

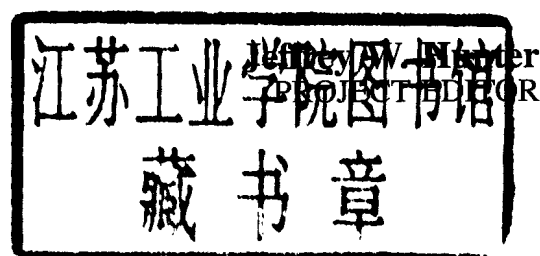
☐ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

CLC 200

Volume 200

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers





Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 200

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Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 2,000 authors now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 include authors who died after December 31, 1959. Previous to the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially important to today’s reader.

Scope of the Series

CLC provides significant passages from published criticism of works by creative writers. Since many of the authors covered in *CLC* inspire continual critical commentary, writers are often represented in more than one volume. There is, of course, no duplication of reprinted criticism.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science fiction writers, literary and social critics, foreign authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews taken from hundreds of book review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning from the beginning of an author’s career to the most current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other published writings that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete biographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

Organization of the Book

A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *CLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *CLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual cumulative title index that alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in *CLC* and is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof Books, 1990. 73-82. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witlec. Vol. 169. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 3-8.

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Gloria Anzaldúa

1942-2004

(Full name Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa) American novelist, poet, short story writer, essayist, critic, editor, and children's author.

The following entry presents an overview of Anzaldúa's career through 2004.

INTRODUCTION

Anzaldúa is recognized as a significant figure in contemporary Chicano literature. Her fiction, poetry, and essays explore her experience as a *mestiza*, a woman living on the border between different countries and cultures. She is respected as an authoritative voice on feminist and homosexual issues, particularly as they relate to Third World countries and Chicano culture.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Anzaldúa was born September 26, 1942, in Jesus Maria of the Valley, a Mexican community on the Rio Grande in South Texas. Her father was a sharecropper, and she was raised on a series of corporate farms. From an early age, she worked in the fields with her family. Despite financial and emotional hardships—her father died when she was fifteen—she excelled at school and became interested in writing. Anzaldúa attended Pan-American University in Edinburg, Texas, and received a B.A. in English, art, and education in 1969. She received an M.A. in literature and education from the University of Texas at Austin in 1973 and did further post-graduate study at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Later she taught high-school English in migrant, adult, and bilingual programs in Texas. With co-editor Cherríe Moraga, Anzaldúa collected a series of essays titled *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), which became Anzaldúa's first publication and received a Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award. The volume explores the feminist revolution from the perspective of women of color and addresses the cultural, class, and sexual differences that impact them. In *La Prieta* (1995), she openly discusses her lesbian sexuality, a contentious issue that divided her and her family for three years. She has been an instructor on such subjects as creative writing, feminist studies, and Chicano studies at several universities, including the

University of Texas at Austin, San Francisco State University, and the Vermont College of Norwich University. Her critical and fictional work is often published in numerous anthologies and alternative-press journals. Anzaldúa died on May 15, 2004.

