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**Working the Borderlands, Becoming *Mestiza*:
An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa**

**Conducted by K. Urch, M. Dorn, and J. Abraham
disClosure Editorial Collective
October 23, 1993**

Gloria Anzaldúa is a Chicana tejana lesbian-feminist poet and fiction writer from south Texas now living in Santa Cruz, California. In the past decade she has helped to change the complexion of North American feminist theory and literature through her personal writing; her organization, editing and spiritual guidance on two collections of creative pieces and theoretical essays by women of color and her continued encouragement of aspiring women writers. We are tremendously pleased to be able to include her thoughts on boundaries and Borderlands.

The intense energy released in Gloria Anzaldúa's first edited collection, This Bridge Called My Back (Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983) is still being felt within the literary and feminist communities. In 1990 she edited the expansive Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras (Aunt Lute Foundation Books: San Francisco). Its essays reflect on both the tremendous advances over the decade and the still considerable challenges facing women writers of color. Between these two collections, Gloria Anzaldúa published a book of her own work, the genre-bending, multi-lingual Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (Spinsters/Aunt Lute Book Co.: San Francisco, 1987). Widely hailed and awarded for its innovative combination of poetry, autobiographical essay, and enabling feminist theory, Borderlands fills in the outlines of the "left handed world" Gloria first sketched in This Bridge Called My Back. Borderlands is an extended meditation both her childhood along the Texas-Mexico border and the historic migrations of "pre-Aztec Indians from what is now the U.S. Southwest to central Mexico and, then, back centuries later as mestizos, blood mixed of Indian and Spanish Conquistadors" (back cover). It is a treasure-trove of evocative, resonant symbolism and dream imagery for people making the dangerous passage beyond static boundaries. One of the crucial images in the book is la nepantla, a long tube or birth canal one moves through in a liminal, post-identitarian state.

La nepantla is a dreamplace, in-between nodes of stability, where identities are multiplied, fragmented and finally shaken off like a snake's skin. The borderlands dweller is the nimble trickster, la mestiza, as Gloria calls her enabling

myth-image for feminist mobilization in the post-modern, post-Fordist era. This new Borderlands race, first described by Jose Vasconcelos in La Raza Cósmica (Aguilar S.A. de Ediciones: Mexico, 1961), exploits the network of in-between spaces and ambiguous identities emerging with the breakdown of patriarchal nation-state boundaries.

In revealing this new territory, Gloria Anzaldúa has inspired a new generation of women writers, travelling across the country to speak at numerous writers workshops. We spent two hours interviewing Gloria in her hotel room after she had completed participation in the 1993 Women Writers Conference at the University of Kentucky. This wide-ranging interview considers the different socio-spatial relations where borderlands work takes place: between two lovers; between doctor and patient; between the United States and its Norteamericano neighbors; between different 'American' ethnic groups thrown into the 'Hispanic' umbrella; between the girl-child and international machismo culture; between non-Western literature and the academy.

These topics are covered in six sections. The first section introduces the physical and emotional landscape of borderlands. The following section explores the dangerous power of Western knowledge—particularly as wielded by the medical profession—to the mestiza's balance of body, mind and spirit. Here Gloria discusses the complicated social forces that attach to her medical diagnosis and treatment for diabetes. In the following section, Gloria describes her evolving self-understanding as a girl-child in southern Texas. The fourth section discusses her spiritual poetics, and incorporates one of the 'goddess' poems from Borderlands, "Antigua, mi diablo". The fifth section presents the prospects and problems of multiculturalism as currently practiced in the university classroom. While Borderlands has entered the multicultural cannon of university Women's Studies and English departments, we ask Gloria to reflect on the costs of this acceptance. The sixth and final section deals with the problems of mobilizing around a 'Hispanic' or 'Latino' cultural identity in the U.S. today, and the need for dialogue. Interspersed through the interview are occasional selections from Borderlands that complement the various topics discussed.

Part I: Finding the Borderlands

MD: We thought your work would be ideal for this issue because so many of our readers are interested in boundaries, geographic and otherwise. Your work talks about the Borderlands as a place but also as a state of mind which can be interro-

gated through language.

Anzaldúa: Yes, when I capitalize Borderlands, it means that it's not the actual Southwest or Canada-U.S. border, but that it's an emotional Borderlands which can be found anywhere where there are different kinds of people coming together and occupying the same space or where there are spaces that are sort of hemmed in by these larger groups of people.

MD: Have you found by talking with women at this writer's conference that they're finding these Borderlands in many different places?

Anzaldúa: I think that what I have found from talking to women, not only at this conference but at other conferences, is that there are many other Borderlands that I hadn't conceived of—they apply the metaphor of the Borderlands to their situation. It could be like a relationship between say a white woman and a black woman who are lovers and their emotional physical life becomes a kind of Borderlands. Two spaces overlap, one that is neither black nor white but black superimposed on white, a shaded area. People who are in that marginalized space get looked at as being different, as being in some way outcasts because they don't belong to the rigidly defined categories of white or black.

MD: So people think they don't exist.

