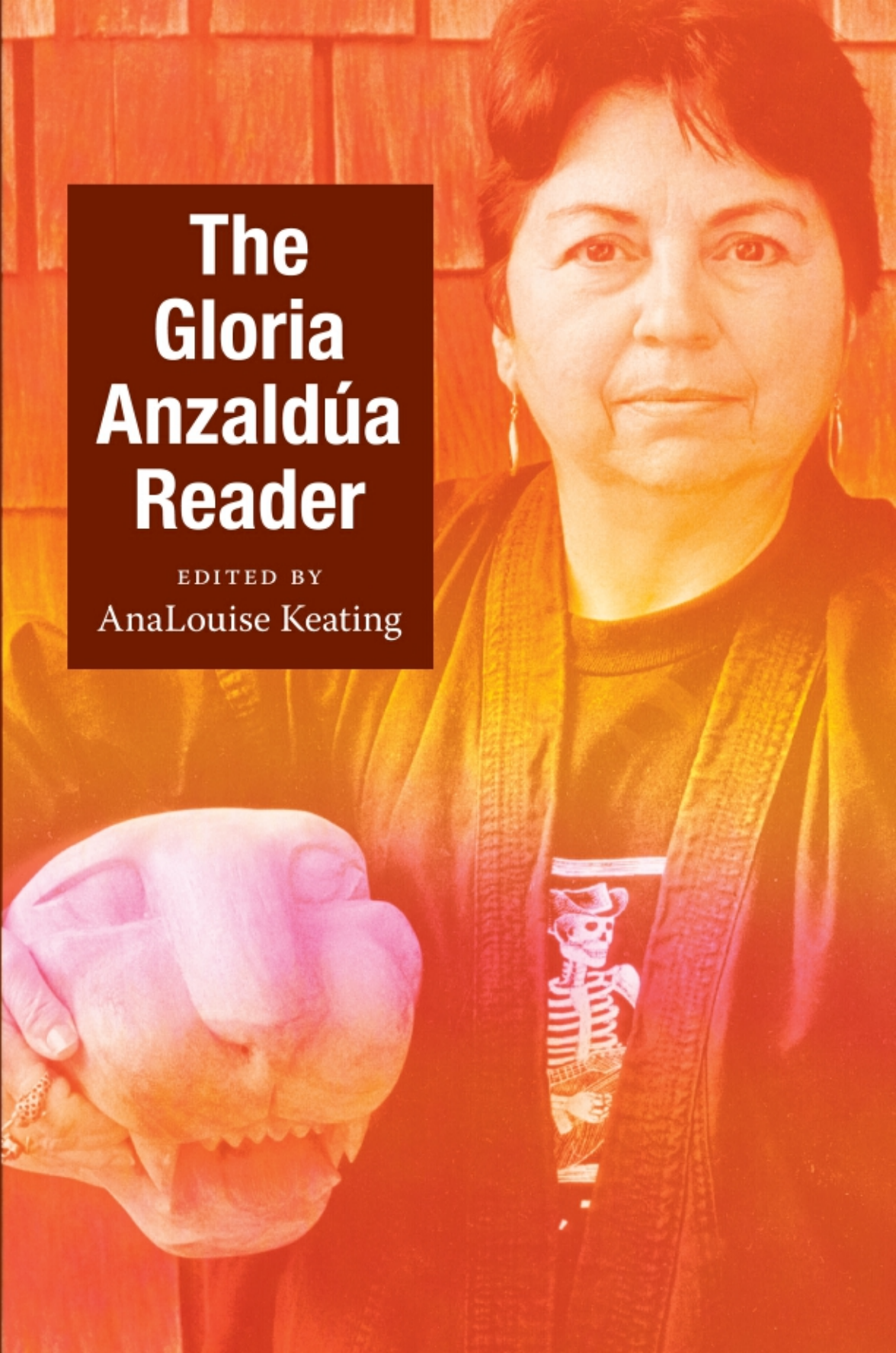


The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader

EDITED BY
AnaLouise Keating



The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader

A book in the series

LATIN AMERICA OTHERWISE: LANGUAGES, EMPIRES, NATIONS

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GLORIA E. ANZALDÚA

The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader

AnaLouise Keating, editor

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frontispiece: photograph of Gloria Anzaldúa
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Para almas afines,
for everyone working to create
El Mundo Zurdo

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Editor's Acknowledgments

The act of writing is the act of making soul, alchemy. It is the quest for the self, for the center of the self, which we women of color have come to think of as “other”—the dark, the feminine. Didn’t we start writing to reconcile this other within us? We knew we were different, set apart, exiled from what is considered “normal,” white-right. And as we internalized this exile, we came to see the alien within us and too often, as a result, we split apart from ourselves and each other. Forever after we have been in search of that self, that “other,” and each other.—GLORIA ANZALDÚA, “Speaking in Tongues”

Where to begin? With Gloria Anzaldúa, of course. Perhaps it goes without saying, but my biggest debt and greatest thanks is to Gloria herself. Gloria, the alchemist. Gloria, the nepantlera. Thank you, comadre, for your relentless acts of making soul, for your tireless quest for the self, for your other—which resonates so deeply with so many others, with our selves. Plunging so deeply into your work—sacrificing so much in the process—you give us lifelines enabling us to find ourselves and each other. Your words build community. Their intimacy reverberates with me, as with so many others, assisting us as we heal our own internal splits and self-alienation, assisting us as we transform ourselves and the world. Thank you for your writing, Gloria. And, on a more personal note, thank you for your friendship, mentorship, and support.