MAJOR WORKS

Published in 1987, *Borderlands/La Frontera* is considered Anzaldúa's major work. It traces the historical and personal journey of the people who inhabit the border between Mexico and the United States and elucidates the socioeconomic, political, and spiritual impact of the European conquest of indigenous peoples on the borderland as well as the ways in which marginalized peoples oppress one another. The volume is divided into two sections, the first a series of seven essays and the second a grouping of several poems. The poetry and essays in the collection are thematically linked by their focus on the borderland experience as well as the factors that affect cultural, sexual, and class unity. In the essay "La conciencia de la mestiza," Anzaldúa touches on the divisiveness of sexism and homophobia to Chicano culture. By calling herself a *mestiza*, she rejects gender and sexual boundaries and attempts to create a new identity. Another essay, "The Homeland, Aztlán/El Otro México," offers an extensive view of the major historical events that have resulted in the present-day border between the United States and Mexico. The second half of the essay provides a collective, familial, and personal perspective on the issue. In "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa explores the negative social attitudes toward Chicano ways of speaking, as well as the deleterious effects of these negative attitudes on the self-identity of Chicano people living in the borderlands. The last essay in the book, "La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness," introduces the concept of a *mestiza* consciousness, which is rooted in the borderlands, the breaking down of cultural boundaries, and the synthesis of different cultures, races, and languages. This amalgamation results in a new awareness, the *mestiza* consciousness, which subverts traditional perspectives on cultural identities to create a multicultural paradigm. In 1990, Anzaldúa edited *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, an anthology of essays and poetry written by female students, artists, political activists, and academics.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Reviews of Anzaldúa's work have been highly favorable. The majority of critical attention to her oeuvre is focused on *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which critics regard as an important cultural study. While a few reviewers have criticized Anzaldúa's style as elliptical and have identified a tendency in her writing to leave ideas undeveloped, most commend as innovative her approach to cultural and feminist theory, the scope of her essays, and her articulation of the challenges facing lesbians and people of color. Feminist interpretations of her work analyze the impact of her theoretical frameworks of identity and *mestiza* consciousness on feminist and homosexual studies. Commentators also praise the combination of historical information and personal experience in Anzaldúa's essays. *Borderlands/La Frontera* is recognized as an influential work in Chicano cultural theory, and has been a popular text in Chicano, homosexual, and feminist studies.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

- This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* [editor with Cherrie Moraga] (essays and poetry) 1981
- This Way Daybreak Comes* [with Annie Cheatham and Mary Clare Powell] (poetry) 1986
- Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (essays and poetry) 1987
- Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* [editor] (poetry and essays) 1990
- Prietita Has a Friend—Prietita tiene un amigo* (juvenilia) 1991
- Friends from the Other Side—Amigos del otro lado* (juvenilia) 1993
- La Prieta* (novel) 1995
- Lloronas, Women Who Howl: Autohistorias—Torias and the Productions of Writing, Knowledge, and Identity* (essays) 1996
- Prietita and the Ghost Woman—Prietita y la llorona* (juvenilia) 1996
- This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* [editor and contributor] (poems, letters, stories, essays) 2002

CRITICISM

Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (essay date fall 1994)

SOURCE: Yarbro-Bejarano, Yvonne. "Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*: Cultural Studies, 'Difference,' and the Non-Unitary Subject." In *Contem-*

porary American Women Writers: Gender, Class, Ethnicity, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora, pp. 11-31. New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998.

[In the following essay, originally published in a 1994 issue of *Cultural Critique*, Yarbro-Bejarano discusses Anzaldúa's theory of *mestiza* or border consciousness in relation to the theory of difference and the mixed critical reaction to *Borderlands/La Frontera*.]

In 1979, Audre Lorde denounced the pernicious practice of the 'Special Third World Women's Issue' (100). Ten years later, the title of one of the chapters in Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Woman, Native, Other*—'Difference: A Special Third World Women's Issue'—alludes to the lingering practice of acknowledging the subject of race and ethnicity but placing it on the margins conceptually through 'special issues' of journals or 'special panels' at conferences. In her 'Feminism and Racism: A Report on the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference', Chela Sandoval critiqued the conference's structure, which designated one consciousness-raising group for women of color yet offered proliferating choices for white women (60). Nine years later, a conference at UCLA on 'Feminist Theory and the Question of the Subject' replicated this scenario, presenting a plenitude of panels on different aspects of the question of the subject, while marking off a space for 'minority discourse' that simultaneously revealed the unmarked status of the generic (white) subject of the other panels. Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer, the guest editors of a special issue of *Screen*, formulate its title as an ironic question: 'The Last Special Issue on Race?' They point out that the logic of the 'special' issue or panel 'reinforces the perceived otherness and marginality of the subject itself'. In their critique, they invite us to identify the relations of power/knowledge that determine which cultural issues are intellectually prioritized in the first place . . . to examine the force of a binary relationship that produces the marginal as a consequence of the authority invested in the center.

