Border Secrets: An Introduction

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A “border” is always and only secured by a border patrol. Where Scott Michaelsen works, in El Paso, Texas, on the U.S.-Mexico border, one sees the most clearly virulent form of border production literally in the backyard of the university. Along the Rio Grande are miles upon miles of cement trenches, chain-link fences, light-green paddy wagons, uniforms, binoculars, and soon, perhaps, steel walls, as well as multiple paranoid discourses of national and racial contagion. This book is concerned with borders like this, but more often the focus is on the sorts of “soft” borders produced within broadly liberal discourse: benevolent nationalisms, cultural essentialisms, multiculturalisms, and the like—in short, the state of “border studies.” As border theorist Renato Rosaldo noted in his keynote address at the 1995 American Ethnological Society meeting, a trickle of U.S.-Mexico border studies has turned into a flood in the wake of, among other influential works, Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), Rosaldo’s own Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis (1989), D. Emily Hicks’s Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text (1991), and Ruth Behar’s Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story (1993), as well as essay collections such as Héctor Calderón and José David Saldivar’s Criticism in the Borderlands (1991). These books focus primarily on the U.S.-Mexico border—the birthplace, really, of border studies, and its methods of analysis.

The idea of the “border” or “borderlands” has also been expanded to include nearly every psychic or geographic space about which one can
thematize problems of boundary or limit. In collections such as Gustavo Pérez Firmat’s *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?* (1990) and Alfred Arteaga’s *An Other Tongue: Nation and Ethnicity in the Linguistic Borderlands* (1994), the focus expands to include Latin American, Caribbean, and internal U.S. borders. A further expansion of the border concept is evident in the essays collected in this volume. The readings presented here refer, among other things, to a wide range of anthropological, sociological, feminist, Marxist, European postmodernist and poststructuralist, postcolonial, ethnohistorical, and race/ethnicity theory, all now presumed to bear significant genealogical and logical relation to border studies in the Americas—the focus of which is expanded once more to include, among other things, the U.S.-Canadian border, U.S. sectionalism, and American immigrants’ diasporic experience.

We imagine one possible meaning for our book’s title to be simply this: the “limit” for border theory’s growth is the reinscription of the various disciplines as instances of border studies. As an explicit example of this tendency, Alejandro Lugo’s essay in this collection ends with a call for “antidisciplinarity,” which is, in effect, a “transdisciplinarity” in that it imagines a borderlands anthropology supplemented by history (primarily a history of modernity, including histories of the state and the academy), sociology (Marxist, as well as the history of bourgeois sociology), feminism, and the like in order, in a Gramscian “war of position,” to offer “effective resistance against” “the state, theory, and power.” For Lugo, all of the disciplines and their histories must be brought to bear on the problem of the borderlands if the theorizing of it is not to be blind to the role of nationalist and capitalist “structure” and “order” in dominating and disciplining the border. Lugo imagines the disciplines re-fusing under the heading of “border studies” in order to refuse and challenge border dominations.

In short, like “race” and “gender,” and then “nation” and “sexuality,” the intellectual entry point of the “border” is one of the grand themes of recent, politically liberal-to-left work across the humanities and social sciences. National interdisciplinary conferences are organized around this theme, and hundreds of papers and books produced in all of the liberal arts disciplines.

In the majority of this work, interestingly, the entry point of “the border” or “the borderlands” goes unquestioned, and, in addition, often is assumed to be a place of politically exciting hybridity, intellectual creativity, and moral possibility. The borderlands, in other words, are the privileged locus of hope for a better world. Anzaldúa’s and Rosaldo’s texts suggest this: although neither would minimize the violence, of every sort, within the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, both authors’ arguments about the significance of this geographic area hinge upon such promise. Rosaldo cites and glosses Anzaldúa approvingly in the conclusion to his chapter titled “Border Crossings”:

Gloria Anzaldúa has further developed and transformed the figure at the crossroads in a manner that celebrates the potential of borders in opening new forms of human understanding. . . . In making herself into a complex persona, Anzaldúa incorporates Mexican, Indian, and Anglo elements at the same time that she discards the homophobia and patriarchy of Chicano culture. In rejecting the classic “authenticity” of cultural purity, she seeks out the many-stranded possibilities of the borderlands. By sorting through and weaving together its overlapping strands, Anzaldúa’s identity becomes even stronger, not diffused. She argues that because Chicanos have so long practiced the art of cultural blending, “we” now stand in a position to become leaders in developing new forms of polyglot cultural creativity. In her view, the rear guard will become the vanguard.

(1993, 216)

The following collection of essays not only theorizes the idea of “border,” but also explores the philosophico-political limits of border theory work. Here, for once, the “border” will not be taken for granted, either as an object of study and analytic tool or as a privileged site for progressive political work. Hence a second meaning for our title, *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*.

We begin with an understanding that for all of border studies’ attempts to produce a cultural politics of diversity and inclusion, this work literally can be produced only by means of—can be founded only upon—exclusions. Several of the contributions to this volume, each in its own way, are intent on mapping these exclusions—whether geographic, ethnic, theoretical, or other—and filling in the gaps in border work. Other pieces suggest an alternative to border studies (the “other”
of yet “another” border studies) that involves thinking from an entirely different sort of “ground” — indeed, without the possibility of a ground for determining and securing relation. To think along these lines is to suggest a nonprescriptive “model” for multiculturalism and community.

The model used by liberal-to-left scholars, by border theorists, is the one in which differences count, make a difference, in which particular constellations of practices are understood to be essentially related or organized by some principle of identity. Homi Bhabha suggests that this model amounts to the celebration — even when practiced as what David Palumbo-Liu calls “critical multiculturalism” (15) — of “cultural diversity,” the celebration of culture as an “epistemological object” (Bhabha 34); such celebration, Bhabha writes, “gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity” (34); it is, finally, the “representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures” (34). The other “model,” which is not one, which presupposes and circumscribes nothing, is one in which differences mean nothing, add up without sum; a “model,” then, in which practices can never be totalized to account for identity — indeed, in which there would be no (question of) identity.

The first model imagines a day of nearly infinite judgments about otherness (at least, judgments concerning the other’s very existence) — but judgments, finally, that are not judgmental. One version would be acknowledging and respecting the other’s identity in its alterity without presuming much of anything about the other; or, in a slightly more interactive mode, learning about the other’s identity without producing a system of inflections, hierarchies. Benign and friendly judgments, these, without content and/or value.

We know this to be theoretically impossible. Such judgment, inevitably, is exclusion, and is necessarily made from a position entirely incommensurate with the other. It is always already a kind of prejudice, and the very possibility of more familiar forms of such — the determining of categories of and candidates for the inferior, the unnatural, the debased. As a model for multiculturalism, it is ineluctably exclusive: constructive of borders around identities, the fault lines today being precisely those differences that seem to matter and “make a differ-

ence” — gender, race, color, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, to name the most obvious.

The second model is one of radical inclusivity, and not because “we” are, as Tzvetan Todorov claims in On Human Diversity, all fundamentally alike at the level of our humanity. This community, if it is one, has no ground, but is nevertheless “founded,” according to Jean-Luc Nancy, on our being-in-common:

Being in common means that singular beings are, present themselves, and appear only to the extent that they compear (comparaissent), to the extent that they are exposed, presented, or offered to one another. This compearance (comparison) is not something added on to their being; rather, their being comes into being in it. (1991, 58)

The second model does not begin with the principle of identity. It is no longer a question of inclusion or exclusion, no longer a question of taking it personally, no longer a question of affiliation (brotherhood) or identity. Differences make no difference and cannot, as a consequence, secure legislation against anyone. This is not to say that there is no judgment, only, rather, that judgment will be unfounded, without precedent, and fraught with typically unthought ideological implications. We take this to be Bhabha’s point when he writes that “culture only emerges as a problem, or a problematic, at the point at which there is a loss of meaning in the contestation and articulation of everyday life, between classes, genders, races, nations” (34). At stake is the “structure of the problem” of cultural limits, something that proponents of cultural diversity, in their “well-intentioned moralist polemics against prejudice and stereotype” (34), cannot describe. In focusing attention on the limit of culture, the border of its possibility, Bhabha distinguishes between cultural diversity on the one hand and “cultural difference,” which “is the process of the enunciation of culture as ‘knowledgeable,’ authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of identification” (34), on the other. Cultural difference is, then, the “process of signification through which statements of culture and on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity” (34). Cultural difference would thus be the “foundation” for any possible cultural diversity, but it remains a problematic, ambiva-
lent ground, one that threatens the security of the identity, the author-
ity, it supports: "The concept of cultural difference focuses on the prob-
lem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the name of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation" (34). To put it another way, "we" are always at the limit of the enunciation of culture, always awaiting the arrival of culture as the unambivalent ground of and for identity. In the advent of its arrival, Nancy's community is before us. Which is simply to say that "we," this community without ground and without identity, will have to decide about "culture," will have to be responsible both to and for "our" decision concerning "borders" and "difference," if "we" are to bring such effects forward. Or if at all. Every time, for the first time.

