.” As a result, we see a proliferation of images both within the metaphoric language of the poems and on the page, as each poem “performs” or embodies different shapes and images. For instance, in “Poets have strange eating habits,” Anzaldúa writes: “tunneling here tunneling there / the slither of snakes” (163). The “tunneling” and “slither” of snakes is performed on the page where the long, back and forth motion of the lines replicates the speaker’s glide of descent into the shaman-state. As the speaker “burrow[s] deep into” herself, the lines contract and tighten, forming a compact final stanza.

In contrast, in “*Cihuatlyotl, Woman Alone*” the poem takes shape inside a rectangular block of text, whose external borders are sharply defined and maintained. The text of the poem echoes a chant, but the long white spaces between words and phrases highlight the gaps in the chant, where what should be smooth and seamless is disrupted by images of the female body (“to my face and breasts / put a lock between my legs”) (195), a racialized landscape (“soft brown / landscape, tender *nopalitas*) and the speaker’s sense of the disconnect between her community (“I have learned / to erect barriers” “No self, / only race *vecindad familia*”) and her multiple selves, (I remain who I am, multiple / and one of the herd, yet not of it. I walk”). The chant does have a narrative, but it’s one that’s constantly interrupting itself, in English and in Spanish, questioning it’s own logic and form through linguistic and spatial gaps. The challenge in reading the poem lies in having to fight the natural tendency of the eye to jump the gaps and cross over the white space, yet to do so would be to miss the point of the poem. Anzaldúa asks us to pause in the gaps, to descend into those places where “crossing over” is a privilege paid for with bodily, psychic and poetic wounding.

If the poems themselves function like *códices*, Anzaldúa’s poetry explicitly displays the pictorial language that lies more deeply embedded in the first half. Instead of seeing this difference as marking a boundary between the two halves, using the image/shapes of her poetry helps to uncover and decode how picture-thinking works in the earlier sections and moves us toward a border beyond boundaries. The image of Mamagrande’s brown face and “parchment skin” (132) in the poem “Immaculate, Inviolate: *Como Ella*” functions as a kind of pictorial palimpsest, where beneath her face we find traces of various histories/stories from the hybrid essays: the separation between the brown female body and her sexuality, the sexual/cultural/political violence of men, and hierarchies of sexual power.

Both sections form a dialectic, where each section participates in the coding and decoding of the other. The titles of each of the six sections of poetry gesture towards the preceding seven sections of “essay.” For example, the first section of poetry, “Mas antes en los ranchos” establishes the geographic space of the borderlands just like “The Homeland, Aztlán.” Section Four, “*Cihuatlyotl, Woman Alone*,” celebrates myth-making and the pre-Colombian epistemologies that are theorized in “*Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink*.” The final section of poetry, “El Retorno” (the return), is a definitive call to action, just like the final essay chapter, “La conciencia de la mestiza.”

In the composition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa “attempts to connect pre-Colombian histories, values, and systems with the postcolonial twentieth century” (*Interviews* 267). In doing so, she subverts the mandates of both totalizing systems of

meaning and transforms any attempt to stabilize her work proffering it instead as a source for transformation.

In pausing for a brief moment to return to the words—the seeds—from which this project has grown, I am trying to read for the re-visionary. For the cracks reveal that the things we thought we knew can be dismantled, remade, seen again, seen anew, re-visioned through different lenses in order to accommodate multiplicity, shift consciousness, and transform. By shifting the focus to Anzaldúa's poetry, *Borderlands / La Frontera* shape-shifts, takes on a fuller and richer texture. Deepens. Beyond the boundaries of *Borderland's* first section, Anzaldúa emerges as the re-visionary artist, theorist, activist who lives between worlds, pushes her perception, invents and reinvents “epistemological tools for individual/collective self-definition, resistance, intervention, and creation” (*Entre Mundos* 5). This re-visionary position creates and transforms out of the gaps between worlds. It is this re-vision that I hope makes visible the radical potential in this collection. To see the border beyond boundaries occupies the Anzaldúan space where new epistemological tools are fashioned out of wounding and disjuncture. To continue expanding and broadening perspectives on Anzaldúa's theories creates opportunities to read new texts through her lens(es). It means occupying the gaps and cracks and silences.

Border Encounters draws its breath from the spirit of Gloria. In intimate exhalations, these words fill the gaps between difference (racial-ethnic, gender-sexual, class, citizenship status), not to smooth them over, but to more fully inhabit them and enliven them with the potentially radicalizing diversity of the U.S-Mexico borderlands. Perhaps in the unfinished places, the questions that remain, the ideas yet to be realized, thoughts not fully formed, we can begin to adapt to new realities. These new realities must be visionary—they must imagine and create worlds where justice, equality, diversity, and difference are both foundations and faultlines. Borders beyond boundaries. A tectonic prayer for that still unmapped common ground. An aftershock of all that we allege.

¹ See Linda Garber's "Spirit, Culture, Sex: Elements of the Creative Process in Anzaldúa's Poetry" and Inés Hernández-Avila's "Tierra Tremenda: The Earth's Agony and Ecstasy in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa" in *Entre Mundos / Among Worlds*

² See *Entre Mundos / Among Worlds*

³ This can be an important narrative, and a necessary political tool in the coalition work of Third World/transnational feminism and Chicana studies. See Gayatri Spivak's discussion on the uses of "strategic essentialism" in mobilizing political movements.

⁴ Aztec word for shaman or shape-shifter, see *Borderlands/La Frontera* (88).

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