The persistence into the 1990s of discourses and practices that reinscribe the margin and the center indicates the problems inherent in theorizing 'difference'. In 'The Politics of Difference', Hazel Carby suggests that discourses on difference and diversity in the 1980s functioned to obscure structures of dominance. Linda Gordon offers a 'white-woman's narrative and perspective about the appropriation of the notion of differences among women by a white-dominated women-studies discourse' in her article 'On Difference' (100). The reinscription of the politics of domination within the discourse on difference inheres in part in the practice of theorizing difference within a paradigm that implies a norm and the tolerance of deviance from it (Gordon 100 and Spelman). The 'additive' model, in which heretofore excluded categories are

'included' in an attempt at correction, works against understanding the relations among the elements of identity and the effect each has on the other (Spelman 115 and Uttal).

This critique has been accompanied by an awareness that the failure to produce a relational theory of difference (Lippard 21) is not just a sin of omission, a result of 'laziness or racism', but points to a profound 'conceptual and theoretical difficulty' (Gordon 101-2). What is needed is a new paradigm that permits the expansion of categories of analysis in such a way as to give expression to the lived experience of the ways race, class, and gender converge (Childers and hooks). The writing of women of color is crucial in this project of categorical expansion, producing what Cherríe Moraga calls 'theory in the flesh' (Moraga and Anzaldúa, *Bridge [This Bridge Called My Back]* 23). This embodied theory emerges from the material reality of multiple oppression and in turn conceptualizes that materiality. The embodied subjectivities produced in the texts of women of color allow for an understanding of 'gendered racial identities' or 'racialized gender identities' (Gordon 105). *

Cultural studies would appear to provide ideal terrain for the mapping of this new paradigm, with its 'commitment to examining cultural practices from the point of view of relations of power' and its understanding of culture as both 'object of study and site of political critique and intervention' (Grossberg et al. 5). However, it is important to keep in mind that the current attention to the intersections of race, nation, sexuality, class, and gender within cultural studies is the result of struggles initiated by people of color within the British movement to construct 'new political alliances based on non-essential awareness of racial difference' (Grossberg et al. 5). Lata Mani and bell hooks, among others, express concern at cultural studies' potential failure to articulate a new politics of difference—'appropriating issues of race, gender and sexual practice, and then continuing to hurt and wound in that politics of domination' (hooks, *Discussion* 294).

In what follows, I will examine Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of *mestiza* or border consciousness and its contribution to paradigmatic shifts in theorizing difference, as well as contentious issues in the *reception* of this text: on one hand, the enthusiastic embrace of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by many white feminists and area scholars and, on the other, the critiques voiced by some critics, particularly Chicana/o academicians.

Given the above discussion on the conceptual difficulty in theorizing difference, it is understandable that a text like *Borderlands* would be warmly received. But, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out, the proliferation

of texts by women of color is not necessarily evidence of the decentering of the hegemonic subject (34). Of crucial importance is the way the texts are read, understood, and located. Two potentially problematic areas in the reception of *Borderlands* are the isolation of this text from its conceptual community and the pitfalls in universalizing the theory of *mestiza* or border consciousness, which the text painstakingly grounds in specific historical and cultural experiences.¹

Unlike Sandoval's use of the adjectives 'oppositional' or 'differential' in her theory of consciousness,² Anzaldúa's choice of the terms 'border' and particularly '*mestiza*' problematizes the way her theory travels. Clearly, non-Chicana readers and critics may relate to the 'miscegenation' and 'border crossing' in their own lives and critical practices. For example, in her discussion of David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly*, Marjorie Garber uses the term 'border crossings' in a way similar to Anzaldúa to describe the activity of presenting binarisms (West/East, male/female) in order to put them into question (130). The point is not to deny the explanatory power of Anzaldúa's model, but to consider the expense of generalizing moves that deracinate the psychic 'borderlands' and '*mestiza*' consciousness from the United States/Mexican border and the racial miscegenation accompanying the colonization of the Americas that serve as the material reality for Anzaldúa's 'theory in the flesh'. If every reader who identifies with the border-crossing experience described by Anzaldúa's text sees her/himself as a 'New *mestiza*', what is lost in terms of the erasure of difference and specificity?