To begin to articulate the problem of the border, one can begin literally anywhere — for example, in the back pages of the New Yorker, where, in 1993, the American Indian College Fund ran an extremely terse advertisement. The ad tells nothing about the fund's purpose, which involves support of twenty-seven tribal colleges, most of which are located on reservations across the country. The ad contains a single line of copy and a single image. The text — in large, bold letters — reads, "Save A Culture That Could Save Ours." What does this mean? "Culture," that ultimately mysterious word in interdisciplinary conversations at the moment, is at stake. And two particular cultures — "ours" and that of the "American Indian."

On the one hand, the implication is that American Indian culture is in a kind of danger that can be averted only through a college education. It is at least cause for wonder that an Anglo educational institution must prop up Indian ways of being — that Indians need an Anglo-style education, including an education in who they are — in order to continue to be themselves. But however strange it sounds, this argument is made quite explicit in the information that the American Indian College Fund mails to those who respond to the advertisement. The fund has printed a set of postcards that describe various Indian beliefs, and at the bottom of each card, the fund notes: "This is just one of the many beliefs that are kept alive by the 27 tribal colleges. Help save a culture that could save ours" (emphasis added).
So while the ad copy presumes that the reader knows precisely where the border lies between "our" culture and Amerindian culture, the ad says that neither of these two cultures can be, in the future, what they already are, without massive border crossing. An Anglo supplement to Indian culture is needed in order to gather and hold together such culture, and this combined Anglo-Amerindian product is needed, in turn, in order to supplement the Anglo world. The Anglo world secures the Indian world, and Anglo-Amerindian education returns the favor and secures the Anglo world.

The image in the ad is also worth examining. It is a "white" feather nesting within a colored flame. This white/colored image visualizes the ad copy, and imagines a day when that which is white (i.e., Anglo) is encased within that which is colored (i.e., Amerindian). The image also visualizes complex cultural transfer, because the white image is in the shape of a feather, which so typically symbolizes "Indianness" and its relationship to nature, and the colored image is a flame, which symbolizes, most likely, civilization in general, and, in particular, the knowledge provided by a college education. So the image promises a future when that which is "white" will be shaped like an Indian mind, and that which is "colored" will be shaped in the manner of an Anglo mind.

But it is even more complicated, and here is where the text is at its most interesting. The border between the two images is not secured. The bottom of the white feather is not enclosed within the black border; rather, the bottom of the white feather leaks out onto the ad's larger field of whiteness, not only escaping a complete nesting, but demonstrating that the black envelopes the white only as it itself is enveloped by the totality of that which it surrounds. The image is, finally, one in which whiteness reigns, though the white secures its own complex imaging of a preserved whiteness only by the introduction of a seemingly protecting coloredness. That which is colored is then both an external and internal border for the white.

It is perhaps predictable that the ad, through the use of the word could, imagines that cultural transfer and interrelationship between Anglos and Amerindians is still to come, as if, in the late twentieth century, two separate cultures exist that can now—if "we" choose—inform and even ground each other. This is a modified multiculturalist affirmation of difference: bare multiple-culturalism combined with a vision of a more complex, mixed future, albeit with the distinction between cultures always preserved. Perhaps it goes without saying that this is a particular narrative of modernity: the world begins in simple difference or alterity (Europe and its others), and, following colonialism, it ends happily in complex reciprocity.

Judged as a politics, what such a narrative, or model of both a present and an ideal future, necessarily leaves behind as a trail of debris is an opening for virulent forms of differentiation—on both sides. Amerindians can, within the bare terms of the ad, use its language to indict whiteness in general as, at least, self-destructive. And Anglos can too easily use the rhetorical resources of the ad to produce simple reversals on the fund's implied message: Amerindians' contributing to the salvation of Anglos looks to some like backwardness, technophobia, anti-modern tree-hugging, anticapitalist laziness, and the like.

In other words, multicultural or liberal notions of difference are also, at one and the same time, fuel for a rhetoric of dislike or even hate. One can always read a narrative of differentiation either way, depending upon one's largest political sensibilities. And unless one can imagine a world composed of nothing but liberal sensibilities (and this is, indeed, impossible, given that the differential field of political ideas demands that all positions within the field exist), the result is that virulent whiteness and coloredness continue (see Bourdieu 185). Liberal politics, then, inevitably reproduces the conditions of hate.

Recognizing the traps of this discourse, however, does not necessarily plunge one into pessimism, because it is possible to rethink the border—in this case, the border "between" Anglo and Amerindian cultures. It is not necessary to think that the modern world proceeds from separate and distinct, preexisting cultures toward more complex formations. One can, instead, think of the complexity—the profound interrelationship of the very ideas of European and indigenous cultures—as a product of colonialist thought from its inception. The cultural knots—the sorts of borders that strangely elide the difference between inside and outside—are products of beginnings. What is typically described as identity difference is nothing more than an effect of an identity relationality that makes it seem as if cultures are still to be "crossed" rather
than, as David Murray has suggested, analyzed for their “constant interplay” (3).

If colonial encounters in general produce the problematic rhetoric of the American Indian College Fund, then one possible project is de-thinking — thinking backward — the status of the differences themselves and imagining a future not more but less complex or mixed. This means forgoing the “saving” of cultures, and instead destructuring one’s sense of them. It involves making studies of “culture” as maximally difficult as possible in the name of a future sparser and sparser in its understanding of peoples and cultures. This means doing away with modern anthropology, sociology, and ethnohistory’s ideas of culture, as well as these disciplines’ tropes of complexity, typically assembled under the prefixes inter, trans, bi, and cross. These “traveling logics” can give way to something else — a recognition that cultural borders are effects produced in the mental operation that pulls two groups of people together (in the case of anthropology, ethnographers and their research objects) — (con)fusing them in order to contrast them. The terms of this other way of thinking culture make it impossible to describe singular cultures and their border/crossing. “Border effects,” instead, trace back to abyssal discursive relationalities.

To put it in terms of the American Indian College Fund advertisement, the fund cannot have its cake and eat it, too. The language of multicultural differentiation and mixture is betrayed by the black/white border within the image that does not successfully mark out where the cultural border lies and how it can be crossed. In the ad, the border crossing has always already taken place, with the seemingly privileged figure of coloredness always already colonized.

Two of the best-known elaborations of border theory — Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera and Hicks’s Border Writing — expose the problems and tensions inherent in theorizing border crossing. And both texts bear some relationship to the New Yorker ad. First, both establish the same kind of difference — the same historical divide — between modern and premodern worlds. This is an old story. In these texts, the premodern world consists of separate and distinct cultures or territories and the modern of culture crossings. Hicks calls this later process, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, the “detrimentalization” of culture and language (xxiv), whereas Anzaldúa speaks of a multiplicity of “borderlands” — the psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands, which “are not particular to the Southwest” and which, in fact, are disseminated across borders and into every body that inhabits the world, whether these bodies reside near geographic borders or not (pref., n.p.).