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a constant presence in our lives, and you have had to share me—first with Gloria, my friend, the flesh-and-blood person, and now with her writings and writing projects. In my obsession to finish this project (and so many others), I've been an absent presence, at times. You have bolstered my spirits and energized me, and I lack the words to truly express my gratitude. And finally, as always, I thank the spirits, orishas, and ancestors.

Introduction

Reading Gloria Anzaldúa, Reading Ourselves . . .

Complex Intimacies, Intricate Connections

It's not on paper that you create but in your innards, in the gut and out of living tissue—*organic writing* I call it. . . . The meaning and worth of my writing is measured by how much I put myself on the line and how much nakedness I achieve. —GLORIA ANZALDÚA,
“Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” (1981)

Whenever I listen to my students or other readers as they engage with Gloria Anzaldúa's writings, whether they're discussing her poetry, fiction, or prose, I am struck by the profound ways that her words resonate with so many different types of people—not with everyone, of course, but with a surprisingly wide range, including many who do not self-identify as Chicana, Latina, feminist, lesbian, and/or queer. They are shocked by the intimacy of Anzaldúa's insights; they feel like she's speaking directly to them, like she's describing their own deeply buried secrets and beliefs. They acknowledge the many differences between their embodied locations and Anzaldúa's—differences including but not limited to her campesino¹ upbringing in South Texas; the specific forms of alienation and oppression she experienced due to her health, color, culture, gender, economic status, and sexuality; and/or her complex relationship to language. But when they read Anzaldúa they feel a sense of familiarity more intense than that experienced with most other authors.

I attribute Anzaldúa's ability to generate such complex intimacies at least partially to her willingness to risk the personal,² to put herself “on the line” and strive for an extreme degree of “nakedness,” as she asserts in “Speaking in Tongues,” quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. Anzaldúa performs radical acts of self-excavation; stripping away social masks and conventions, she bares herself in her writings. By plunging so deeply into the depths of her own experiences, no matter how painful those experiences might be, and by exposing herself—raw and bleeding—she externalizes her inner struggles and opens possible connections with her readers.

The oldest child of sixth-generation mexicanos from the Río Grande Valley of south Texas,³ Anzaldúa interacted with people and ideas from a number of divergent worlds yet refused to be contained within any single group, belief system, or geographical/political/psychic location. Thus in her early autohistoria,⁴ “La Prieta,” she defiantly maintains multiple allegiances and locates herself, simultaneously, in multiple worlds:

“Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement,” say the members of my race. “Your allegiance is to the Third World,” say my Black and Asian friends. “Your allegiance is to your gender, to women,” say the feminists. Then there’s my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there’s my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? *A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings.* They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label.⁵

Although each group makes membership contingent on its own often exclusionary set of rules and demands, Anzaldúa refuses all such terms without rejecting the people or groups themselves. Instead, she moves within, between, and among these diverse, sometimes conflicting, worlds. She positions herself on the thresholds—simultaneously inside and outside—and establishes points of connection with people of diverse backgrounds:

You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and -legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web.

Who, me, confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me.

Anzaldúa’s bold assertion illustrates her personal integrity, holistic politics, and provocative challenges to conventional thinking. Whereas many progressive social-justice activists and theorists in the late 1970s and early 1980s were banding together into identity-specific groups, Anzaldúa was not. She rejected the demands for monolithic identities and exclusive, single-issue alliances and invented new forms of relational, inclusionary identities based on affinity rather than social categories.⁶ As she explains in one of her final essays, “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces,” “Many of us identify with groups and social positions not limited to our ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, or national classifications. Though most

people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include—what I call the new tribalism.”⁷ In this passage, as in much of her work, Anzaldúa models a flexible process for personal and collective identity formation, ethical action, and alliance building.⁸ I want to underscore the radical implications of Anzaldúa’s approach. Generally, identification functions through exclusion: we define who and what we are by defining who and what we are not. By shifting the focus from exclusion to inclusion, Anzaldúa invites us to reconfigure identity in open-ended, potentially transformative ways.

Shortest bio GEA: Feminist visionary spiritual activist poet-philosopher
fiction writer—GLORIA ANZALDÚA, *Journal* (2002)

Although generally defined by others as a “Chicana lesbian-feminist” author, Anzaldúa described herself more broadly. As the above ultra-short biographical statement indicates, she viewed herself in extremely expansive terms. Rather than emphasize her racial/cultural identity, sexuality, gender, or class, she foregrounds her thinking and writing, her spirit-inflected politics and texts. As I will explain in more detail later, this collection builds on and showcases Anzaldúa’s complex, unconventional self-definition.