Anzaldúa: Yes, and for people like ourselves who are *mestizos*, those rigid categories collapse. We live in a white world, in an academic world. *Mestizos* exist in all these different worlds. Ten or twelve worlds may overlap. People can't pin us down. They can pin us down to occupation, student, teacher. They can pin us to race, gender. But even those categories are not fixed. People change their genders, like transsexuals. A lot of people of color behave very white. A lot of white people have adopted cultures not of their own, embraced them and appreciate them and live in them. So, this kind of *mestizaje* makes for confused boundaries. It makes people uneasy because they can't define and separate and say this is this and this is this.

MD: And there's a sense that the person who sits astride the boundaries is an alien, is almost a person who . . .

Anzaldúa: is there illegally. Who's there illegitimately.

People who are in the process of crossing from one class to another or one

country to another or one identity to another go through a transition, a *nepantla* state which is part of the Borderlands. This is before you get to a point of stasis, whether you call that the mainland or the Borderland or the island or whatever. It is agonizing for people, because they're in a state of confusion and the process might be slow or it might be fast. It's not knowing who you are; it's almost like being identity-less for that space of time.

The only thing that we have to remind us who we are is our identity. Identity is linked to memories, experiences that we've had. When you emerge from the *nepantla* stage, those experiences are often open to re-interpretation. Because you're no longer who you were. Today you're no longer the person you were yesterday or 10 years ago or 15 years ago.

The person that you are now may have achieved political sensitivity and awareness and a feminist consciousness, and may have achieved all sorts of knowledges. You look back at the past and reinterpret those events from the new perspective, the new awareness. But when you are in this transition space, *nepantla*, there's nothing firm that you can grasp, not even your past memories because you are re-interpreting them and in re-interpreting them you are changing the past. It's like being in a complete flux, this having no identity or having many identities.

MD: So the boundaries break down and that's the in between.

Anzaldúa: The boundaries break down, all the ideas that you have about who you are break down. You're no longer white, straight, heterosexual, gay, male. You don't belong in that old category anymore.

KU: You say that once you've come through the *nepantla* stage, if you don't get stuck there in that narrow part, then the power exists when you get to the Borderlands.

Anzaldúa: Yes. For a little while, you come to a waystation where everything is secure and you know you have your job, you have your name. But you are on earth here to grow and develop, you can't remain in the same way station forever. You go through another growth stage, another *nepantla*. It never ends. You think it's going to get easier but it doesn't.

JA: Your work reminds me of the Mexican philosopher, Jose Vasconcelos' work. I thought *La Raza Cósmica* was a wonderful work when I first read it. Do you agree with his idea that there's a better chance for mixing and plurality in our

suffered nations because of his theory of *la raza cósmica*?

Anzaldúa: I think so. You know Native Americans call it the rainbow. This mixture of races. And almost everywhere there's a discussion of and paying attention to *mestizaje*. In the Caribbean, in Canada, in the borders between French Canadians, Native Americans, and English. In other parts of the world, *mestizaje*, the *mestizo*, is being talked about, though not necessarily using the term '*mestizo*' or '*raza cósmica*.' They use their own terms. It's worldwide, this Borderlands phenomenon. I think that Vasconcelos had certain ideas that were privileging the white part of the mexicano, the white part of the . . .

JA: the *criollo*?

Anzaldúa: The *criollo*. Vasconcelos didn't put enough of the so-called 'lower' mixtures . . . he didn't mention the Black and Asian blood and heritages which are definitely part of the Mexican mixture along with the Spanish and Indian.

Part II: Healing Body, Mind and Spirit

MD: From reading your essay, "La Prieta" from *This Bridge Called my Back*, I had the sense that you did not see the medical profession as a site of healing. Could you comment about your dealings with medical professionals and your diagnosis with diabetes? Your work has such a strong healing aspect to it. There's a healing that's necessary for people who are trying to extend their boundaries, but there's also the actual act of physically healing the body. Do you see a tie between those two ways of thinking?

Anzaldúa: Between the physical healing of the body and . . . ?

MD: and healing the ruptures in the fabric of society?

Anzaldúa: Yes. Oh yes. The macrocosm and the microcosm, in my experience, they reflect each other, mirror back to each other. What's happening to me, Gloria, this individual person, what I think is personal, may also be happening collectively. What happens to me, personally, happens to other women, happens to other Chicanas or other women of color or all women, my personal concerns, the things that I worry about, the things I get depressed about are also what other women and men get depressed about.

I used to think that it was just my problem, that these problems were unique to me, but they're not. So, when I write, I know that I'm writing very particularly about my Chicana experience, but I also know that others will identify with what I write, whether they're male, white, colored, female, because they've had some of the same experiences. Some of the things that make you ill, that make you depressed, are induced by culture.

Culture has directed the ways that we interact with each other, ways that body, spirit and soul interact or don't interact. Most of the dominant culture and all of our cultures say that there's a split between body, mind and spirit, claim that the spirit doesn't exist and that if you take care of the physical problem, there's no emotional or mental problem. With diabetes, I found that it doesn't work if you just take care of the physical, take insulin, exercise, eat healthy. If I'm depressed and I don't have a positive sense of myself because I'm an ill person, then that defeats the insulin, the physical therapy.

When I felt disconnected from myself spiritually, it was like for a while I had lost my soul. My soul was not in my body, so I felt spiritless, I felt like I was just this . . . meat . . . this matter that thought, this machine that thought. Because my soul was not there. It took me a long time to deal with the fact that I had to balance all those three aspects of my life in order to start stabilizing my blood sugar. Negative thoughts would cause changes in the hormones, would change the chemicals in my blood system, would negatively affect the function of the cells in taking fuel from the blood. With negative attitudes, I would sabotage my body. So body, mind, and spirit have to work together.