Second, both texts, like the ad, are concerned with saving all individual cultures from destruction, and Anzaldúa in particular is concerned with saving subjectivities from the increasing cultural fragmentation that puts such subjectivities at risk. But both Hicks and Anzaldúa believe that cultural isolationism poses grave dangers, even though Anzaldúa also sees “borderlands’” subjectivity as “plagued” and “torn” due to cultural “transfer,” “collision,” “clash,” “strife,” and “attack” (78). In both cases, salvation involves increasing attention to border crossing: a kind of coming to consciousness of proliferating psychological and/or linguistic crossings. For Anzaldúa, those subjects who speak “Chicano Spanish” in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands are wounded subjects, but sometimes, today, they are becoming conscious of these effects of border crossings. And even Anglos living in Iowa are already border crossers, though without knowing it or feeling it. They are hunkered down in an illusory, self-enclosed white subjectivity. Anzaldúa asks of Anglos or whites “to be met halfway” (pref., n.p.). “Whites” are “to be our allies” in the future (85), she argues, and she addresses whites in the following way: “Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppleganger in your psyche” (86). Such a modification of consciousness will produce a world of border subjects that preserves “the heterosexual white man’s or the colored man’s or the state’s or the culture’s or the religion’s or the parent’s’” ways of being-in-the-world as part of an amalgam or fusion that is “just ours, mine”: “And suddenly I feel everything rushing to a center, a nucleus. All the lost pieces of myself come flying from the deserts, and the mountains and the valleys, magnetized toward that center. Completa” (51).

Hicks’s metaphor for this same process is that of the hologram: “In the same way that one part of a hologram can produce an entire image,
the border metaphor is able to reproduce the whole culture to which it refers” (xxviii). She imagines a complex project of global wellness that preserves all existing cultures and languages by stitching together the border subjectivities that embody them toward an in-principle incompletable yet still necessary and ideal conception of wholeness (xxix). The difference between Anzaldúa and Hicks on this point is that Anzaldúa forecasts absolute, holistic completeness, whereas Hicks strategizes a “less solid” sort of universality—one that “cannot be dominated so easily” (xxix). In both cases, however, cultures must be forced into increasingly combining relationship with one another in order to save each individual cultural piece or fragment.

Third, both texts, again like the American Indian College Fund ad, premise saving or “healing” the world on recourse to the indigenous. Hicks calls this “nonsynchronous memory” (xxii). “The word [the world speaks] is sick”; “the global body needs to be healed,” she says, and the dangerously fragmented subjectivities of modernity are made well, finally, by a kind of writerly shamanism (xixi). Hicks says:

Border writing is the trace of the coyote/shaman...[in which] the writer...[is] a shaman who writes in order to cure the reader...If the border is a machine, then one of its elements is the bicultural smuggler, and to read...is to cross over into another side where capital has not yet reduced the object to a commodity, to a place where psychic healing can occur. (xxx)

Anzaldúa, for her part, writes at great length about getting in touch with a pre-Aztec, Nahuatl element inside her: “Plumb the rich ancestral roots” (23); “native cultural roots...origins” (21). “Let’s all stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian split point of view and root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent” (68). This submerged consciousness, this unconscious, acting as an “officiating priestess” (80), allows one to “deconstruct” the split border subject and “reconstruct” a transborder, pan-cultural subjectivity that no longer hurts (82–83).

Some serious problems within these theoretical narratives are quite obvious, three of which are worth noting. First, the tensions between tendencies toward universalism and localism are not sufficiently marked. In both cases, Spanish American writing is both unique and serves as a kind of final destination for all world writing. This is the same double gesture, from reverse perspective, of the cultural history of the West, as Jacques Derrida notes in The Other Heading. Europe, according to Derrida, has been figured for hundreds of years as both special and universal—and this tension or contradiction is one of the crucial markers of colonialist thought. Both Anzaldúa and Hicks, it might be said, engage in a new but no less tired form of colonialism.

Second, the recourse of both Anzaldúa and Hicks to the seemingly indigenous partakes of some of the most obvious stereotypes about premodern peoples (that their cultures are dominated by magic, shape-shifting, healing) as well as a decidedly late-Western, “New Age,” and, finally, bland universal humanism and/or multiculturalism (we need to “see not just from one side of the border, but from the other as well,” says Hicks [xxiii], and we are “on our way to a new consciousness” beyond black and white dichotomies, says Anzaldúa [78]). In these twin and again conflicting tendencies, the indigenous is, on the one hand, “othered” as profoundly antirational and, on the other hand, understood as humanist through and through. Putting to one side the question of just how phantasmatographic these notions of indigenousness are—and they are all profoundly romantic-mythic—the splitting or bifurcating of the historically and perhaps necessarily linked ideas of rationalism and humanism is a highly problematic gesture.

Finally, there is a third unresolved tension in Hicks’s and Anzaldúa’s texts between the claims to future inclusiveness of all sides of the world’s borders and the harsh criticism of facets of Anglo or white culture: capitalism and technologism in Hicks; sexism and heterosexism, among other things, in Anzaldúa. For all their claims to inclusiveness, saving notions of indigenousness in Anzaldúa and Hicks resist and strive to overcome domination by capital, technology, machismo, and heterosexuality. In other words, for every bare multiculturalist gesture in these texts, there is another gesture toward the demonization and repression of a presumed white or Anglo culture.

But the largest problem in these texts involves coming to terms with their conceptualization of completeness and totality. If the world begins in completely separate, unlike, anterior cultures, what guarantees or secures the very possibility of wholeness or wellness—completeness and totality? In Hicks’s case, what does a “hologram” look like that is
pieced together from unrelated fragments? She uses words like “order” and the “whole,” and she uses the Benjaminian metaphor of the “vessel” “piece[d] together” (xxx) — but what guarantees that a totality will emerge from the fragmentary state(s) of culture? And in Anzaldúa's case, what guarantees that “certain ‘faculties’ — not just in me but in every border resident — and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened” (pref., n.p.), and that these faculties will produce a kind of writing or communication that translates all “alien” cultures into a pan-cultural, pan-linguistic tongue?

One answer might be that the special notion of “indigenousness” in these texts operates as a kind of universal translator. Hicks certainly implies that there is something so similar about all indigenous cultures, and something so complete unto itself and so well or healthy about the very condition of indigenousness, that, in its essence, it speaks across all modern borders and heals their differences. In Hicks's narrative, all of the different modern cultures emerged out of indigenousness, and that same indigenousness therefore undergirds or underpins modernity — provides a set of hidden connections among cultures that can be called back into being. For Hicks, then, the wholeness of the hologram is guaranteed only when the fragments of modernity are lacquered over with a heavy coat of indigenousness, drawn from its deep well.

Anzaldúa's text works much the same way, even though it is only hemispheric in outlook. Indigenousness is different from modernity because it is preduality, prebinarity — it is a heady mixture of anything and everything before elements and concepts were separated out from one another and organized hierarchically. Modernity (read: duality, or difference) emerges directly out of this rich, inchoate, and protean stew, and can be, therefore, redissolved back into its constituting indigenousness.

But something else altogether can be argued concerning these images of totality and completeness. Or, at least, it is possible to suggest another pathway for thinking that was open to Anzaldúa and Hicks. A theory of borderlands need not return to the homelands.

Both Anzaldúa's mysterious, untapped “faculties” and Hicks's “non-synchronous memory” are nothing more or less than the embodiment of the complex of “border effects” — a transcultural or global “outer edge or border [that] can also be considered an inner fold” (Derrida 1984, 14). They both involve the sensing of relationality interpreted as an exterior completeness and totality that, at one and the same time, feels interiorized — and this can be understood as the largest possible but still phantom effect of the project of bordering. It is a version of the “border effect” that produces a sense of individual cultural completeness, logically extended to its maximum — to the culture that is the combination of all independent cultures. Anzaldúa's and Hicks's resorting to “indigenousness” in order to account for such feelings is both a grasping at mythic-nostalgic straws and, on another level, little more than liberal-humanist politics.

But a border is not something that can be crossed by one or the other self-enclosed cultural subject. Nor can all of these borders be assembled and gathered together into a still larger enclosure — whether one calls it “completa” or a negative/ideal totality. Instead, a border is always already crossed and double-crossed, without the possibility of the “trans” cultural — whether petit or grand. It is “to be related, without translation, to all the ‘trans’— that are at work here” (Derrida 1984, 172).