A versatile, award-winning writer,⁹ Anzaldúa published poetry, theoretical essays, short stories, innovative autobiographical narratives (or what she calls *autohistorias* and *autohistoria-teorías*),¹⁰ interviews, children’s books, and multigenre anthologies. She is best known for *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), a hybrid combination of poetry and prose, which was named one of the 100 Best Books of the Century by both *Hungry Mind Review* and the *Utne Reader*.¹¹ Anzaldúa’s published works also include a number of essays and several short stories, a handful of poems, as well as the following books: *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), a groundbreaking collection of essays, poetry, and letters coedited with Cherrie Moraga and widely recognized by scholars as a premiere feminist text; *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists-of-Color* (1990), a multigenre edited collection of feminist theorizing by self-identified women of colors;¹² two bilingual children’s books: *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado* (1993) and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona* (1995); *Interviews/Entrevistas* (2000), a memoir-like volume of her interviews; and *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (2002), a multigenre transcultural collec-

tion (which she co-edited with me) that calls for and enacts new modes of feminist/womanist theorizing, social-justice movements, and spiritual activism.

Anzaldúa was a prolific, full-time author, and these diverse publications represent only a small fraction of her extensive work. For the last twenty-seven years of her life, she made writing her primary focus. When she moved from Texas to California in 1977, she resolved to dedicate herself entirely to the writing, and for the rest of her life she did so, refusing to take full-time jobs or to do anything else that might detract from what she called “la musa bruja” and her work. She paid a large price for this commitment, sacrificing her health, her family, and her friends whenever this “witch-muse” called.¹³ At the time of her passing, Anzaldúa had completed or was nearing completion on many projects, including (but not limited to!) a variety of essays, several collections of short stories and books of poetry; a novel-in-stories; a writing manual; a book of daily meditations; a young-adult novel; a play in poetic verse; a book-length exploration of imagination, creative writing, and social change; and a co-edited multi-genre collection. A number of these manuscripts are complete and had been thoroughly revised. While I cannot know for sure why Gloria did not publish more of her work, I believe that her chronic illness,¹⁴ coupled with her perfectionist sensibilities and issues related to racism and betrayal, made her extremely cautious.

This collection contains a representative sampling of Anzaldúa’s work covering a thirty-year span of her career. My selection process was guided by three primary interrelated goals. First, I wanted the book to be useful for a wide variety of readers, ranging from those who are entirely unfamiliar with Anzaldúa and her writings to scholars who have studied her works for years. Second, I wanted to showcase Anzaldúa’s diversity in topics, genres, and approaches so that even the most “expert” readers might be startled by her range and gain insights into the diverse, intertwined layers of her work. And third, I wanted to respect and remain true to Anzaldúa’s carefully considered aesthetics, stylistic preferences, complex self-definition, and holistic vision.

These goals shaped the volume in significant ways. In addition to a wide range of Anzaldúa’s published and previously unpublished work, a detailed index, and brief introductions to each piece, the *Reader* contains several appendices: a glossary of common Anzaldúan theories and terms, a timeline with some highlights from Anzaldúa’s life, and a bibliography of primary and secondary publications. I have included many of Anzaldúa’s

best-known published writings, as well as some frequently overlooked publications. Originally, I had hoped to reprint two very different chapters from *Borderlands*: “La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a Mestiza Consciousness” and “La herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State.”¹⁵ While the former is one of Anzaldúa’s most frequently quoted, discussed, and reprinted pieces, the latter is rarely excerpted in anthologies or examined in Anzaldúan scholarship. Given its provocative linkages between spirituality, sexuality, revisionary myth, and psychic experience, it’s not surprising that scholars rarely examine “La herencia de Coatlicue.”¹⁶ However, these issues were crucial to Anzaldúa herself and represent some of the most innovative, visionary dimensions of her work.

I also include pieces designed to highlight Anzaldúa’s interests in the visual arts and education, as well as her role in the genesis of queer theory. As a child, Anzaldúa painted, drew, and did other forms of art. As she explains in *Interviews/Entrevistas*, she seriously considered a career in the visual arts before deciding to focus on literature. In this volume, “Border Arte: Nepantla, El Lugar de la Frontera,” “Bearing Witness: Their Eyes Anticipate the Healing,” and Anzaldúa’s own drawings (in the gallery of images) reflect her intense interest in this area. Throughout her life, Anzaldúa explored education-related issues; she had her teaching certificate and taught a wide variety of students, ranging from prekindergarten to doctoral.¹⁷ Two previously unpublished pieces, “The New Mestiza Nation” and “Transforming American Studies,” as well as the interview with Linda Smuckler, illustrate some of her pedagogical interests. I selected “La Prieta,” “To(o) Queer the Writer,” and “El paisano is a bird of good omen,” as well as previously unpublished poems like “The Occupant” and “The coming of el mundo surdo,” to emphasize Anzaldúa’s formative role in developing queer theory, a role that theorists generally overlook. Why have theorists so often ignored Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking contributions to queer theory? I don’t know. Do many heterosexually identified scholars fear being censured or labeled as gay? Do they simply not see the provocative, transgressive elements in her work? Are most queer theorists so Eurocentric or masculinist in their text selections that they have entirely ignored *This Bridge Called My Back*, where Anzaldúa’s queer theorizing first occurs in print?

Many readers also overlook or seem to be unaware of Anzaldúa’s lifelong struggles with her health. Due to a rare hormonal imbalance, Anzaldúa began menstruating while still an infant and went through puberty when only six years old (she had a hysterectomy in 1980). Throughout her child-

hood, she was marked by this physical difference in ways that profoundly shaped her work, giving her an expansive, nuanced understanding of difference as well as tremendous compassion for those who are marked as outside the norm.¹⁸ These health-related issues were central to Anzaldúa herself; readers interested in exploring this aspect of her life and her work might find the previously unpublished “Disability & Identity: An Email Exchange & a Few Additional Thoughts” especially useful. This piece, which began as an email exchange between Gloria, my students, and me, was one of Anzaldúa’s final writings. (She was revising it into an essay during the last year of her life.)