Other readings are possible that resist the impulse to read the text as one looks in a mirror. Elizabeth Spelman cautions against what she calls 'boomerang perception: I look at you and come right back to myself' (12). Appropriative readings are precluded by the constant interrogation of the conditions and locations of reading. It is one thing to choose to recognize the ways one inhabits the 'borderlands' and quite another to theorize a consciousness in the name of survival, to transform 'living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience' (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 73).

A useful strategy in teaching or reading *Borderlands* is to locate both reader and text: the reader, *vis-à-vis* plural centers and margins, and the text, within traditions of theorizing multiply embodied subjectivities by women of color³ and living in the borderlands by Chicanas and Chicanos. Contextualizing the book in this manner, rather than reading it in a vacuum, helps avoid the temptation to pedestalize or even fetishize *Borderlands* as the invention of one unique individual. Given the text's careful charting of *mestiza* consciousness in the political geography of one particular border, reading it as part of a collective Chicano negotiation around the

meanings of historical and cultural hybridity would further illuminate the process of 'theorizing in the flesh', of producing theory through one's own lived realities. Angie Chabram-Dernersesian documents Chicana texts dating from the early 1970s that represent 'shifting positionality, variously enlisting competing interests and alliances throughout time and space' and 'multiple evocations of a female speaking subject who affirms various racial identities' (85-9). Women of color thinkers such as the writers in *Bridge* and Sandoval were developing notions of multiple subjectivity in a context of political resistance in the early 1980s. In the mid-80s, Chicano artists such as David Avalos and the Border Arts Workshop attempted to expose, or even to celebrate, the political and economic contradictions of the border that sustain the officially illegal but unofficially sanctioned market in undocumented workers from Mexico. In Chicana/o criticism, the border constitutes a powerful organizing category in such works as Sonia Saldívar-Hull's 'Feminism on the Border: From Gender Politics to Geopolitics' and the collection *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology*, edited by Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar.

In her discussion of 'deterritorializations', the displacement of identities, persons, and meanings endemic to the postmodern world system, Caren Kaplan examines the process of 'reterritorialization' in the movement between centers and margins and how that process of reterritorialization is different for First World and Third World peoples. For Kaplan, the challenge of the First World feminist critic is to avoid 'theoretical tourism' (or in the case of Anzaldúa's text, becoming 'boarders in the borderlands'), to avoid 'appropriating . . . through romanticization, envy, or guilt' (194) by examining her simultaneous occupation of both centers and margins: 'Any other strategy merely consolidates the illusion of marginality while glossing over or refusing to acknowledge centralities' (189).⁴ Rather than assuming Anzaldúa's metaphors as overarching constructs for like-minded theoretical endeavors, it might be more helpful to set them alongside the metaphors garnered from the rigorous examination of one's own lived personal and collective history. Kaplan argues that recognizing one's own processes of displacement 'is not a process of emulation' (194); Minnie Bruce Pratt states: 'I am compelled by *own life* to strive for a different place than the one we have lived in' (48-9; quoted in Kaplan 364).