This has to happen in writing too. If you are doing a good job in writing the three have to connect. It's not enough to be technically good, and to know how to manipulate elements of fiction or poetic techniques. If your heart and soul are not . . . if there's not a passion for what you do, and if you don't have a greater goal than to just write this poem or this story . . . if you don't have the goal that you want to touch others in some way, that you want for your experience to touch others so that you see yourself reflected in their responses and their experiences in the ways they react, then the writing doesn't work. It doesn't have *duende*--that spiritual, emotional, intellectual flash or moment that touches the reader when a writer transmits the inner depth of her soul.

I look at my fingers, see plumes growing there. From the fingers, my feathers, black and red ink drips across the page. Enscribo con la tinta de mi sangre. I write in red. Ink. Intimately knowing the smooth touch of

paper, its speechlessness before I spill myself on the insides of trees. Daily, I battle the silence and the red. Daily, I take my throat in my hands and squeeze until the cries pour out, my larynx and my soul sore from the constant struggle. (71-72)

MD: When you bring this attitude of a physical, spiritual and intellectual connectedness to your medical appointments, do you get resistance to it?

Anzaldúa: Well, I introduced to this specialist the element of "You know Doctor, in my culture, we have *curanderismo*, which treats the whole person, and there's certain things that Western medicine is good for, you know, certain operations, certain illnesses. There are other things that *curanderismo* or Mexican folk medicine or *spiritismo* or some of the other cultural medicinal practices can achieve that Western medicine can't." These other non-Western practices often treat the whole person. Sometimes they treat the whole person's family. And he'll say, "Well, I really don't know that much about *curanderismo*." But he seems open to other methods. He sees people in hour, half-hour, fifteen minute slots, and there's only so much one person can do per day and only so much per week. They're all overworked. It's awful. There's no spiritual dimension in Western medicine.

KU: It's like you say, we're meat. We're meat to medicine.

Anzaldúa: Doctors are arrogant because they have so much authority over all their patients. The patient looks at them as the ultimate authority; doctors are like gods. So along comes somebody like me and says, "Oh, you know, I've been doing some research on race and diabetes and I found out that those of us who have Native American blood are three-hundred percent more likely to get diabetes, and what do you think? Do you think this started with the Conquest, with Europeans bringing in new viruses and new germs?" I try and do that and it's like . . . (exasperation).

And so that arrogance keeps them from opening their heads, their minds to new ideas. Not all doctors are like that. Some of them I think are open, but most of them are so harried, so busy and they have that God Complex. If every day of your life people come to you one after the other and look up to you and follow your every word and take it as the only way then, after years of being a doctor, you get to thinking "Yeah, I must be the ultimate authority."

MD: Do you see issues of health and self-determination becoming a rallying point for dissidents of all stripes? Do you think that this assault on the medical profes-

sion, if you want to call it that, is a part of the change of thinking you describe in *Borderlands*?

Anzaldúa: Yes, it's about tearing down the old culture, and breaking down some of these beliefs. The belief system about doctors is one, food is another, leaders, professionals. It's breaking down those beliefs that the dominant culture has, because as long as we hold these beliefs nothing gets changed. So, along comes somebody with AIDS, and they see that Western medicine is not all that much of a solution for AIDS and they want to bring in visualizing and meditating and working with music and sound and other ways, and they come up against a tremendous resistance from the traditional cultural ways of dealing with illness and with death. Tradition is like when people come up against certain established religious tenets—it's sacred. You're not supposed to touch it. The medical profession has become that kind of sacred cow that you don't want to kick because . . .

JA: It'll kick you back. It's like law. Lawyers, doctors.

Anzaldúa: Sí, all the entrenched things, you know.

Part III: Growing Up a Girl-Child in *Machismo* Culture

JA: Most of the relatives in my family, or acquaintances who are either lesbian or gay, usually do not want to stay in their country. They end up in New York, or Los Angeles, or Chicago. Could you tell me about the connection between *machismo* as well: we can't truly call it a Latin-American phenomenon? It's more. . .

Anzaldúa: It's worldwide.

JA: Do you see any connection with that?

Anzaldúa: I think that as a feminist, I really objected to the fact that my culture values the males. As a little girl, I could tell that my brothers were valued more than me and my sister. My neighbors' wives were battered by their husbands who treated them like idiots. Some husbands would send the wife shopping and make sure that she would only spend so much, she had no autonomy as to what to buy. When schools started, the man usually took the whole family shopping and it was up to him what shoes, what jeans, what shirts they bought. This happens in working-class rural areas. In the more urban areas, male dominance maybe does not have to do with shopping and shoes and food but with "Should we get a television

or not?" "Should we get this insurance or not or rent this house or not?" In families like these the man does not get input from the wife even if the wife is a strong figure. Becoming sensitized to the lot of women made me realize that the patriarchal *macho* culture had to be changed.