Over half of the material in this volume has not been previously published, and many of the previously published pieces are currently out of print. As I sorted through the enormous amount of unpublished writings, trying to decide what to include, I was guided by my desires to introduce readers to additional aspects of Anzaldúa and her work and to trace her theoretical and aesthetic development. Thus, for example, I selected the interview with Linda Smuckler because it offers a complex, multifaceted view of Anzaldúa, focusing on the relationship between spirituality, sexuality, and her work. Drawn from two very different points in Anzaldúa’s career (1982 and 1998), this interview also enables us to chart important shifts and continuities in Anzaldúa’s thought. Other pieces, like “Creativity and Shifting Modes of Consciousness,” “On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*,” “Dream of the Double-Faced Woman,” “Memoir—My Calling; or, Notes for ‘How Prieta Came to Write,’” “How to,” and “When I write I hover” offer fascinating insights into Anzaldúa’s writing process, *Borderlands*’ origins, and other writing-related issues.

Because many readers view Anzaldúa almost exclusively as a prose writer, it seemed especially important that this collection also highlight her poetry, fiction, and experimental autohistorias.¹⁹ From the early 1970s until the end of her life, Anzaldúa defined herself as a poet and fiction writer and spent much of her energy in these genres. At the time of her death, she had written over forty stories, including *La Prieta/The Dark One*, a novel-in-stories, which she viewed as one of the highlights of her career. As she explains in her writing notas,²⁰ *La Prieta* is

about transformation and metamorphosis, about the relation between nature and culture, between humans and animals. The stories interweave the surreal, unconscious subreality of the inner world of thought, fantasy, and dream and the world of the spirit with the everyday life. All converge at the liminal space I call *nepantla*, the interface space between all the worlds.

Prieta experiences a sense of self that is and is not tied to time, space, or society. She experiences unusual events—a shamanistic event which awakens her, or a paranormal event where different realities converge. She undergoes a radical shift in her way of seeing the world, a coming-to-consciousness which changes her identity.

As this description indicates, Anzaldúa interwove many of her own theories and philosophical concerns into her fiction. Indeed, she viewed her fiction as central to her entire creative process and a major catalyst for her thinking. In addition to including one of the stories from *La Prieta*, I have included two previously published short stories: “El paisano is a bird of good omen” and “Ghost Trap.” These stories are fascinating on many levels, including (but not limited to) gender relations, sexuality, social conventions, and paranormal perception.

I write because it's my calling, my task to do in the world. I write. It is a ritual, a habit, a propensity bred in my bones. It is what I do. I write because I like to think on paper. I write because I like to think, and to track my thoughts. I write because I want to leave a discernable mark on the world.—GLORIA ANZALDÚA, “When I write I hover” (1997)

I first met Gloria Anzaldúa back in 1991 and began working closely with her a few years later when, through a series of serendipitous events, I edited a volume of her interviews. After this collection, *Interviews/Entrevistas*, was accepted for publication, we began collaborating on several more projects. Working so intimately with Gloria gave me many insights into her intense writing and revision process. As she indicates in the preceding epigraph, writing was her vocation, her mission in life, her “task to do in the world.” Perhaps not surprisingly, then, Anzaldúa approached her writing like a ritual or a prayer. Her creative process was thoughtful, recursive, and communal, involving extensive research, multiple, heavily revised drafts, and peer critiques with her “writing comadres” and others. Seeking precisely the exact word or term which could most effectively convey her meaning to a specific audience, she carefully examined and revised each metaphor and analogy, every sentence, paragraph, line of poetry, and stanza.²¹ She could happily devote an entire day to revising a handful of pages; she could spend weeks, months, or even years revising her work. Especially during the last phase of her career, Gloria did not want to release a manuscript for publication until she felt that it was ready—“ready” as she defined the term, not as others might. In fact, the publication of our

co-edited book, *this bridge we call home*, was delayed by an entire year because she absolutely refused to stop revising her essay “now let us shift.”²² Similarly, she was very reluctant to publish “Let us be the healing of the wounds: the Coyolxauhqui imperative—*la sombra y el sueño*” (included in this volume) because she wanted to revise it further. Only the impassioned pleas of the book’s editors, combined with encouragement from her writing comrades, compelled her to permit the essay’s publication.

I describe Anzaldúa’s meticulous, spirit-inflected approach to her art as “shaman aesthetics” to underscore her faith in language and imagination, her belief in writing’s potentially transformative power. Anzaldúa posited an intimate interrelationship between image, metaphor, and change. Thus in “Metaphors in the Tradition of the Shaman” she maintains that writers’ words enter into and transform their readers: “Like the shaman, we transmit information from our consciousness to the physical body of another.” Throughout her work, Anzaldúa attempts to enact this transformation. Her careful, deliberate writing process relies on rigorous self-excitation, multiple revisions, and extraordinary, painstaking attention to image, metaphor, and individual word choice. Flesh becomes text as she intensely self-reflects and strives for words that can move through the body, transforming herself and her readers on multiple levels.