To bring Anzaldúa and Hicks to this point means abandoning, finally, any project of “keeping intact one's... identity,” as Anzaldúa phrases it (pref., n.p.), and then comprehending the cultural or linguistic self as necessarily incomplete, coming to be, held open to “outside” cultures, while, at the same time, as having always already enfolded the other within itself, with the border between the inside and outside, in principle, uncloseable. Such an other way of thinking produces defamiliarizing border readouts without the possibility of laying it on the line — or at least a straight or straightforward one. Borders everywhere, but a world where no geographer's or cartographer's science is up to the task of mapping. And once this is grasped, who can say what the “one,” the “many,” the “othered,” or the “whole” sum total might be capable of re-thinking — or actively forgetting to think?

The “border” in border studies remains the problem, set before Anzaldúa's “one” and the “other” as the site for “keeping intact one's... identity.” It is the place, in short, of a certain property, and of a certain properness. You might say that one belongs there, that we will find ourselves there, facing one another across that divide. Such is the upshot
of Calderón and Saldívar's introduction to Criticism in the Borderlands, in which they describe that volume's project as an attempt to place the borderlands — the literature and criticism, the culture, then, of the U.S. Southwest — before a national audience, explaining that while the "widening of the literary canon" has benefited many, "much work still lies ahead, however, especially in the field of Chicano literature; although many men and women have entered the academy, our literature and scholarship have yet to receive full institutional support or national attention" (1). This work "lies ahead" of "us" like a problem, a limit or border, to which "we" come and that "we" will have to cross. But not all of "us": there are exclusions operating in this borderlands anthology, exclusions that, as part of the introduction, serve to authorize the collection's coherence and publication. "Chicano culture, as viewed by Chicanas and Chicanos as well as by European and Latin American scholars, is an expression of a social group that has given the distinctive cultural feature to the American West and Southwest" (2). In sum, the borderlands belong to Chicano culture, to Chicano cultural self-expression. It is a right of property.

As such, moreover, it must be constituted within a narrative of possession, a genealogy of occupation. At stake is a relation to the origin, the right to determine it:

Although Colonial Novohispano and Mexican cultures in this region date back to the mid-sixteenth century and beyond, taking into account Native American mestizo roots, the literature produced by these groups should be ideologically and institutionally situated within the national literatures of Spain and Mexico. A Spanish chronicler of the area which was later to form the northern regions of the viceroyalty of New Spain, Cabeza de Vaca or Coronado writing in the sixteenth century, regardless of whatever sympathy he may have had for Native Americans, is not a Chicano but a Spaniard. (2)

On the one hand, as in Anzaldúa and Hicks, there is the suggestion of a relation to an indigenous mestizaje, of an origin without history; on the other hand, there is the desire to determine the origin of Chicano cultural expression as a principio without the taint of Spanish colonialism. Cabeza de Vaca is no Chicano despite passing several years in and through what would become the South Texas valley — the scene of Rolando Hinojosa's fictions — and despite moving among that originary mestizaje. In excluding conqueror-writers like Cabeza de Vaca and Coronado, Criticism in the Borderlands effectively argues that contact with others, being among others, makes no difference. There is contact, perhaps no end of contact, but it makes no difference. This exclusivity implies that the rule of Chicano identity is not to be among others, but to be among Chicanos: it is constitutive of an enclave. The cultures in contact, then, in the sixteenth century, like Criticism in the Borderlands's understanding of Chicano culture today, apparently maintain their respective purities, their identities, without and before the other — a kind of aboriginal Native American mestizaje that in its aboriginality becomes pure, on the one hand, and on the other a Spanish cultural "purity" influenced for centuries by the presence in Spain of Jews and Moors. The two, constituted of mixing without rule, exist in the borderlands, unmixed — without any intercourse. And this despite what Calderón and Saldívar call "the four hundred years of a Mexican mestizaje presence in our borderlands" (7). This would be the rule, the arché of Chicano culture.

Calderón and Saldívar no doubt are aware of the exclusion; they remark it as an effect of another definition of Chicano identity: "If we limit Chicano or Mexican-American artistic forms to political boundaries, they have existed in oral or written form since the Texas-Mexican War (1836) with greater awareness of cultural differences from Mexico after the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-48)" (2). The possibility of Chicano or Mexican American cultural identity results from an Anglo-American intervention in already colonized territory. Given this definition of Chicano identity, the exclusion of Cabeza de Vaca is not one: he belongs to an earlier historical-political narrative. Yet the new model for Chicano identity remains exclusive despite its apparent geopolitical inclusivity, for it includes as Chicanos only those who are both inscribed genealogically within the geopolitical borders of the U.S. expansion into formerly Mexican territory and resistant to Anglo-American domination:

Although we are not dismissing the various ideological discourses on the borderlands prior to the mid-twentieth century, we are arguing in this volume for a Mexican-American or Chicano intellectual perspective….
Calderón/Saldivar Chicano studies effectively tells all those who would be Chicanos that it is not enough to have been born in a certain place at a certain time of a certain biological-cultural genealogy. It tells them they will have to choose and, further, that they will have to know what they choose; they will have to resist and they will have to do so consciously. They will have to take sides. And they will have to know what side they've taken. This would be the crisis of identity without the risk, for all Chicanos will decide for “us”; they will all be like “us.” Our resistance against their assimilation. No Chicanos on the other side, el otro lado. Chicano identity is inscribed, as is every other identity, within the horizon of the politics of opposition. Yet Todorov, in The Conquest of America, cautions that “we shall never be sure that by not behaving like them we are not in fact on the way to imitating them” (254). Or, even were we to grant the possibility of knowing that we resist, and of knowing what amounts to resistance, as Derrida points out in the preamble to “The Ends of Man,” such opposition “does not upset the given order”:

It would be illusory to believe that political innocence has been restored, and evil complicity undone, when opposition to them can be expressed in the country itself, not only through the voices of its own citizens but also those of foreign citizens, and that henceforth diversities, i.e., oppositions, may freely and discursively relate to one another. That a declaration of opposition to some official policy is authorized, and authorized by the authorities, also means, precisely to that extent, that the declaration does not upset the given order, is not bothersome. (114)

It is always possible, in other words, that we will never know where we stand and, knowing where we stand, knowing what side we've taken or come to occupy, we won't nevertheless find ourselves elsewhere. What passes, then, for resistance, for opposition, and, thus, for identity? Or perhaps there is only passing resistance and the passing away of identity. Identity: it comes to pass.

Perhaps, then, there are very few Chicanos: perhaps there are none. A strategy for inclusion grounded upon an exclusion, a principle of inclusivity (resistance, opposition) that, when pushed hard enough, effectively denies access to all — and this to preserve Chicano identity, to save it from others, and not, as Benjamin Alire Sáenz suggests in his
contribution to this volume, to rethink Chicano as “an identity that waits for the day that it is no longer necessary.”

Sáenz’s essay makes clear what so much of Chicano studies — and ethnic studies in general — fails to note: identities don’t travel well. They don’t work well abroad, among others; and home, too, is always foreign, always on the other side of the border. Sáenz notes: “Chicano in those years meant nothing. There was no context, no social or political necessity for that identity. But it was my time in Europe and my summer in Africa that taught me that I did not belong in those places. I was a foreigner there — and would always be a foreigner. I came to the conclusion that I had a people — that I belonged to a people, a community.” But the place he thinks he belongs is not his either: he has just recounted the story of a young woman who told him to “criticize Mexico...— criticize your own country.” In Europe, the Chicano is European, American, white; in the United States, the Chicano is Mexican. Always out of place, improperly sited, at home and abroad: this will be the “ground” of the Chicano, of Chicano identity, if there is one, and, perhaps, of a certain “people” and “community.” Or, to address the problem in terms of Louis Kaplan’s reading of The Pilgrim, Chaplin’s film set in the “no-man’s-land” of the Tex-Mex borderlands, the borderer — the one who dwells, who is at home — is always on the other side of the border. Indeed, we will never be able to tell, to hear, the difference between the border and the borderer.