'You're nothing but a woman' means you are defective. Its opposite is to be un macho. The modern meaning of the word 'machismo' as well as the concept, is actually an Anglo invention. (55)

That kind of *conocimiento* and political sensitivity made me aware that there were other people who were oppressed. Not just women—there were whole races. I started looking at races. As a Chicana, I wasn't as good as the white girl. The white girls were bussed into an all-white school, while Mexicans had to stay in town and go to this elementary school that was all Mexican-American—except the teachers who were all white. When it came to jobs, it was Mexican-Americans who were doing stoop labor, while the whites were doing the bossing.

Though we 'understand' the root causes of male hatred and fear, and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it. . . It is imperative that mestizas support each other in changing the sexist elements in the Mexican-Indian culture. As long as woman is put down, the Indian and the Black in all of us is put down. (83-84)

So I began making the same connections that I had made as a girl-child about being a racial minority in this white world. I started looking at the white world and saw that working-class whites had no more control than working-class people of color, maybe just a little more. The crazies, the people who had mental illness, and those who were different, were treated like pariahs. There were the criminals who were arrested a lot. I don't think a person is born a criminal, but is made so by his/her experiences and reactions to those experiences. This society arrests more blacks and Latinos. What does that say?

And then there were the queer groups, the lesbians and the gay guys. In south Texas, in the valley—which consists of farms and small towns, little *peublitos* like the one I come from—queers experienced similar kinds of oppression as women, as Chicanos. They suffered similar oppressions, but not exact ones. That made me think about what all of us have in common. It's that this greater authority is trying to tell us how to be. And if you don't conform to their models, you're branded crazy, queer, cripple, criminal.

This greater authority is the *macho* patriarchy, the entrenched old guard that wants to keep control of everything. They won't relinquish anything to women or people of color. They want to maintain the status quo. Sometimes it's a conscious oppression, but a lot of times it's like, habit. It's like you were taught, "if you're white, you're smarter and you're better—it's just a given." So whites treat other races as inferiors.

I myself grew up thinking that I was inferior, so I acted inferiorly until I got politically aware. I was ashamed of being dark, I was ashamed of being poor, I was ashamed that I didn't speak Castilian, that my language was Tex-Mex or Spanglish.

JA: The same thing happens here to the so-called 'hicks,' to Black English, to Appalachian English,—we all have these different ways of talking which reflect who we are, our accents, our prejudices, our biases, so on and so forth, and we're made to feel inferior because it's different from the grammar book.

Anzaldúa: They don't want to acknowledge the fact that language evolves. From Old English to the English we speak today, language grows, changes. They want to keep it static, rigid, Castilian.

Part IV: Spiritual Poetics

KU: Could you discuss the difference in the rhetorics used by the people on the margin? Do you think that African-American women and Latin-American women often *choose* a different poetics to express theoretical points; rather than making an authoritarian argument in a theoretical article, they might mix discourses, the way you have in your book, poetry and theoretical footnotes.

Anzaldúa: I think that a mixing of language and of genres is a way of resisting. After years and years of being told you're wrong—"you write wrong," "you think wrong," "you speak wrong,"—you develop a kind of anti-colonial political consciousness, one that critiques the standard way of talking, writing, writing a poem. One says to oneself, "The way that I speak is just as legitimate as the way that you speak, and I am going to speak in my voice, no matter what you do to me, no matter how many teachers in composition say, "This is wrong." One does that out of resistance, out of trying to decolonize one's condition, out of trying to say, "This wall has to come down, because all these people over here are being oppressed

because of this wall, because of this law, because of this rule, because of this language." For people of color and marginalized people writing becomes a very political act, an act of resistance.

In the process of resisting and writing and pushing against the wall, some of us get through cracks, like *Borderlands* which is now used in college courses. The very composition teachers that used to say "You have to rewrite this because you're being too subjective, and you're using the I-person, and you're being too autobiographical," now use *Borderlands* as a text in their composition classes. And that blows me away. So, then I think, "OK, what is it that they are accepting and what is it that they are not accepting?"