Universalizing readings of *Borderlands* occur in the larger 'postmodern' context of increasing demarginalization of the cultural practices of people of color as well as the simultaneous destabilizing of certain 'centered' discourses of cultural authority and legitimation (Julien and Mercer). Although many critics of the postmodern proclaim, either nostalgically or celebrato-

rily, the end of this and that, very few focus the crisis of meaning, representation, and history in terms of the 'possibility of the *end of [Euro-] ethnocentrism*' (Julien and Mercer 2). Stuart Hall, former director of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and a black Jamaican who migrated to England, savored the irony of the centering of marginality at a conference entitled 'The Real Me: Post-modernism and the Question of Identity':

Thinking about my own sense of identity, I realise that it has always depended on the fact of being a *migrant*, on the *difference* from the rest of you. So one of the fascinating things about this discussion is to find myself centred at last. Now that, in the postmodern age, you all feel so dispersed, I become centred. What I've thought of as dispersed and fragmented comes, paradoxically, to be *the* representative modern experience! This is 'coming home' with a vengeance! Most of it I much enjoy—welcome to migranhood.

(44)

Hall sees it as an important gain that 'more and more people now recognize . . . that all identity is constructed across difference', but he also insists that narratives of displacement have 'certain conditions of existence, real histories in the contemporary world, which are not only or exclusively psychical, not simply "journeys of the mind"' (44). Whereas Jean Baudrillard and other Eurocentric postmodernists explain the fragmentation of identity in relation to the end of the Real, Hall refers here to what some have called the Real that one cannot not know, the 'jagged edges' of poverty and racism.⁵

For this reason, Hall proposes the possibility of another kind of 'politics of difference'. New political identities can be formed by insisting on difference that is concretely conceived as 'the fact that every identity is placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history'. This conception of the self allows for a politics that constitutes "'unities"-in-difference' (45), a *politics of articulation*, in which the connections between individuals and groups do not arise from 'natural' identity but must be articulated, in the dual sense of 'expressed in speech' and 'united by forming a joint'.⁶

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* exemplifies the articulation between the contemporary awareness that *all* identity is constructed across difference and the necessity of a new *politics* of difference to accompany this new sense of self. Dorinne Kondo points out the difference between deconstructions of fixed identity that 'open out' the self to a 'free play of signifiers' and Anzaldúa's representation of multiple identity in the 'play of historically and culturally specific power relations' (23). While Anzaldúa's writing recognizes the importance of narratives of displacement in the formation of her subjectivity, she is also aware of the material conditions of existence, the real histories of these narratives. Hers is a 'power-

sensitive analysis that would examine the construction of complex, shifting "selves" in the plural, in all their cultural, historical, and situational specificity' (Kondo 26).⁷

Borderlands maps a sense of 'the plurality of self' (Alarcón, 'Theoretical' 366), which Anzaldúa calls *mestiza* or border consciousness. This consciousness emerges from a subjectivity structured by multiple determinants—gender, class, sexuality, and contradictory membership in competing cultures and racial identities. Sandoval has theorized this sense of political identity that allows no *single* conceptualization of our position in society as a skill developed by those marginalized in the categories of race, sex, or class for reading the shifting of the webs of power ('Report' 66-7). She sees the term 'women of color' not as a single unity but as a conscious strategy, a new kind of community based on the strength of diversities as the source of a new kind of political movement. Her theory legitimates the multiplicity of tactical responses to the mobile circulation of power and meaning and posits a new, shifting subjectivity capable of reconfiguring and recentering itself, depending on the forms of oppression to be confronted. Anzaldúa enacts this consciousness in *Borderlands* as a constantly shifting process or activity of breaking down binary dualisms and creating the third space, the in-between, border, or interstice that allows contradictions to co-exist in the production of the new element (*mestizaje*, or hybridity). Crucial in her project are the ways 'race' works in the complex 'interdefining' and 'interacting' among the various aspects of her identity.⁸ Her essay 'La Prieta' (the dark-skinned girl or woman), published in *Bridge*, already introduced the concerns she will explore in *Borderlands*: her relationship to her dark Indian self and the denial of the indigenous in Chicano/Mexicano culture. It is the representation of the indigenous in the text that has evoked the most critical response from Chicana/o and non-Chicana/o readers alike.