This is a very different terrain from the one marked out by Calderón and Saldivar, by Anzaldúa, and by Hicks. It is, perhaps ironically, the space traversed by Cabeza de Vaca in Naufragios. But this is not to argue in favor of Bruce-Novoa’s assertion of Cabeza de Vaca’s Chicanicity, an inclusion grounded on the identity of personal experience (see note 3); on the contrary, it is to site Cabeza de Vaca at the edge of the decision about his place, at the limit of inclusivity and exclusivity. At the border of meaning, which is, according to Jean-Luc Nancy, the place of mestizaje (1994). It is also where Rolena Adorno finds him in “The Negotiation of Fear in Cabeza de Vaca’s Naufragios.” For Adorno, Cabeza de Vaca’s movement between Amerindian groups allowed those groups to come into contact. Thus Cabeza de Vaca mediated Amerindians as a kind of shaman, without, however, occupying an essential place between them: “This magical power did not mean that the Spaniards were the principal parties in the negotiations between the marauding groups and their victims, but rather the catalysts to the exchange: they helped produce the desired pillaging and could be counted upon not to covet its rewards” (562). His place within these exchanges, then, is extrinsic; nothing accrues to his place. It is productive of nothing but the possibility of relation among and between others. He is a cipher at the edge of an economy of cultural production. He gains nothing in relation to these others — neither a new, Amerindian identity nor the preservation of a Spanish one. His place is entirely emptied out. He will come to occupy the site of an unidentified “we” (Todorov 1984, 199): entirely empty, neither inclusive nor exclusive; a community, a plurality, that produces no culture to which “we” belong, no identity “we” can call our own. This “we” takes no sides in the “war of position,” has no place there.

On the one hand, to the extent contemporary Chicano studies of the Calderón/Saldivar sort defines itself, defines Chicano in terms of resistance and opposition to hegemonic discourses of the nation, Cabeza de Vaca has no place there: he is no Chicano. On the other hand, Bruce-Novoa’s inclusion of Cabeza de Vaca within the genealogical narratives of Chicano literature and Chicano history is no less problematic in that it depends on the guarantee of shared experiences. This sort of inclusion is an exclusion waiting to happen; it is effectively the same as Calderón and Saldivar’s insistence on “Chicano” as a relation to Anglo-American discourses of national identity, as long as the relation is the one “we” all share: one of opposition, of resistance.

At stake in these gestures of inclusion and exclusion is a policing of the border of culture and of the borderlands in general as the location of Chicano culture, a certain legislation that governs access to culture and cultural identification. Again, this is not a problem unique to Chicano studies. In an article published in American Quarterly, the flagship journal of the American Studies Association, Betsy Erkilla suggests that “current paradigms of American literary studies...encourage a separatist and atomized model of literary and cultural studies in which whites do whites, men do men, women do women, blacks do blacks, latinos do latinos, and there is very little dialogue among or cultural encounter beyond these relatively fixed ethnic and gender bounds” (564). Border
studies and/or multiculturalism reach their limit in monadology: a world of “created simple substances or monads” that “have no windows, by which anything could come in or go out” (Leibnitz 181, 179).

Yet, while it is true that other critical discourses both implicitly and explicitly have recourse to borders — geopolitical and metaphorical — it is equally true that Chicano studies, more than any other, has refocused critical attention on the concept of the border. Chicano studies — more than ethnic studies or postcolonial studies or U.S.-Mexico border studies — has made the idea of the border available, indeed necessary, to the larger discourses of American literary studies, U.S. history, and cultural studies in general. And precisely because Chicano studies has come to occupy the border — the political-geographic one between the United States and Mexico and the concept of the border person, the fronterizo — and to claim it, as Hicks and Anzaldúa do, as a kind of birthright, and as Renato Rosaldo does, as the site “of creative cultural production,” Border Theory must mark out an other relation to it. Border Theory inscribes itself neither simply within Chicano studies nor simply without it: neither inclusive nor exclusive, it traces the limit (of the border) of disciplinary and discursive identity.

The border is policed, access denied or permitted, always on the ground of reading, interpretation. Roberto González Echevarría points out that “the law (legislar, from ‘to read’) is above all a system of reading and writing, a prescribed way of interpreting” (67). Rosaldo’s Culture and Truth, which is perhaps the most important text in the growing canon of multicultural anthropology and which occupies the center of the most recent Chicano studies, is organized around certain problems of reading, problems that have, finally, the force of law. No fewer than three times, Rosaldo provokes a crisis of interpretation by marking scenes of reading and the decisions they demand. But his point is not that it is rigorously impossible to decide for or against a certain reading, and that, this shadow of undecidability notwithstanding, “we” must decide without precedent, without rule. Nor does he, faced with such a legislative problem, conclude that the question of reading effectively opens the subject to the aporetic structure of the border of subjectivity. No: Rosaldo’s crises of reading are, rather, sites of exclusion and affiliation.

Culture and Truth’s remaking of social analysis, its repositioning of “the cultural force of emotions” (2) depends on how “we” read A. R. Radcliffe-Brown’s reading of Andaman Islanders’ “weeping” rite (52–53), deciding “whether or not the weepers actually feel anything” (52); on how “we” read Karl Marx’s “anti-Semitic stereotypes,” whether “we” read them straight or not, in context or out (190–93); and, finally, though it comes first in Culture and Truth, on how “we” read Rosaldo’s “use of personal experience” (11). According to Rosaldo, “we” will decide that Andaman Islanders do feel something when they weep their welcome; that Marx, when read in context, was not an anti-Semite; and that, most important, “we” sympathize with Rosaldo’s use of personal experience, namely, his description of Michelle Rosaldo’s death and his reaction to it.

The crisis, however, is not one; there is no other choice, for to decide otherwise would be, quite simply, inhuman: as Rosaldo points out, “unsympathetic readers could reduce [his text] to an act of mourning” (11), in the same way, for example, that Radcliffe-Brown, Rosaldo notes, “regards [Andaman Islanders’] tears as mere playacting” (53). Unsympathetic readers, of course, are those who do not share emotions with others or, in the case of Culture and Truth, with “us.” But within the context of Culture and Truth’s argument — basically that humans share an emotional structure that makes multiculturalism possible — unsympathetic readers, because they lack such fellow feeling, the possibility of sympathetic identification with the other, which makes us human, are dead, and thus no longer human. Culture and Truth’s “‘we’ in other words will be inclusive of all humans, of the living. If you are human, you will be one of “us”; to prove you are alive, however, to prove your humanity, you must agree with “us,” you must sympathize. There is in this totalizing gesture masked as inclusive multiculturalism something of what Rosaldo calls “the Green Card phase” of institutional diversification. “Institutions of higher learning appeared to tell those previously excluded,” Rosaldo explains, “‘Come in, sit down, shut up. You’re welcome here as long as you conform to our norms’” (x). This would be called, if it weren’t already called multiculturalism, a theory of assimilation grounded upon a fundamental exclusion, an exclusion so thoroughly buried it goes virtually unnoticed, almost unread.
No doubt *Culture and Truth* constructs an inclusive community, a “we” that “you” and “I,” among others, can join, be part of; such community comes at a certain cost, however, and though that cost won’t be “our” humanity — for that will be given “us” upon “our” inclusion — it will be any possibility of an ethical relation to others. Indeed, this community costs “us” others. And it does so precisely by reducing the risk of reading, by reducing the problem it puts before “us” — whoever “we” are, living or dead.

On the one hand, we have multicultural inclusivity grounded in legible universal human emotions — tears, for example — that do not, however, require interpretation because “we” (all humans) agree on their import; on the other hand, we have an inclusive, expansionist multicultural American literary history grounded on principles of inclusion that produce a certain hegemonic Chicano identity. How, for example, does *Criticism in the Borderlands* justify Cabeza de Vaca’s exclusion from a widened American literature, a multicultural one, except to say that he is a Spaniard? Effectively, *Criticism in the Borderlands* would exclude him on the grounds that he is not one of us, not a product of U.S. Anglo-American cultural and economic domination, and that he was one of them — a Spaniard, a conqueror — his sympathy for us mestizos notwithstanding. In the first half of the sixteenth century, what exactly is a Spaniard, whether here, in the Americas, or there, in Europe?

Of tears and Spaniards, then, two transparent scenes that make clear the grounds for legislating against a certain anthropological narrative of the other and Cabeza de Vaca. In a way, the question for multiculturalism would be, For whom do Spaniards cry? For themselves or for others? How do they know? And, for that matter, how do “we” tell the difference between a Spanish tear and a Chicano one? Or are they/we all merely playacting, feigning authentic tears, authentically shedding crocodile tears for the other?