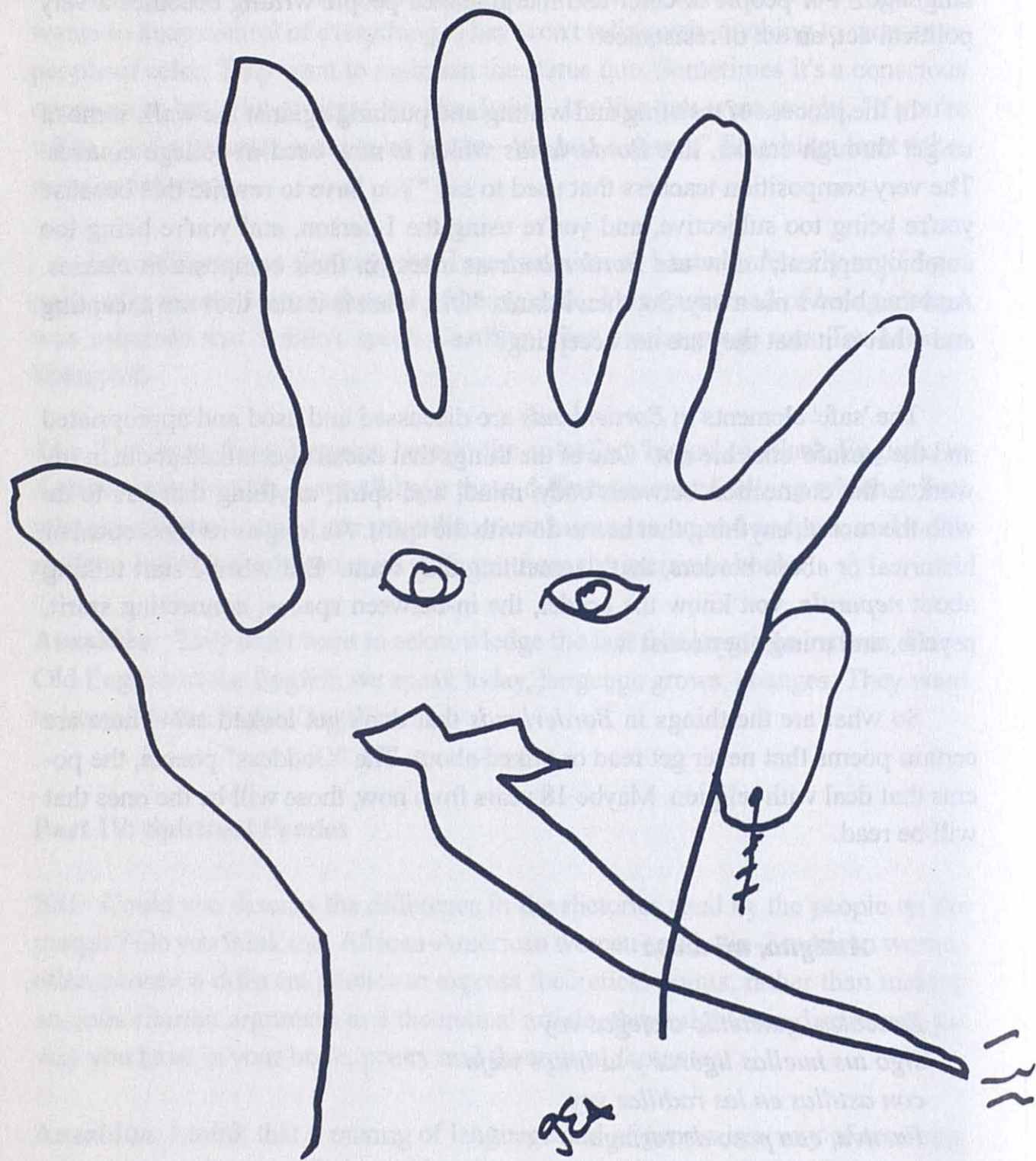
The 'safe' elements in *Borderlands* are discussed and used and appropriated and the 'unsafe' ones are not. One of the things that doesn't get talked about in my work is the connection between body, mind, and spirit, anything that has to do with the sacred, anything that has to do with the spirit. As long as its theoretical or historical or about borders, that's something they want. But when I start talking about *nepantla*, you know the border, the in-between spaces, connecting spirit, psyche, and mind, they resist it.

So what are the things in *Borderlands* that don't get looked at? There are certain poems that never get read or talked about. The "Goddess" poems, the poems that deal with religion. Maybe 18 years from now, those will be the ones that will be read.

Antigua, mi diosa

*Descalza, gateando a ciegas voy
sigo tus huellas ligeras y tu linaje viejo
con astillas en las rodillas voy.
Furtiva, con paso de tortuga
camino bajo la noche desafortada.
Antigua, mi diosa, por ti sacrifique
las plantas de mis pies.
Acantilada por tus ojos vulnerada voy,
testiga de este largo invierno.*

*En medio de un chillido de trenes
veniste a las ruinas de Brooklyn*



con tu sonido de cascabeles.
 Tu voz un millón de alas.
 Como un chubasco veniste
 oliendo a almendras quemadas y copal

Me diste tu golpe de hacha
 caí como un árbol despetalando mis ojos.
 Te tendiste a mi lado, tus dedos cantando como espadas
 haciendo dibujos en mi cara.
 Me entraste por todas las rendijas
 con tu luz llenaste el hueco de mi cuerpo.

Me consumaste enterita,
 sí, mi antigua diosa,
 sembraste tus semillas de luz
 en los surcos de mi cuerpo.
 La cosecha: esta inquietud
 que se madura en agonía.
 Y ahora huyes en mis entrañas como un animal.
 Toditito ha cambiado, nada me satisface.
 Ancient, querida, parece que no tengo cura.

Hace diez meses que me hago y me deshago—
 que tarea inacabable tu me dejaste.
 No te puedo dar me no,
 no me puedo entregar a tu regazo.
 ¿Cómo? si nunca me he dado a mí misma.
 Antigua, mi madre, ya no soy dueña
 ni de mis desengaños.
 Tú acabaste con todo eso.
 Deseos insepultos velan la noche
 Mira como me has aruinado.
 No tengo remedio.

Este pobre cuerpo renacido
 tres veces ha resurrecto.
 La última vez me sentenciaste
 con esta aflicción:
 años y años de tu ausencia.
 Que gran deshandaruda me pediste.

*Y ahora por todas las tierras vulnerada te busco.
Antigua, tu hija errante no puede alcanzarte.*

*Deme otra seña,
otra migaja de su luz.
Mi incendiada piel urge el saberte.
Antigua, mi diosa, quiero brotar otra vez
en tu negrísima piel.*

MD: There's a lot of skittishness in classrooms. Trendiness with borders, but skittishness to mix the state and the religious realm, to bring into a classroom an understanding of another kind of spirit world which is supposedly part of very personal private lives. Does it have something to do with the architecture of the place? The architecture of the discipline that it's being taught in, that the spirit elements are always deemed not important?