Primary among these concerns are what are seen as the text's essentializing tendencies, most notably in the reference to 'the Indian woman' and the privileging of the pre-Columbian deity Coatlicue, which obscures the plight of present day Native women in the Americas.⁹ This wariness toward the invocation of 'Indianness' and the pre-Columbian pantheon must be contextualized in the contemporary critique of the cultural nationalism of the Chicano Movement, which engineered a romanticized linking between Chicanos and indigenous cultures as part of the process of constructing a Chicano identity. Many of us are engaged in an ongoing interrogation of the singular Chicano cultural identity posited by dominant masculinist and heterosexist discourses of the Chicano Movement and the role *indigenismo* played in this exclusionary process.¹⁰

This seems to me to be the crucial distinction between the project of such Chicano Movement artists as Luis Valdez or Alurista and Anzaldúa's project in *Borderlands*: whereas the first invoked *indigenismo* in the construction of an exclusionary, singular Chicano identity, the latter invokes it in the construction of an inclusive, multiple one. The theory of *mestiza* consciousness depends on an awareness of subject positions—a concept which Diana Fuss maintains represents the *essence* of social constructionism (29)—working against the solidifying concept of a unitary or essential 'I'. Fuss suggests that the seeming impasse between 'essentialism' and 'social constructionism' is actually a false dichotomy, and she calls attention to the ways they are deeply and inextricably co-implicated (xii). Perhaps more productive (and more interesting) than firing off the label 'essentialist' as a 'term of infallible critique' is to ask what *motivates* the deployment of essentialism (xi), which carries in itself the potential for both progressive and reactionary uses. In her discussion of subaltern studies, Gayatri Spivak speaks of the 'Strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest' (205), an analysis that would focus 'essentialist' moves in *Borderlands* in terms of 'who', 'how', and 'where': the lack of privilege of the writing subject, the specific deployment of essentialism and 'where its effects are concentrated' (Fuss 20).

On more than one occasion in the text, Anzaldúa,¹¹ who as a Chicana lesbian of working-class origins enjoys no privilege in the categories of race, culture, gender, class, or sexuality, explicitly articulates her project: 'belonging' nowhere, since some aspect of her multiple identity always prohibits her from feeling completely 'at home' in any one of the many communities in which she holds membership, she will create her own 'home' through writing.

I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, . . . to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture.

(22)

Mestiza consciousness is not a given but must be *produced*, or 'built' ('lumber', 'bricks and mortar', 'architecture'). It is spatialized ('A piece of ground to stand on', 23), racialized ('*mestiza*'), and presented as a new mythology, a new culture, a nondualistic perception and practice:

the future depends on the straddling of two or more cultures. By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—*la mestiza* creates a new consciousness.

(80)

In *Borderlands*, this new consciousness is created through writing; Anzaldúa's project is one of discursive self-formation. Through writing she constructs a *consciousness* of difference, not in adversary relation to the Same but as what Alarcón calls the 'site of multiple voicings' ('Theoretical' 365) or what Trinh calls 'critical difference from myself' (*Woman* 89). The evocation of essentialism in the text is in the service of a constructionist project, the production of a border or *mestiza* consciousness that gives voice and substance to subjects rendered mute and invisible by hegemonic practices and discourses, and is understood as the necessary prelude to *political* change (87).

Borderlands' emphasis on the elaboration of a *consciousness* that emerges from an awareness of multiple *subjectivity* not only contributes to the development of a new paradigm for theorizing difference but also addresses aspects of identity formation for which theories of subjectivity alone are unable to account. Only theories of consciousness, such as Anzaldúa's or Sandoval's, can elucidate what Richard Johnson calls 'structural shifts or major re-arrangements of a sense of self, especially in adult life' (68). In his article 'What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?', Johnson, who followed Hall as director of the CCCS, distinguishes between subjectivity and consciousness:

Subjectivity includes the possibility . . . that some elements or impulses are subjectively active . . . without being consciously known. . . . It focuses on the 'who I am' or, as important, the 'who we are' of culture. . . . Consciousness embraces the notion of a consciousness of self and an *active mental and moral self-production*.