Anzaldúa’s two most influential works (thus far) are the multigenre co-edited collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) and her single-authored text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Widely regarded as a feminist classic, *This Bridge Called My Back* broke new ground. Bringing together U.S. women-of-color feminists from diverse ethnic/racial, economic, sexual, and national backgrounds, *This Bridge* offered a crucial challenge to conventional feminist theorizing and the mainstream women’s movement in the United States.²³ Although some scholars describe *This Bridge* as women of colors’s entry into the feminist movement, I see the book somewhat differently, as a crucial reminder that feminism was not and never had been a “white”-raced women’s movement with a single-issue, middle-class agenda. Anzaldúa and the other contributors self-identified as feminists, and most had done so for many years before *This Bridge*’s publication. In *This Bridge Called My Back*, they remind readers that feminism, defined broadly and flexibly, offers crucial points of connection for social-justice workers of diverse backgrounds. Although they critique the racism, classism, and white supremacy within certain strands of feminism, they do not describe feminism itself as “white” or as belonging primarily to “white”-raced women.

Instead, they call for new kinds of feminist communities and practices; they simultaneously invite women of colors to develop new alliances and challenge “white” middle-class feminists to recognize and rectify their racism, classism, and other biases. Consisting of poetry, letters, analytical essays, interviews, and prose narratives, *This Bridge* also demonstrated the transformative possibilities that arise when we theorize in multiple genres and modes.

While *This Bridge* brought Anzaldúa important attention from feminists and led to numerous speaking engagements in the early 1980s, she is best-known for *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), an innovative blend of personal experience with history and social protest with poetry and myth. Although *Borderlands* resists easy classification, scholars often describe it as a complex cultural autobiography that builds on and expands previous uses of the genre. Anzaldúa herself describes this text as “autohistoria-teoría,” a term she coined to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms. Autohistoria-teoría includes both life-story and self-reflection on this story. Writers of autohistoria-teoría blend their cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and other forms of theorizing. By so doing, they create interwoven individual and collective identities. Frequently anthologized and often cited, *Borderlands* has challenged and expanded previous views in a number of academic fields, including (but not limited to) American studies, border studies, Chicano/a studies, composition studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, feminism, literary studies, critical pedagogy, women’s studies, and queer theory. As Sonia Saldívar-Hull notes, *Borderlands* is a “transfrontera, transdisciplinary text” that has “traveled between” many disciplines.²⁴

Focusing especially on Anzaldúa’s theories of the “Borderlands,” the “new mestiza,” and “mestiza consciousness,” scholars have critiqued and revised their disciplinary paradigms and contemporary identity-based issues. *Borderlands* has also significantly impacted the ways we think about Chicano/a studies, border issues, the concept of the Borderlands, ethnic/gender/sexual identities, code-switching,²⁵ and conventional literary forms. Anzaldúa uses the term “Borderlands” in two complex, overlapping yet distinct ways. First, she builds on previous views of the borderlands as a specific geographical location: the Southwest border between Mexico and Texas. Second, she redefines and expands this concept to encompass psychic, sexual, and spiritual Borderlands as well. For Anzaldúa, the Borderlands—in both its geographical and metaphoric meanings—

represent painful yet also potentially transformational spaces where opposites converge, conflict, and transmute.

Anzaldúa's theory of the "new mestiza" has been equally influential and represents an innovative expansion of previous biologically based definitions of mestizaje. For Anzaldúa, "new mestizas" are people who inhabit multiple worlds because of their gender, sexuality, color, class, body, personality, spiritual beliefs, and/or other life experiences. This theory offers a new concept of personhood that synergistically combines apparently contradictory Euro-American and indigenous traditions. Anzaldúa further develops her theory of the new mestiza into an epistemology and ethics she calls "mestiza consciousness": holistic, relational modes of thinking and acting or, as she explains in "La conciencia de la mestiza," "a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes."

As this *Reader* demonstrates, Anzaldúa's post-*Borderlands* writings expand these concepts and others in provocative ways. Thus, for example, her later theories transform the *Borderlands* into *nepantla*, new mestizas into *nepantleras* and *nos/otras*, and mestiza consciousness into *conocimiento*.²⁶ Perhaps because scholars, publishers, students, and others have focused so much of their attention on *Borderlands*, these theories have not yet received the attention they deserve. I hope that this volume will encourage readers to explore Anzaldúa's later writings in more detail and recognize the important developments she made in the years following the publication of *Borderlands*.

In editing this volume, I have tried to respect Anzaldúa's wishes and follow her intentions as closely as possible. Thanks to the years we spent working together, I developed a solid understanding of her literary expectations and aesthetics, her beliefs about what constitutes good writing, and her personal standards as an author. Because she was such a perfectionist, I seriously debated including a few pieces, like "Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness" and "On the Process of Writing *Borderlands*," which are not as polished as Gloria might prefer. However, I decided that these essays give us such valuable insights into her work that they should be available to a broad readership. Although Anzaldúa sometimes (often!) continued revising her work after publishing it, I usually included the earliest published versions rather than the later revisions because we anticipate publishing the revised versions at a later date.²⁷ I did stray from this practice in two ways: First, and in keeping with Gloria's strongly expressed preference, I chose not to italicize Spanish, Náhuatl, or other non-English words. As Gloria often explained, such italics have a denor-

malizing, stigmatizing function and make the italicized words seem like deviations from the (English/“white”) norm. Second, in instances when the published versions had typographical errors and in instances when there was a lack of clarity (probably generated by the publishing process itself), I went back to the manuscripts in order to ascertain Anzaldúa’s intentions. For those pieces which were previously unpublished, I generally used the most recent versions. Throughout this volume, the footnotes are my own, designed to provide additional information that might be helpful to readers. The endnotes are Anzaldúa’s original notes. Editorial additions to these notes are placed in square brackets.