Anzaldúa: I think that's why we've developed this poetic of resistance. What I've noticed in reading the works of women of color is the fact that in writing they try to connect their personal experiences with what's going on in society in general. We tend to make narratives of our experiences, to put the autobiographical experience, the actual experience in the work by reviewing it, revising it, rewriting it, re-interpreting it, and then connecting it with the lives of other people.

There's a certain element of representation that academics and theorists shy away from. They believe that a writer can't represent anyone but herself, that she can't write for other people or about other people. There's a very strong element in the writings of people of color that represents the whole culture, the history of one's race, the family experience, the community experience. It's a poetics that says, "This is not just me, this is about other people." It's almost like the academicians want to say, "This person doesn't have a community, this person doesn't have a family, this person doesn't have a race, this person doesn't have a class." They just want the theory, the idea, without the connection to the community.

Our lives are so eventful, traumatic, tragic, beautiful, we don't have to make up fictions--this is the *autohistoria* I was talking about. I can retell experiences that I've had, episodes in my life that sound stranger than fiction. Women come up to me and say: "I really envy you your cultural experience and I wish that I had that kind of fountain of experience to draw on." I tell them, "You wouldn't want my pain, you wouldn't want my problems." It's like going out and buying a pair of

jeans and then washing them and tearing holes in them and making them look drab. I mean is this what these women want to do with their lives, so that they'll resemble the lives of people of color?

MD: You get this sense that "I haven't suffered enough to be able to write." A lot of people have had experiences that they're not aware of—have had the experience of oppression, but now don't look at it as such.

Anzaldúa: And this is especially true of the sacred. They look at the Native American and her rituals or the Mexicana and her *curanderismo* and they want some of that spirit, some of that experience and knowledge.

JA: So it's like, you almost go shopping for it.

Anzaldúa: Yes, cultural tourism at its worst. But it's only the small percentage of people who are interested, the new-age awareness people. The people of the academy don't want the sacred.

KU: They only want to know the techniques of how it is written. It's all very academic.

Anzaldúa: Yes, and "How many hours do you write a day?" they'll ask, or "What writers shaped your poetics?" They don't want to know about the psychological and spiritual struggle to put words on paper, just the things that they can duplicate. A lot of straight people will do that too. Straight women ask me, "What is it that two women do in bed?" or "How does one know when one is a lesbian?" Some of the curiosity is legitimate and is genuine and I answer; some, though, is vicarious voyeurism.

KU: The postcard experience. They want to get the quaint aspects of what they consider exotic because they don't have the experiences.

Anzaldúa: They don't want to live in the Borderlands, they don't want to cross over. They want to see and take out and bring to their safe homes. Then there are the ones who want to claim the postmodern experience for living in the Borderlands for themselves, who want to be the experts on the Borderlands, who territorialize it and take it over.

MD: Or even they might be interested in jumping across the border for a little bit.

Anzaldúa: As a tourist. And they'll buy the *curios*, the little statues, the symbols. When it's out of fashion, throw it back, dump it out, and go shopping, be a tourist in another area. I admire people delving into other cultures. I've delved into Buddhism and Taoism, and many other systems of knowledge. But it's different when you're genuinely interested and that interest promotes knowledge, than when it's to appropriate for the sake of making yourself a different person in the eyes of your friends or to make money. There are white people who write children's books with Native American characters and say they're Native American writers when they're not. There's a difference between jumping into somebody else's culture out of appreciation and trying to disseminate knowledge and doing it to rip them off. I think that it's positive for whites to go into colored religions and cultures and histories and study them, for example a Swede studying Puerto Rican culture. I like that kind of exchange; it's kind of *mestizaje*, and the opposite of the imperialist gesture that is at the expense of the people who you're studying.

Part V: Multiculturalism in the Academy

KU: In terms of the canon, where do you think we are? Where do you think we should go? Do you think people are just saying, "Oh, we're multicultural" and not really having multiple cultures there for people to look at and read or do you think that there's a backlash going on?

Anzaldúa: Well, I think we were making progress in the beginning, up until a couple of years ago, that the professors who put women of color and other diverse outsider-groups in their syllabi were first of all, sort of tokenizing, but then the tokenization changed to a real interest in other people's literatures. This led to a sincere and conscious effort to change on the part of the professor—to change the department as well as her or himself and to educate students. Then this anti-'politically correct' backlash came on, and so there's been kind of a step back. The forerunners, who were Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies professors, mostly people of color, are not credited with the multi-cultural movement. These are the people who brought in Zora Neale Hurston as an example.

White professors have to still be told by students of color, "We want to study such and such" or "I'm Puerto Rican and I would like to see some of that reflected in the syllabus." It's sort of like the Johnny-come-latelies are the ones who are taking the bows. For years there were a small percentage of progressive whites and people of color teachers who would bring into the classroom culturally diverse material. And their forerunning steps are not acknowledged. It is the Johnny-come-

latelies who are capitalizing on multi-culturalism and diversity and difference. They think that they have the answer to it all. They don't recognize that they are able to do their work in multi-cultural education because of the people that came before. And then the people that came before, the black, native, Asian, and Chicano professors feel like they haven't been acknowledged. Every time they open their mouth, they get a PC slap.