(44)

Anzaldúa's construction of *mestiza* consciousness helps us begin to explain what Johnson calls the

subjective aspects of struggle . . . [that] moment in subjective flux when social subjects . . . produce accounts of who they are, as conscious political agents, that is, constitute themselves, politically. . . . subjects are contradictory, 'in process', fragmented, produced. But human beings and social movements also strive to produce some coherence and continuity, and through this, exercise some control over feelings, conditions and destinies.

(69)

One axis for the enactment of *mestiza* consciousness in Anzaldúa's text is the use of personal histories and private memories that necessarily entail a context of political struggle.¹² Another privileged site for the construction of border consciousness is Coatlicue, Lady of the Serpent Skirt, a pre-Columbian deity similar to India's Kali in her nondualistic fusion of opposites—both destruction and creation, male and female, light and dark. The text's emphasis on Coatlicue has sparked

the criticism that Anzaldúa compresses and distorts Mexican history. While Mexicanists and historians may have good reason to be disgruntled at Anzaldúa's free handling of pre-Columbian history, it appears to me that the text's investment is less in historical accuracy than in the imaginative appropriation and redefinition of Coatlicue in the service of creating a new mythos, textually defined as 'a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave' (80).

In her article 'Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of the Native Woman', Alarcón stresses a two-pronged process in Chicana writers' treatment of the Indian woman: invocation and recodification (252). Chicana writers reappropriate the Native woman on their own feminist terms because of the multiple ways the Chicana body has been racialized in discourses on both sides of the border (251). Their purpose is not to 'recover a lost "utopia" nor the "true" essence of our being', but rather to bring into focus, by invoking 'the maligned and abused indigenous woman', 'the cultural and psychic dismemberment that is linked to imperialist racist and sexist practices' (251). Alarcón cites Anzaldúa's 'Coatlicue state', the continuous effort of consciousness to 'make sense' of it all, as an example of this invocation and recodification of the Native woman in the exploration of racial and sexual experience (251). For me, criticisms of essentialism or elitism in Anzaldúa's use of Coatlicue are shortsighted in light of her function in Anzaldúa's project of pluralizing the unitary subject and dealing with difference in a nonhierarchical fashion (*Borderlands* 46).

Yet another area of contention is that *Borderlands* offers a spectacle of the painful splits that constitute Chicanas' multiple positioning for the voyeuristic delectation of European American readers. In the foreword to the second edition of *Bridge*, Anzaldúa herself seems to be aware of the backfiring potential of feeding non-Chicana readers' perception that being a person of color is an exclusively negative experience: 'Perhaps like me you are tired of suffering and talking about suffering. . . . Like me you may be tired of making a tragedy of our lives. . . . [L]et's abandon this *auto-cannibalism: rage, sadness, fear*' (iv; emphasis in original).¹³ Other artists who use the border as a sign of multiplicity have been criticized for the opposite, for an excessive or inappropriate celebratoriness. Some artists and writers in Tijuana question what they see as the 'euphemized vision' of the contradictions and uprootedness of the border in the work of Guillermo Gómez Peña and others in the Border Arts Workshop and their bilingual publication *La Línea Quebrada/The Broken Line* (García Canclini). These other cultural workers on the border reject what they see as the celebration of migrations often caused by poverty in the place of origin, a poverty repeated in the new destination.

It seems to me that different readings of Anzaldúa's text, for different reasons, could emphasize either the positivity or negativity of 'living in the Borderlands'. What strikes me is the emphasis she places on the work involved in transforming the pain and isolation of 'in-between-ness' into an empowering experience through the construction of *mestiza* consciousness in writing.¹⁴ Anzaldúa does describe the paralyzing tensions of her multiple positionings:

Alienated from her mother culture, 'alien' in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits.