I have arranged the selections chronologically, divided into three periods marked by specific points in Anzaldúa’s publication history: The “early writings” cover her work up to and including the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983); the “middle writings” include work shortly before and after *Borderlands* (1987); and the “late writings” include her work from the mid-to-late 1990s until her death in 2004. I made these divisions somewhat arbitrarily (one decade per “period”) and for my own convenience the first time I taught a graduate seminar on Anzaldúa. However, as my students and I made our way through the writings, I realized that these divisions can reflect distinct periods in Anzaldúa’s career: a spiraling yet cyclical movement, a contraction followed by an expansion of sorts. More specifically, Anzaldúa’s writings from the early and late periods are broadly inclusive, at times positing a global citizenship of sorts, while some of her work from the middle period is less inclusionary, more focused on rigid identity labels and categories, and (therefore) more restrictive.²⁸

Indeed, some of my students have reacted quite strongly to a few of Anzaldúa’s pieces from this middle period, insisting that Anzaldúa seems to rely on stereotypes and monolithic categories; this reliance leads to broad generalizations that entirely reject those labeled “white,” male, and/or members of the dominating culture. In short, these student readers, when focusing solely on some of Anzaldúa’s work from this middle period, feel as if they have been reduced to a false stereotype and actively excluded from her theories. I caution against such assumptions. As I’ve explained to my students, we need to read each piece in (at least) two contexts: first, the original audience and historical period, keeping in mind Anzaldúa’s experiences at that time; and second, the full trajectory of Anzaldúa’s work, a trajectory energized by her attempts to forge inclusionary, community-building theories and endeavors. Moreover, even during her more exclu-

sionary moments, Anzaldúa enacts inclusionary gestures. (See, for instance, “The New Mestiza Nation,” where she writes, “Progressive whites who have friends from different worlds and who study different cultures become intellectual mestizas. They may not be emotional mestizas and certainly are not biological mestizas. But there can be empathy between people of color and progressive, sensitive, politically aware whites.”)

I believe in free dialogue & abhor academic censorship of any kind, especially that which seeks to “protect” me or “my” image. . . . Any of you estudiantes, please feel free to unravel these concepts (or any other of “my” concepts)—once they go out into the world they cease to “belong” to me. —GLORIA ANZALDÚA, “Identity & Disability” (2003)

This statement, written only seven months before her death, illustrates Anzaldúa’s generous attitude toward her literary reputation and her work. Once she had released her words “into the world,” she tried to detach her ego from them. They were not her personal, private words but “belonged” to anyone who read them. Gloria was not possessive about her theories and ideas—except in those instances when others tried to police the meanings, circumscribe the definitions in narrow terms, and/or appropriate her ideas and pass them off as their own.²⁹ She was fascinated by the various ways people interpreted her work, and she often wove their interpretations into her later writings.³⁰ She did not believe that any particular person or group—not Chicanas, not queers, not women, not tejanas, not mexicanas, not personal friends or colleagues—had an exclusive, superior, insider perspective into her theories and her writings. Anzaldúa’s inclusionary vision, coupled with her ability to create expansive new categories and interconnections, makes her work vital to contemporary social actors, thinkers, and scholars.

And so, I close with an invitation, from Anzaldúa herself, to build on and “unravel” Anzaldúa’s words, to remember and enact her bold insights and holistic, relational vision.

Notes

Thanks to Pamela White for reading and commenting on this introduction.

1. In keeping with Anzaldúa’s own preference, I do not italicize Spanish, Náhuatl, or other non-English words. Italicizing non-English words denormalizes them.

2. I describe this radical self-reflective process as *risking the personal* to underscore the dangers involved. For more on this topic, see my introduction to Anzaldúa's *Interviews/Entrevistas*. Keating, "Risking the Personal: An Introduction."

3. For extensive biographical information, see the timeline located in the second appendix.

4. "Autohistoria" is a term Anzaldúa coined to describe a specific type of self-writing. For more information, see the glossary in the first appendix.

5. All Anzaldúa quotations, except those from her journals, are drawn from pieces included in this volume.

6. In her later writings Anzaldúa explores these affinity-driven identities in her theory of "new tribalism." See also her theories of *El Mundo Zurdo* and *nepantleras*.

7. Anzaldúa, "(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces," 3.

8. Unlike conventional forms of "tribalism," which generally rely on very specific forms of kinship-based identity and belonging, Anzaldúa's new tribalism relies on an open-ended process of personal affinities, self-selection, and political commitments.

9. Anzaldúa won numerous awards, including the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award, the Lambda Lesbian Small Book Press Award, an NEA Fiction Award, the Lesbian Rights Award, the Sappho Award of Distinction, and the American Studies Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

10. Anzaldúa coined these terms to describe the innovative forms of autobiographical writings that she and some other contemporary writers, especially women-of-color authors, employ. For more on these topics, see the glossary.

