

Introduction

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Contemporary cultural critics have theorized the multiple aspects of “location” in many different ways. Of particular interest to me in this brief introduction are their approaches to transnational locations in general and, in particular, how the concept of borders and borderlands has served some of these critics, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi Bhabha, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Nestor García Canclini, Edouard Glissant, D. Emily Hicks, Mary Louise Pratt, and José David Saldívar, as a rich source of ideas ranging from issues of identity to the processes of cultural production.

Anzaldúa (*The Borderlands/La Frontera*) focuses her interest on the borderlands that, in her opinion, simultaneously organize and disorganize space and create hybrid identities and cultures. Bhabha (*Nation and Narration*) writes about the “third space” between national borders. Deleuze and Guattari (*Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*) advance the notion of fragmentation in cultural, linguistic, and political deterritorialization. García Canclini (*Culturas híbridas* [*Hybrid Cultures*]) develops the concept of *transfrontera* contact zones and strives to show how the cultures of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands need to be reconfigured and deterritorialized. Glissant has created the term “cultural zones”—“spaces where historical, political, social, and religious experiences overlap national boundaries in ways that inform the literature of these zones” (*Caribbean Discourses: Selected Essays* 196)—and draws links between novels

written in various parts of the Americas. For Hicks (*Border Writing: The Multi-Dimensional Text*), border writing “emphasizes the differences in reference codes between two or more cultures,” and connotes a perspective that is no longer dominated by nonborder regions. Pratt (*Imperial Eyes: Imperial Writing and Trans-culturation*) analyzes “contact zones” or the space of colonial encounters in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. Saldívar (*Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*) shows how hybridity, at least in the U.S. immigrant context, is not a natural or static category but is a socially constructed position. He views the U.S.-Mexico border space as the movement between outside and inside, one that “must necessarily always be a process of hybridity, incorporating migrant souls in relation to the body politic, generating other spaces and sites of meaning, and producing new border spaces of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representations” (Saldívar 84-85). He sees the *transfrontera* contact zone as the “social space of subaltern encounters.”

Since the mid-nineteenth century, when Mexico ceded a large part of its northern territory to the United States, the 3,000-mile geopolitical border, extending from Tijuana/Chula Vista in the west to Brownsville/Matamoros in the east, has been a source of endless confrontation and antagonism between the two countries. California’s Proposition 187 and the construction of intimidating physical barriers in urban centers along the border, both designed to discourage immigration from Mexico, are two recent examples of how the border has become a site of conflict.

Arising in part from this historical conflict between the U.S. and Mexico, Chicanos, Mexicans, and others have reflected on the complexity of the border and its role in shaping the histories and cultures of both Mexico and the United States. The physical geo-political border, as well as other aspects of the border—esthetic, cultural, dialogical, linguistic, metaphorical, spatial, etc.—have become central to their literary works as well as to Mexican

and U.S. movies, music, television programs, and other forms of cultural production.

In the following essays, the contributors to this special issue of *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature* draw on the ideas of some of the cultural critics cited above (as well as others) to explore the general concepts of border and borderlands broadly defined in diverse works of literature and film. Claire Fox, Debra Castillo, Gary Keller, Amy Kaminsky, and Maarten van Delden use a comparative and contrastive analysis to explore how Anglo-American, Chicano/Chicana, and Mexican writers and filmmakers conceptualize the border. Javier Durán and Francisco Manzo-Robledo focus exclusively on the views and approaches of Mexican writers (Carlos Monsiváis, Octavio Paz, José Revueltas, and Luis Spota) who examine aspects of both American and Mexican culture. David William Foster, Roberto Cantú, Douglas Canfield, Ellen McCracken, George Hartley, and Alberto López Pulido choose to treat specific works by Chicano/Chicana writers (John Rechy, Alfredo Véa, Jr., Montserrat Fontes, Norma Elia Cantú, Francisco X. Alarcón, and Benjamin Sáenz) who offer very diverse views—social, cultural, lyrical, nostalgic—of living on the geopolitical border or of the borders of internal consciousness.

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