KU: Is there someone in particular you're thinking of? A couple of professors who were doing this kind of work? I know that bell hooks was talking about teaching Zora Neale Hurston for 20 years in her speech given at the 1993 Women's Writers Conference.

Anzaldúa: It's people like her and also a lot of women's studies and ethnic studies professors who started bringing into the academy these other voices. And it's been going on for 25 years, maybe more. But it's only lately that it's become a buzz term.

KU: So do you think that it's just a name, or do you think that this type of education is really happening?

Anzaldúa: I think it's both. I think that it's just a name, but that it's also really happening. If you look at the civil rights movements in this country, first it's like just words, then laws that are established, and then people start living those realities. Yet this country is still riddled with racism. It's sort of like both extremes exist at the same time.

We did *This Bridge Called My Back* in '78, '79, '80—it came out in '81, and I did *Haciendo Caras* in '91, a ten year gap between the two anthologies. In putting together a thematic body, I looked at what had changed, what was different from the 80's of *This Bridge*? There wasn't really that much difference except that instead of addressing the white communities, which we did a lot in *This Bridge*, in *Haciendo Caras* we were talking more with and amongst ourselves. But the issues were the same: legitimacy, violence against women, race and class. And yet there was supposed to be ten years worth of progress in feminism. So you have progress and you have same old same old. A paradox.

MD: But it's a different audience. You're talking amongst yourselves, so there's a recognition between women of color of different groups within that larger category.

Anzaldúa: Yes. Twenty years ago women of color would have maybe not responded so vocally to racist slurs, now we do. Ten years ago, a girl-child wouldn't squawk if a man touched her inappropriately, now they are taught in school to say, "No, you shouldn't touch me in those places." So, there is progress with certain generations, but then the newer, . . . I don't know how to say it.

JA: But bilingualism, biculturalism is going on at the same time. There's one camp that says, "No, we're an Anglo-Saxon speaking country, we're not multi-cultural."

Anzaldúa: The country's going through an identity change, an identity crisis because it really is multicultural, it really is diverse. But its old identity says, "This is white, middle-class Anglo-Saxon, European, etc. etc.," and that's how the country sees itself. We have to change the way we see the country in order to change the identity of this country. Nationalism is also very trendy to talk about.

MD: Now nations are becoming problematic. Before we understood what they were, they had boundaries. Now, the Wall has fallen and there's whole new nations being created, there's new types of governments being practiced, but does that influence the way we think about the United States? Can you learn from these struggles that are happening abroad to try to redefine democracy at home?

Anzaldúa: There's a lag between what we say we see this country as being and what it really is. Look at us, we're mixed, in this country, in this room. I think we're getting to the point where we're recognizing that maybe the United States is this culturally diverse country. Finally. The black faces were there, the brown faces were there, but . . .

MD: It just didn't register, because there was hegemonic male, white Anglo-Saxon face on America.

Anzaldúa: Yes. In my culture, in my community if somebody said, "*Americana*," I knew it wasn't me, it was. . .

JA: That's right, but we are *Americanos*.

Anzaldúa: Yeah. And now we're taking back the word.

JA: I did that in school all the time. Mexicans aren't *Norteamericanos*. They call themselves *Americanos*. I'm not *Americano*.

Anzaldúa: Did you correct them and say "*Norteamericano*?" I do the same thing with these people who will title their books *Such and Such in America*. Are you speaking for Canada, Central and South America too? American studies is notorious for doing this when it does not include the cultures and literatures of the rest of the Americas. Why do you use the word 'America' when you are only talking about the United States?

MD: Probably because they want to re-evoke that imagery. That white imagery.

Anzaldúa: Manifest Destiny has to do with it too. The "civilizing" of the world. So American Studies as a discipline is changing, because the people that squawk say, "Let's bring in these other writers." "Let's bring in the cultures of these other Americas."

KU: Who are the most important writers to be brought in, maybe that are looked at, even in multi-culturalism right now? Are there people within multi-cultural education curriculums who are becoming icons, and others being left out?

Anzaldúa: Yes. What happens is that they'll pick one of us, somebody from the Chicana community, somebody that's a Latino, an Asian, a black, and that is supposed to cover . . . Gloria Anzaldúa is supposed to represent all Chicanos, and there's no reason to bring in Henry Cisneros and other people. They do this all the time. It's a kind of compensation, it's a kind of making one serve so that they're not being racist, they're not being exclusionary, they're not being whatever. And so, some of us make it into the cracks. I've noticed that a lot of the women of color who make it through the cracks, one of the things we try to do is bring others with us. This is one of the reasons I like to do anthologies so that I can bring the unknown writers, the unpublished writers into voice. People like Henry Cisneros will say "Have you read *Borderlands*." We do this with each other. I tell people at the conference, "I think when you're considering what speakers to have next year, you should consider Irena Klepfisz. She is very good at doing this kind of work." And so we do that. I would love for her work to be taught.

KU: But they don't fit within the categories that they're trying to fill when they make a syllabus. Maybe some people are trying to erase some of the categories. Like they don't focus on being a lesbian, they just say this person is Tex-Mex, or if they're teaching a feminist course, they might erase some of the Tex-Mex part and just teach the lesbian part. . . .