(20)

But she also figures the 'Coatlicue state', the effort to 'make sense' of contradictory experience, in the language of undocumented border crossings: 'to cross over, to make a hole in the fence and walk across, to cross the river . . . kicking a hole out of the old boundaries of the self and slipping under and over' (49). While she turns the pain of living in the psychic and material borderlands into a strength, she never loses sight of the concrete processes of displacement.

Borderlands is marked by such contradictory movements: the pain *and* strength of living in the borderlands, a preoccupation with the 'deep . . . underlying structure' *and* the affirmation that 'the bones often do not exist prior to the flesh' (66), *la facultad* as both a dormant 'sixth sense' *and* a 'survival tactic' developed by the marginalized (38-9). Since, as Mohanty points out, the 'uprooting of dualistic thinking . . . is fundamentally based on knowledges which are often contradictory' (37), *mestiza* consciousness involves 'negotiating these knowledges, not just taking a simple counterstance' (Mohanty 36).¹⁵ Adopting the 'new *mestiza*' subject position requires

developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. . . . Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. . . . That third element is a new consciousness . . . and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from *continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm*.

(79-80; my emphasis)

This articulation of Anzaldúa's project challenges the Western philosophical tradition based on binary oppositions and its own textual workings, given the tension between *mestiza* consciousness as an activity or process of the non-unitary subject and the crystallized production of the 'name' *mestiza* consciousness in *Borderlands*. 'Naming', 'the active tense of identity' (Lippard 19), both extends the possibilities of 'crossings and mixings' and 'inevitably sets up boundaries' (Lippard

245). For Trinh, 'moments when things take on a proper name can only be positional, hence transitional' (*Moon* 2), but 'access to proper names as moments of transition . . . requires that "the imagination also [be] a political weapon."¹⁶ For, there is no space really untouched by the vicissitudes of history, and emancipatory projects never begin nor end *properly*' (*Moon* 7-8). Neither writer nor critic can inhabit a pure place of resistance or contestation (Kondo).¹⁷ Although neither reader nor writer, like Trinh's 'impure subject' (*Moon* 104) or the 'new *mestiza*', can ever 'merely point at the sources of repression from a safe articulatory position' (*Moon* 93), *mestiza* consciousness provides a model for knowing that the 'only constant is the emphasis on the irresistible to-and-fro movement across (sexual and political) boundaries' (*Moon* 105).

The first six essays of the book inscribe a serpentine movement through different kinds of *mestizaje* that produce a third thing that is neither this nor that but something else: the blending of Spanish, Indian, and African to produce the *mestiza*, of Spanish and English to produce Chicano language, of male and female to produce the queer, of mind and body to produce the animal soul, the writing that 'makes face'. The final essay, 'La conciencia de la *mestiza*/Towards a New Consciousness', reveals this serpentine movement that structures both the text itself and *mestiza* consciousness.

Borderlands juxtaposes essays and poetry, political theory and cultural practice, not separating one from the other but producing a fusion of the two, a 'theory in the flesh'. The writing of both Anzaldúa and, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga gives theory a new 'face'. They struggle to make sense of what it means to be working-class Chicana lesbians in essays that are collages of dreams, journal entries, poems, and autobiographical reflection. King characterizes this kind of writing as 'mixed genres emerging from and theorizing mixed complex identities' (88). As Trinh points out, in this kind of writing,

the borderline between the theoretical and the non-theoretical is blurred and questioned, so that theory and poetry necessarily mesh, both determined by an awareness of the sign and the destabilization of the meaning and writing subject.

(Woman 42)

The Vietnamese writer's reflections on writing as a 'gendered' kind of theory also describe Anzaldúa's and Moraga's texts:

From jagged transitions between the analytical and the poetical to the disruptive, always shifting fluidity of a headless and bottomless storytelling, what is exposed in [these texts] is the inscription and de-scription of a non-unitary female subject of color through her engagement, therefore also disengagement with master discourses.

(Woman 43)