11. I mention these accolades by *Hungry Mind Review* and the *Utne Reader* because they were so important to Anzaldúa herself. I think that she valued the fact that *Borderlands* had an audience beyond the academy.

12. I use the phrase "women of colors" rather than "women of color" to underscore our complex diversity.

13. For more on Anzaldúa's determination to focus her life on her writing, see her "On the Process of Writing *Borderlands/La Frontera*" and "Memoir—My Calling," included in this volume.

14. In 1992 Anzaldúa was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, but even before this she had endured a number of chronic physical conditions throughout her life, including a hormonal imbalance that led to childhood menstruation and a hysterectomy in 1980.

15. Unfortunately, due to the stipulations and concerns of *Borderlands*' publisher, I was unable to include any material from *Borderlands* in this reader; however, several pieces in part 2 serve a similar representative function and reflect Anzaldúa's thinking during this period. See especially "Encountering the Medusa," "Del Otro Lado," "Creativity and Switching Modes of Consciousness," "On the Process of Writing *Borderlands / La Frontera*," and "The New Mestiza Nation: A Multicultural Movement." Everyone interested in Anzaldúa should read *Borderlands* in its entirety.

16. Anzaldúa made a similar point: “The ‘safe’ elements in *Borderlands* are pro-created and used, and the ‘unsafe’ elements are not talked about. One of the things that doesn’t get talked about 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 it’s theoretical, if it’s about history or about borders, that’s fine, that’s something [scholars and other readers] want; talking about borders is a concern that everybody has. But if you start talking about nepantla—this border between the spirit, the psyche, and the mind—they resist.” For exceptions to this resistance, see María Lugones’s work and my *Women Reading Women Writing*.

17. From 1969 to 1973, Anzaldúa was employed as a teacher and taught a range of classes, preschool through high school; in 1972 she obtained her M.A. in English and education; and during 1973–74 she served as the liaison between the Indiana public school system and migrant farm workers’ children. For the remainder of her life she periodically taught writing workshops, as well as occasional literature and creative writing courses at various universities. For a description of Anzaldúa’s teaching style, see Caren Neile’s “The 1,000-Piece Nights of Gloria Anzaldúa,” which offers a first-person account of a graduate course Anzaldúa taught in 2001.

18. For more on Anzaldúa’s health, see her *Interviews/Entrevistas* and my “Working towards Wholeness.”

19. Thanks to one of the anonymous readers for encouraging me to include a wide variety of genres. For important exceptions to scholars’ focus on Anzaldúa’s prose, see Linda Garber’s work on Anzaldúa’s poetry, Mary Loving Blanchard’s exploration of Anzaldúa’s short story, and Edith Vásquez’s analysis of Anzaldúa’s children’s books.

20. I borrow the term *writing notas* from Anzaldúa herself, who used it to describe the hundreds of pages of notes she made as part of her writing process. These *notas* can be found in her archives at the Nettie Benson Library, University of Texas, Austin.

21. For Anzaldúa’s own words on her writing and revision process, see “How to” and “Memoir—My Calling,” both included in this volume.

22. Gloria wrote over thirty drafts of this essay. The drafts can be found at her archives, located at the Benson Library.

23. For discussions of Bridge’s influence, see Norma Alarcón, “The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism”; Rebecca Aanerud, “Thinking Again”; Cynthia Franklin, *Writing Women’s Communities*; and my “Charting Pathways.”

24. Saldívar-Hull, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” 12–13.

25. At its most general, “code-switching” refers to shifting among various languages or dialects within a single language. For Anzaldúa, code-switching entailed transitions from standard to working-class English to Chicano Spanish to Spanglish to Náhuatl-Aztec. At the time *Borderlands* was first published, scholars generally viewed such code-switching in highly negative terms.

26. For more on these Anzaldúan theories, see the glossary and index. For a

discussion of the ways Anzaldúa built on her *Borderlands* theories, see also my introduction to *EntreMundos/AmongWorlds*.

27. I am referring specifically to “To(o) Queer the Writer,” “Border Arte,” and the foreword to *The Encyclopedia of Queer Myth, Symbol and Spirit*.

28. For examples of Anzaldúa’s inclusionary phases, see “La Prieta” and “Let us be the healing of the wound”; for examples of her less inclusive phase, see “Haciendo caras, una entrada,” “Border Arte,” and “Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar or Island.” For an example of Anzaldúa’s transition from exclusionary to inclusionary, see her “The New Mestiza Nation.”

29. See Anzaldúa’s interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego in her *Interviews/Entrevistas*.

30. Anzaldúa’s theory of new tribalism is one of the most obvious examples of this interweaving. As she explains in “now let us shift,” she borrowed the term from a scholar who used it to criticize her work.

Part One

“Early” Writings

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. Gloria, the facilitator, Gloria, the mediator, straddling the walls between abysses. “Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement,” say the members of my race. “Your allegiance is to the Third World,” say my Black and Asian friends. “Your allegiance is to your gender, to women,” say the feminists. Then there’s my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there’s my affinity to literature, to the world of the artist. What am I? *A third world lesbian feminist with Marxist and mystic leanings.* They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label.

You say my name is ambivalence? Think of me as Shiva, a many-armed and -legged body with one foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man’s world, the women’s, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class, the socialist, and the occult worlds. A sort of spider woman hanging by one thin strand of web.

Who, me, confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me.