Anzaldúa: They will read Louise Erdrich, but they won't read Beth Brant or Janet Campbell or some of the other Native Americans. She's made it through the crack, more so than I have. She's made it into the mainstream. I have just made it into the academic world and into the community of color and the lesbian community. I haven't made it to the mainstream.

JA: You haven't made it to Waldenbooks.

Anzaldúa: Yeah. Part of it is a conscious choice because what mainstream publishers do is once you make it in the alternative presses, they want you, because you proved that you could do a book, and you proved that your work would sell. Back to your question, Kakie. Because one person gets in, they think, "we have Louise Erdrich, we don't need any more Native Americans." Part of my political commitment to writers and feminists of color and Jews and working class whites and queers is to bring up these names, to suggest to professors to do this, to do that. But I also can't do their homework for them. They need to go to the library, they need to go to the bookstore, they need to use the local resources in their community.

JA: How about the earlier ones—let's say Julia de Burgos?

Anzaldúa: Yes, I included one of her poems in *Haciendo Caras*, "A Julia de Burgos."

JA: She's an example of a great writer who died of social oppression.

Anzaldúa: In New York, completely ignored at the end, a neglect that killed her.

JA: There are many like her who won't ever write again, who nobody knows about.

Anzaldúa: Well, I think the Puerto Rican *feministas* are bringing her up, the Chicana feminists are looking at the history of Chicana writers and recovering the 1910 and 1920 writers. But we need the non-colored person to do some of this research as well.

MD: So you would see a role for non-colored academics to facilitate doing the archival research, bringing these histories out.

Anzaldúa: Yes, like doing anti-racist work; it used to be our burden, but it's

actually a problem for *whites*. And more whites are taking it on, deconstructing whiteness. The kind of ignorance that this country has perpetuated about the literatures of other people is also a white problem. It's also up to white people to go in the library and read the texts, and dig up the archival material and do the bibliography and the biographies. There are a lot of people of color who say that they don't want whites teaching their subject or they don't want whites reading their literature. I am not one of them; I am not a separatist—not a literary separatist, a racial separatist, nor a lesbian separatist.

I used to go into classes to observe or I would enroll in classes. Usually 50 minutes would go by, and only in the last five minutes would a marginalized writer be discussed. Or the subject would be maybe gay people, gay writers and the lesbian of color would be given five minutes out of the hour.

Part VI: The Challenge of the 'New Tribalism'

JA: Let's address the Latino aspects of your work. Latinos are rapidly becoming the largest 'minority' group, yet I don't see it as translating into political power, for many reasons. Puerto Ricans have their own expectations about living in the United States, Mexicans have their own expectations, Cubans, we don't all think the same, we're not a monolith. Do you see any coming together, somehow? We've had problems over the centuries getting together.

Anzaldúa: What I see is that there's still a very strong resistance towards that kind of coming together. What I see is the old nationalisms, you know, the Chicano here, the Puerto Rican here, the Cuban here, the Central American of different countries here, and it's sort of like we want, as Chicanos, we want to have certain privileges, we want to be recognized by the country, we want all this, but I also see a kind of a small progress that I've called the 'new tribalism.' The old tribe was all about what the group wanted, without considering the Asians, the blacks, the working-class, the whites. And now a new nationalism, a new tribalism is growing. The Chicana is saying: "My ethnic roots are in *Chicanismo*, this is what I am, this is my culture, but I live in a society where I touch blacks, I rub elbows with Asians, I am working in a white university or whatever."

These other groups have their own identity issues, they have their own struggles that are similar or different from mine and so what I'm going to do as this Chicana of the old tribe is make connections with these other groups and create the 'new tribalism' where Chicanos and Puerto Ricans sometimes work together. And some-

times it's Cubans and Puerto Ricans and once in a while, Latino Heritage Week will happen here or there and it will be all of us getting together.

In this new kind of tribalism, we're grounded in our ethnic home and roots, but there are these Guatemalans and there are these Nicaraguans and there are these Puerto Ricans who we are in solidarity with. I see the danger as being homogenous pan-ethnicity, an umbrella named Latino or Hispanic under which these groups will gather and in which our different nationalities will be subsumed and perhaps erased.

JA: The word 'Hispanic.' An umbrella word.

Anzaldúa: Or the word 'Latino.' But the danger to that is that the Chicano collapses differences with the Puerto Rican, with the Cuban, and we're seen as this homogenous community which we're not. So, the thing to do is to extend that new tribalism to each other without losing sight of the Mexican, the Puerto Rican, and the different histories that we have.

JA: You do have a hopeful outlook?

Anzaldúa: I have a hopeful outlook and I have some ideas, but it's going to take all of us to come up with new ideas, to create new identities. When other Latinos want me to come up with the answers, I throw the questions back at them. I'll say, "Well what do you think?" and ask them "How can we come together?" "Is there such a thing as coming together? Is there such a thing as unity? Can we work together without conflating and collapsing our differences." And they'll say what they think and I'll give, and I'll give my two cents' worth, and our ideas take root, and people start feeling good about themselves. I've seen whole groups try to work a little bit towards resolving their problems. There's no resolution, no closure, because the struggle is ongoing, but at least they'll start to imagine, to dream, to envision what they could be, how their communities would grow and develop. That's a little bit of progress.