What of Cabeza de Vaca’s tears? In *Naufragios* — the relación of a nine-year stay/journey among, between, with those fundamentally mestizo Native Americans, written by a “Spaniard,” according to Calderón and Saldivar, who will be recognized neither as Spanish nor as Amerindian by “Spaniards” or by “others” in 1536, and both recognized and not recognized as Chicano in 1991 — Cabeza de Vaca and other “Spaniards”

cry among themselves and among others. Shipwrecked, cast naked upon the shore, Cabeza de Vaca writes:

Así, estuvimos pidiendo a Nuestro Señor misericordia y perdón de nuestros pecados, derramando muchas lágrimas, habiendo cada uno lástima no sólo de sí, mas de todos los otros, que en el mismo estado velan…. Los indios, de ver el desastre que nos habia venido y el desastre en que estábamos, con tanta desventura y miseria, se sentaron entre nosotros, y con el gran dolor y lástima que hubieron de vernos en tanta fortuna, comenzaron todos a llorar recio y tan de verdad, que lejos de allí se podían oir; y esto les duró más de media hora. Cierto ver que estos hombres tan sin razón y tan cruados, a manera de brutos, se dolían tanto de nosotros, hizo que en mi y en otros de la compañía creciese más la pasión y la consideración de nuestra desdicha. (1989, 120-21)

[And thus we were imploring our lord for mercy and pardon for our sins, shedding many tears, each one bewailing not only his own plight but that of all the others whom he saw in the same state…. When the Indians saw the disaster that had come upon us and the disaster we were in, with so much ill luck and misery, they sat down among us and, with great grief and pity they felt on seeing us in such a desperate plight, all of them began to weep loudly, and so sincerely that they could be heard a long way off, and this lasted more than half an hour; and certainly, to see that those uncivilized and savage men, like brutes, were so sorry for us, caused me and others in our company to feel still more grief and the full realization of our misfortune.] (1993, 42)

“We” cry for ourselves and the other cries for “us,” also, but “our” tears need interpretation, need explanation, for tears can never be certain; despite their transparence, they are rather murky emotional indicators, if they mark emotions at all. Cabeza de Vaca’s “y tan de verdad” signals the ambiguity of tears — authentic or feigned, tears of joy or sorrow, tears of pity or self-pity; they must be contained, situated within a narrative of survival in the face of the longest odds. So long, in fact, that despite the “truth” of these Amerindian tears, that they are on behalf of “our” pain, a pain with which the Amerindians sympathize, and despite the effect these tears have on “us,” namely, that “we” feel ourselves and our pain even more truly in the wake of these tears, nevertheless, these others threaten “us.” After feeding and warming “us,” Cabeza de Vaca explains that the Amerindians carry “us” to a house they had made for “us” and


from an hour after the time we arrived they began to dance and make great revelry (which lasted all night), though for us there was neither pleasure nor revelry nor sleep, waiting to know when they were going to sacrifice us. (1993, 43)

How do "we" read the other, the other's tears, the other's revelry? How do we read "our" own tears? The problem for Cabeza de Vaca, simply, is to negotiate the signs of the other, to read the watermark of tears. Salvation or sacrifice, salvation and sacrifice. A certain consumption of the self, then, its completion in the tears of the other.

If there is a rule for reading the other, it remains a secret; and if "our" understanding of ourself hinges on "our" reading of others, then "we," too, the rule or law of "our" identity, remains a secret—a secret among others, perhaps; a secret that cannot (not) be told among others, a secret that cannot (not) take a toll on "us."

Anthropology comes after the secret understood as the private knowledge of culture, that which the other holds in reserve, that which in its reservation preserves the other and sustains the other's culture. And it is, perhaps, since Lévi-Strauss's theft of the proper name in Tristes Tropiques that anthropology has suffered a crisis before the secret: to take it or leave it (272–80). This crisis remains legible in recent feminist ethnography, like that of Ruth Behar and Barbara Tedlock, but also in Elizabeth Burgos's Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia. In the prologue to the first edition, Burgos explains that although she had intended to speak to Menchú about death on the last day of their eight-day stay in Paris, she developed a certain reticence, thinking that direct discussion of Mayan rituals of death would prove "premonitory" (17). Her reluctance takes the shape of a reservation, the putting-on-reserve of certain aspects of Mayan culture. Burgos understands these rituals to be so intimately Mayan that discussion of them with a non-Mayan could prove destructive. This is the anthropological fantasy of the secret of the other, that knowledge that must be kept inside or within a certain culture. It marks the limit of culture. And although Menchú takes the liberty of recording, on her own, a discussion of those rituals, it is nonetheless not clear that she doesn't share Burgos's understanding of one's relation to culture, for Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú concludes, after nearly three hundred pages of revelation, with Menchú claiming that although she has given "una imagen de [mi pueblo]... sin embargo, todavía sigo ocultando mi identidad como indígena. Sigo ocultando lo que yo considero que nadie sabe, ni siquiera un antropólogo, ni un intelectual, por más que tenga muchos libros, no saben distinguir todos nuestros secretos" (1983, 271). The self ocults the secret in order to reserve to herself her identity, in order not to give it away. If the secret is a content, a datum, to be guarded, shared only at the risk of death," then Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú blows smoke in the anthropologist's face, telling her secrets in order not to give herself away.

It is access to some such secret that Criticism in the Borderlands denies Cabeza de Vaca, and it is access to this secret, the secret self that you can't see, that Culture and Truth never challenges in its reading of Sandra Cisneros's The House on Mango Street as resistant to a certain patriarchal discourse of Chicano culture and identity. In "Changing Chicano Narratives" (chapter 7 of Culture and Truth), Rosaldo writes that "young Chicano authors have written against earlier versions of cultural authenticity that idealized patriarchal regimes that appeared autonomous, homogeneous, and unchanging" (161), but in the case of Cisneros anyway, this challenge to patriarchal versions of authenticity, for Rosaldo, does not result in a disavowal of authenticity in general. His point, in other words, is not that there is no authentic Chicano culture, but only that Chicano culture isn't simply what Américo Paredes claimed it was.

A good portion of Rosaldo's analysis of Cisneros concerns "My Name," the brief text that explains Esperanza's relation to her name and her desire to rename, "baptize" herself anew, with "a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees" (163; Cisneros 11). The name she would choose, though she admits that she is "always Esperanza," would be "Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do" (163; Cisneros 11). Rosaldo can't read the name, and although his analysis works the line between Esperanza's patrimony and her matrimony, exposing the sexual politics of a certain Chicano community, it is unable to see that there is
no “invisible, real self” (163), certainly not one that isn’t exposed from the beginning. Rosaldo leaves Esperanza’s secret alone, leaves it to her, despite being told, in Esperanza’s choice of a name, that no one is at home. Esperanza hides nothing: X is the sign of the unknown, the undetermined variable, and it is not simply unknown to Rosaldo, but to Esperanza, too, so much so that, finally, not even Zeze the X will do. Not even that name names her self. Only a name like it will do. The House on Mango Street tells all the secrets of Esperanza, tells all the secrets she knows, tells them to others in order to keep them. In order, perhaps, to keep herself. The name, then, is a problem, “that which one poses or throws in front of oneself, either as the projection of a project, of a task to accomplish, or as the protection created by a substitute, a prosthesis that we put forth in order to represent, replace, shelter, or dissimulate ourselves, or so as to hide something unavowable — like a shield . . . behind which one guards oneself in secret or in shelter in case of danger” (Derrida 1993, 11–12). And yet, what the name would secret and secrete, would protect by projecting itself as a prosthesis, “itself” has the structure of an aporia: that for which there is precisely “no longer any problem” (12), or no longer any chance “of sheltering ourselves behind what could still protect the interiority of a secret” (12).