—From “La Prieta”

This poem, written in 1974 and published in 1976 in *Tejidos*, a literary journal, was Anzaldúa's first publication. Adopting the voice of an Aztec ceremonial knife, Anzaldúa explores issues that recur throughout her work. Significantly, Anzaldúa included this poem in her poetry manuscript version of *Borderlands* (1985) and titled the manuscript's first section "Tihueque / Now let us go."

TIHUEQUE¹

One year in a distant century during Teoteco,
The 12th month of the solar year Five Rabbit,
in the reign of the Four-Water Sun,
I carved 12,000 hearts in honor
of Huitziltopochtli, God of War,
who made the sun rise each morning.

In each succeeding year thereafter
ceremonial drunkenness robbed me
as many hearts embraced the furnace sacrifice.
Only the hearts of the finest Náhuatl braves
and luckiest prisoners and warriors
ate the sacred flesh.

Today I lie in a musty museum
and register 5.5 on Mohs scale.
But my origin, volcanic obsidian,
hard as granite
comes in good stead.

In my childhood I was a mirror.
I threw a vitreous luster, dark-green.
But now the iron oxide running in my veins
dulls my edge
and the air bubbles trapped in me
reflect my age.

Time passes.
I rest and await the flesh.

1. Náhuatl word meaning "Now let us go."

In this poem, written in 1974 and never before published, Anzaldúa draws from and reflects on her experiences teaching in the south Texas public school system.

To Delia, Who Failed on Principles

Because of four lousy points
Delia, a senior, repeating
A sophomore course
Failed.

Short of hair, cow-eyed, humble-proud
From cooking class brought me cookies
From Oregon, an apple. But I stuck to
My principles.

In arbitrary tests the high score
Of momentarily memorized words and facts
I passed, but you
Didn't graduate.

I stuck to my principles
And for a week couldn't sleep
The following year
I passed all repeaters who tried
On principle.

Written in 1974, this previously unpublished poem resonates strongly with sections of *Borderlands/La Frontera* and “The New Mestiza Nation,” indicating that even in the early 1970s, Anzaldúa defined herself in terms of multiplicity and transformation.

Reincarnation

for Julie

I
slithered shedding
my self
on the path
then
looked back and
contemplated
the husk
and wondered
which me
I had discarded
and was it the second
or the two thousand and
thirty-second
and how many me's
would I slough off
before voiding
the core
if ever

June 20, 1974
South Bend, IN

Anzaldúa often included this never before published poem, written in the mid-1970s, in her poetry readings during the early 1980s. Titled in earlier drafts "One of Us" and "Possession," this short poem illustrates Anzaldúa's challenges to conventional concepts of identity and relationships.

The Occupant

I wake one morning
to his body filling mine
I watch him crowd my
entrails out through my navel
His head's too snug in mine
the pressure's making my skull plate flap
like the cover of a boiling kettle
A cock's growing out of my cunt
I'm getting hair on my chest
I'm for sharing
but this is absurd

One of us has got to go

One of us is going to
occupy the other to death

One of us is going to emerge sobbing
with sorrow from the bloody
remnant of the other.

This previously unpublished poem, written in 1974, was one that Anzaldúa sometimes read at poetry readings during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In its expression of a desire to be radically transformed and inspired, the poem offers interesting insights into her aesthetics. (Note the connections with “Speaking in Tongues,” also included in part 1.)

I Want To Be Shocked Shitless

I’m afraid, I told them,
that you will open no gates for me,
that neither one of you will floor me.

I fear that the hooks
in your words will not grip me
that I will vanish
into that inner terrain
where none follow.
I fear you will bore me.

I know you will call me
on the awkward line,
the hollow word.
But the truths I don’t uncover,
the visions I don’t aim toward,
don’t reach, will you——

I don’t want to be told
what to write
I can excavate my own content
I want to be pushed into
digging deep wells
in unheard of lands.
I want you to give me eyes in
in the back of my head.
Be a thunder clap
and rouse me.
Be an earthquake
make me tremble
Be a river raging rampant
in my veins.
Shock me shitless.

This previously unpublished poem, written in the mid-1970s, offers insight into Anzaldúa's poetics and her beliefs about language, inspiration, and poets' roles in society. "The New Speakers" also seems to hint at some of Anzaldúa's own writerly desires.

The New Speakers

(For Frieda)

Words are our trade
we speak them soft
we speak them hard
we do not push the hand
that writes, the times do that.
We are our age's mouthpiece.

There is no need for words
to fester in our minds
they germinate in the open
mouth of the barefoot child,
in the midst of restive crowds.
They wither in ivory towers
and are dissected in college classes.

Words. Some come trippingly
on the palate. Some come laboriously.
Some are quickened by friends,
some prompted by passersby.

Critics label the speakers: male, female.
They assign genitals to our words
but we're not just penises or vaginas
nor are our words easy to classify

Some of us are still hung-
up on the art-for-art trip
and feel that the poet
is forever alone.

Separate.
More sensitive.
An outcast.

That suffering is a way of life,
that suffering is a virtue
that suffering is the price
we pay for seeing the future.

Some of us are still hung up
substituting words for relationships
substituting writing for living.

But what we want
— what we presume to want —
is to see our words engraved
on the people's faces,
feel our words catalyze
emotions in their lives.
What we want is to become
part of the common consumption
like coffee with morning paper.

We don't want to be
Stars but parts
of constellations.