The secret, in short, is the border of identity, the limit between inside and outside, between self and other. But secrets, like tears, secrete without reason. At the very least, cultural secrets, which are always on display, in public, exposed to and shared among others, among ourselves as others, preserve and occult nothing; they are meaningless. Rosaldo won’t look in that direction; his course has another heading: he writes that “it would be difficult to exaggerate the major role played by the narrative analysis of Paredes, Galarza, and Cisneros in my charting a path for renewing the anthropologist’s search for meaning” (166). No doubt anthropologists — understood as broadly as possible, Barbara Tedlock claims that “in today’s rapidly changing multicultural world, we are all becoming ethnographers” (xii) — will find something, a secret or two; and, no doubt, filling their notebooks, they’ll come up empty.12

Border Theory rethinks the place of the border in border studies. More specifically, it challenges the current dream of prevailing border discourses that the so-called borderlands are the site of a new cultural production, a new mestizaje, as it were, fundamentally more tolerant than other cultural paradigms. Border Theory, then, jeopardizes not just the border, whether of political-geographic or metaphoric realities, but the limits of any attempt to theorize the border. At stake is the value of the border, both as a cultural indicator and as a conceptual tool. Of what use, finally, are concepts like “culture” and “identity” if their invocation, even in so-called multicultural contexts, is also exclusive, colonial, intolerant?

To the extent that the cultural borderlands of the U.S. Southwest have been privileged as the site of the production of border discourses, the essays collected in this volume solicit the frontiers of the borderlands, shake them up, on the one hand, in Part I, by reading the borderlands and the discourses they produce and that produce them and, on the other hand, in Part II, by remarking the border elsewhere and otherwise. The volume represents a double strategy, then, of concentration and dissemination, of focusing on the borderlands in order to displace them and of looking away from them in order to locate them elsewhere.

Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics thus collects the work of younger scholars and writers who are not as yet identified with border studies and who are not working in fields or within theoretical frames traditionally associated with border studies, but whose work nevertheless has implications, on the one hand, for the rearticulation of border discourses and, on the other hand, for the reinscription of the disciplines in which the contributors are boarders — American literature, anthropology, ethnic studies — as instances of border studies.

For each of the contributors to this volume, border studies as currently constituted inadequately theorizes the border and its political import. For Alejandro Lugo, it neglects the totalizing power of capitalism and the state; border studies’ “theory of multiple subjectivities” forgets the way in which such subjectivities prop up “the politics of difference under state citizenry” and a “late capitalism characterized not only by the fragmentation of the production process, but also by the fragmentation of the labor force.”

For both Benjamin Alire Sáenz and Elaine K. Chang, border theory is too nostalgic for home, homelands, a final — and imaginary — destination for hope, healing, and security. “It is too late for me to forge a
return to my great-grandmother’s culture,” writes Sáenz, and he cautions that Gloria Anzaldúa’s strategy is “not so different from Englishmen appropriating the ‘classical’ culture of the ancient Greeks as their own’” Chang’s piece is designed to move border studies away from “villain/victim” narratives. Responding to feminists’ dissatisfaction with the collapse of the distinction between “life and text” in postmodern discourse, Chang suggests that attempts to uphold such a “strictly or merely binary” method of thinking play into the hands of essentializing, totalizing, and dominating accounts of race, gender, age, and the like, and make “victims” of people of color, women, and the young by determining their ground, their sites of origin and destination, in strictly “material” terms.

Similarly, Russ Castronovo takes issue with the “nice stories” offered by border studies (Paredes, Anzaldúa) — tales that he links to African American slave narratives of the nineteenth century, told on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. These all are “classic hero” tales in which “a text overcomes the impediments of being marginal to two or more cultures, and indeed ironically benefits from these historical limitations and prejudices, to undermine . . . oppressive structures,” and the academy’s often naive reading of such stories fails to take account of recontainment procedures enacted through conditions of publication, distribution, and framing of such texts, and by particular audiences and their reading practices.

For Louis Kaplan, the problem is a “border analysis” mortgaged to an unthematized notion of “history (or biography),” with its attendant themes of racial/ethnic/cultural origins, traditions, and straight-line trajectories. In short, the discourse of history produces closed-system, “soundproof,” internally coherent subjects, at the level of the individual and/or group, and fails to attend to the problematic of the “signature (or bioautography),” which better reflects identity’s “permanently threatened” status — its eternal and built-in deliberation over “what it might or might not take to be its own.”

One could synthesize these critiques of border studies and suggest that they search, as a group, for ways to rethink and reroute border studies’ tendency to imagine the problem of proliferating border iden-

tities as its own solution once true or historically accurate stories about marginalization and hybridity have been told; once ancient pasts are remembered; once peoples are properly differentiated and situated and, at the same time (which amounts to a later historical time), properly amalgamated or coalesced. The contributors to this book, then, find the identity politics of border studies’ most prominent instantiations naive and wanting in quite similar ways. The two sections of this volume, “The Borderlands” and “Other Geographies” — cohere in their attempt to trouble the proper place of the border, its propriety and properness in the formation, at the very least, of discourses of identity. Indeed, in its fretting of the borders of identity — so many names, protheses, protecting/projection one’s identity, exposing and sheltering it at the same time — Sáenz’s essay in particular resonates, though not unequivocally, in all the others.

But, in a certain way, Border Theory comes apart at the seam, its unity exacerbated by the plurality of critical perspectives presented in it, ranging from Foucauldian and Gramscian influenced Marxism (Lugo, Castronovo) to various deconstructions (Kaplan, Johnson, Michaeelsen) to postmodern feminisms (Chang) — theoretical positions that are not necessarily compatible. These theoretical biases are themselves modulated by the writers’ particular disciplinary affiliations: anthropology (Lugo), American literatures (Johnson, Chang, Castronovo, Michaeelsen), comparative literature (Kaplan). And this diversity is further complicated by the presence of an afterword written by a trained historian, Patricia Seed, and by the presence of a haunting and hauntingly double-voiced “personal” essay by “Chicano writer” Benjamin Alire Sáenz.

Although the volume is “itself” interdisciplinary, gathering the work of scholars/writers from various disciplines, it nevertheless registers the tension such work should elicit, but all too rarely does, for any ethical interdisciplinarity necessarily disrupts the ground of at least two disciplines: the one the practitioner leaves and the one he or she enters. Such border crossing — or, in Kaplan’s terms, bo(a)rder crossing — should be problematic. It is not — far from it: the emphasis on interdisciplinarity as the hallmark of “good” academic/scholarly work and as the savior of the disciplines, interdisciplinarity as the sign of disci-
plinary rejuvenation, the sign of renaissance, should already point toward the bankruptcy of disciplinary work and of the concept of the border as currently constituted in border studies.

More than one of the essays that follow challenge, in varying degrees of explicitness, the necessity and efficacy of the border discourses that separate and constitute disciplines, cultures, identities. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that any or all of the authors agree on strategies for dismantling bordered positions or even on a vocabulary, a language, translated or not, for convening the negotiations necessary to rearticulating them. It would be an even larger mistake to think that all or any of the contributors to this volume would appear at such a negotiation and that if they did, certain of them would not, perhaps, argue for the value of disciplines and, more generally, for the further production and description of cultural differences.

Indeed, several of the essays included here continue to address the border as the site of the encounter between a dominant culture and a resistant one, both of which require a certain identification. This, of course, remains the model of the “borderlands” border studies group, and it worries Castronovo’s fine description of the tensions along the Mason-Dixon line, as well as, perhaps, Lugo’s rendering of the discourses of nationalism in anthropological theories of the state and Chang’s discussion of runaway subjectivity. The interest of these essays testifies to the potency of the prevailing border narrative.

A related point might be made with regard to the sorts of methodological reimaginings and utopian longings evidenced in this collection. The texts of Castronovo and Chang work toward a greater particularity or specificity in border narratives—producing readings of local geographies and conditions and/or power relations as border identities shift over time. Different borders and borderlands are different, and the differences proliferate as border subjects engage one another, relate. Freedom for Castronovo, home for Chang and Sáenz—these are extremely elusive goals or dreams that nevertheless are approximated or at least approached by means of at once more powerful and specific analytics and articulations of culture. Castronovo’s new historicist model of subversion/containment, for example, is a totalizing method for border analysis that results in a description of endless microstruggles—endless cultural identity reformulations, each of which must be taken into account. Lugo’s antiuniversalist politics—his endorsement of a Gramscian or Foucauldian “war of position”—and Chang’s sense of “guerrilla” movement in “breaks left open” within the postmodern, late-capitalist city are analogous strategies for the representation of shape-shifting, multiplying, increasingly fragmented subject positions and for the charting of their potentially subversive implications. The hope in these texts rests upon an ability to map more possibilities within an ever-expanding field of identity positions (Chang notes, for instance, that “to celebrate [identity] illegibility” is akin to celebrating “dead” subjects). And, in this way, we might note these contributors’ partial kinship with crucial presuppositions within major border studies work: intellectual positivism, humanism, agency, and an at least implicit commitment to the promise of identity hybridization and multiplication.

But Chang’s attempt to turn the corner on a streetwalker, so to speak—to remark her inscription of identity as, precisely, inscription itself—and Kaplan’s related effort to textualize identity point in another direction, as does Sáenz’s triple willingness to rethink an identity politics of “fragments,” as his title implies, perhaps to the limit of what he calls the “posthuman” (although he openly acknowledges that such subjects of the future would not be “living” ones), to question the notion of the “active subject” with “radical” potential, and to break with a politics or even an epistemology of shared, coherent “culture.”

Our own individual contributions to the volume seek to extend, but perhaps reconfigure, these tendencies in Chang’s, Kaplan’s, and Sáenz’s critiques by questioning whether any revision of border studies’ objects of study, protocols, or procedures would “better” represent the border. It is the border—not the limit of the border and the subjects who inhabit borderlands, but the limit that is the bo(a)nder—that needs scrutiny if we are to begin to imagine the limit of exclusions, whether racisms, ethnocentrism, and cultural chauvinisms or, relatively, academic disciplinary ones. All of which are implicit in even the most well-intentioned formulations of the discipline(s), of the disciplinary activities, of border studies.
Notes

1. We have done some violence to Murray's line in order to avoid his reference to the "cross-cultural." To repeat: we understand "crossing" as merely an effect of what is actually a network of strangely related identities. This is in line with Fredric Jameson's recent comments on the concept of "culture," which he says "is not a substance" or a phenomenon in its own right" but rather "an objective mirage that arises out of the relationship between two groups. This is to say that no group has culture all by itself; culture is the nubus perceived by one group when it comes into contact with and observes another one." (33). "Culture must thus always be seen as a vehicle or a medium whereby the relationship between groups is transacted." (34). It is "the space of the symbolic moves of groups in agonistic relation to each other." (38-39).

2. To take only the example of ethnohistory and its literary studies equivalent, ethnocricism, the logic of the "cross" dominates famous works by figures such as James Axtell (for example, The Invasion Within) and Arnold Krupat. In Krupat's work, the idea of the "biculural" or "composite" text is implicitly connected to an argument on behalf of cultural diversity or multiculturism (see the second chapter of For Those Who Come After and the conclusion to Ethnocriticism). But not all ethnohistory works this way. Richard White's notion of the "middle ground," for example, is a near relation to the kind of thinking we are recommending. White hints at another way of locating the problem of culture by suggesting that cultures were created literally at the moment of colonial contact. Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the "contact zone"—described in the opening pages of Imperial Eyes—is a potentially analogous idea.

3. Not everyone, not everyone every Chicano, sees it this way. Juan Bruce-Novoa writes that Cabeza de Vaca was the first Chicano, and that "los iniciales en la cultura chican" reconoceran ya la similitud con [Cabeza de Vaca]. Tan multiples resultan las asociaciones que deslumbran: el salir del pais natal en busca de riqueza en un territorio desconocido salvo a travers las leyendas hiperbolicas; el desengan de la realidad dificil y aun humillante al llegar; la perdida del contexto cultural original a cambio del nuevo, hostil, enajenante, capaz de reducir al emigrante a la esclavitud; el aprendizaje lento en que, a travers de duras penas y la mimesis, el emigrante comienza a mejorar su posicion entre los nativos hasta dejar de ser un mero criado para pasar a rendir servicios que le permiten mas movilidad" (1993, 305).

4. Calderon and Saldívar's rejection of Cabeza de Vaca's Chicanicity seems to respond to Bruce-Novoa's claim, which first appeared in Mexico in 1990, for his inclusion within a certain genealogy of Chicano literature—a border dispute, then, within the "borderlands" concerning the definition of Chicano. The irony, of course, is that whereas Calderon and Saldívar argue in the introduction to Criticism in the Borderlands for the expansion of the American literary canon, their dismissal of Cabeza de Vaca from the Chicano family tree would have the effect of reducing the canon by (at least) one: in 1990 Cabeza de Vaca was included in The Heath Anthology of American Literature.

5. For a more detailed account of Paredes's place within a resistant Chicano studies, see R. Saldívar (1995). For counternarratives of Paredes's work, see Rosaldo (1991, 1993), and Bruce-Novoa (1994).

6. See, for example, the introduction to David Palumbo-Liu's The Ethnic Canon, in which Palumbo-Liu argues that the upshot of these discourses should be a "critical multiculturalism" that "may be able to draw forth the potential for resistance and change within the academy and society at large." (3). Bhabha, too, participates in the rhetoric of resistance, but he does not invoke resistance or opposition as the position of a particular culture — of Chicano culture, for example; it is, rather, an effect of "cultural difference" or of the enunciation of culture. "Hegemony," Bhabha writes, "depends on the production of alternative or antagonistic images that are always produced side by side and in competition with each other. It is this side-by-side nature, this partial presence, or metonymy of antagonism, and its effective significations, that give meaning (quite literally) to a politics of struggle as the struggle of identifications and the war of positions." (29). "The war of positions" to which Bhabha refers comes to him in the context of reading Stuart Hall; it is, then, the same war to which Lugo refers through Gramsci in his contribution to this volume.

7. For almost hysterical readings of Rodriguez designed to delimit his canonical authority and to discount his Chicanicity on the basis of his assimilation, see Alarcón, J. Saldívar, R. Saldívar (1990), Sánchez. It is perhaps instructive to read the essays by Alarcón and Sánchez alongside R. Saldívar's contribution to The Ethnic...
Canons (1995): the essays appear to mark the limits of Calderón and Saldivar’s version of Chicano studies: on the one hand, elegiac inclusion of Paredes; on the other, hysterical dismissal of Rodriguez. There would appear to be no “middle ground,” no place to avoid the rhetoric of oppositional identity.

8. For a full-length reading of Rosaldo’s text on this matter, and one that sets his argument in the context of reformist sentimentalism, see Michaels.

9. On tears, Derrida writes: “Why does terror make us tremble, since one can also tremble with cold, and such analogous physiological manifestations translate experiences and sentiments that appear, at least, not to have anything in common? This symptomatology is as enigmatic as tears” (1995a, 55). See also Georges Bataille (1993), which begins with a discussion of tears.

10. “Nevertheless, I’m still keeping my Indian identity a secret. I’m still keeping secret what I think no-one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets” (Burgos 1984, 247).

11. According to Barbara Tedlock, beheading is the penalty for revealing certain Zuni secrets ($2).

12. On the secret and culture in the context of a critique of anthropological discourse, see Mario Vargas Llosa’s novel El hablador, on the secret and the archive, its necessary publicness, see González Echevarría; and on the aporetic structure of the secret in general, see Mark C. Taylor, “Secretions,” in Tears, and Jacques Derrida, among other texts, On the Name, in which Derrida writes: “There is in literature, in the exemplary secret of literature, a chance of saying everything without touching upon the secret. When all the hypotheses are permitted, groundless and ad infinitum, about the meaning of a text, or the final intentions of an author, whose person is no more represented than nonrepresented by a character or by a narrator, by a poetic or fictional sentence, which detaches itself from its presumed source and thus remains locked away [au secret], when there is no longer even any sense in making decisions about some secret behind the surface of a textual manifestation (and it is this situation which I would call text or trace), when it is the call of this secret, however, which points back to the other or to something else, when it is this itself which keeps our passion aroused, and holds us to the other, then the secret impasses us. Even if there is none, even if it does not exist, hidden behind anything whatever. Even if the secret is no secret, even if there has never been a secret, a single secret. Not one” (39-40).

Works Cited


