Risking the Personal

An Introduction

> AnaLouise, I read and like your Introduction, especially the section on spirituality. I think the intro would be stronger if you put *yourself* into it more. Maybe put yourself and your body in my setting—driving down to Santa Cruz, sitting in my study, looking at the spiritual things—altars, candles, statues. Maybe talk about how you physically sense my presence. Put your feelings and observations in a bit, your reactions to the first interview and to this recent interview: What was the same? What was different?
>
> —Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa

Originally, I had planned to write a fairly conventional introduction to this collection of interviews. I'd begin with a brief analysis of the important role interviews have played in Gloria E. Anzaldúa's life since the early 1980s and claim that, for Anzaldúa, interviews are another form of writing. I'd then summarize the innovative ideas contained in this volume, explore the ways they elaborate on and revise those found in her published works, and provide brief summaries of each of the interviews. And perhaps in a few paragraphs I'll return to this conventional format. But if I do so it will be with hesitation, for when I sent a draft of this introduction to Gloria,[1] she responded with the comment I've used as the above epigraph.

Although I was not surprised by Gloria's suggestions, I groaned when I read them. Since I first met Anzaldúa almost ten years ago and asked her to read a chapter draft from my book in progress, she has encouraged me to put myself into the words I write. And still, I resist. My academic training, coupled with my love of privacy, make me fear self-disclosure. If I incorporate the personal into my words, perhaps I won't be respected as a scholar. Or maybe you'll think that I'm vain,

egocentric, and selfish; after all, you picked up this book to learn more about Gloria Anzaldúa, not about AnaLouise Keating. Or maybe my family will read what I write and reject me. Or maybe I'll sound stupid, unsophisticated, naive. *I fear these risks!* But one of the most important things I've learned from reading and teaching Anzaldúa's works is the importance of risking the personal. Throughout her writings, Anzaldúa draws extensively on her own life—her early menstruation; her campesino background; her childhood in the Rio Grande valley of South Texas; her experiences as a brown-skinned, Spanish-speaking girl in a dominant culture that values light-skinned, English-speaking boys; and her sexual and spiritual desires, to mention only a few of the many private issues woven into her words. And you'll find this same willingness to risk the personal—to disclose intimate details, beliefs, and emotions—taken to a further extreme throughout the interviews collected in this volume.

As one of my students suggested last semester when we were reading *Borderlands*, Gloria's willingness to reveal the intimate details of her life is, in some ways, almost a violation of her own privacy.[2] At times, we squirm as we read her words. Although it often makes readers uncomfortable, this use of the personal is central to Anzaldúa's power as a writer. By incorporating her life into her work, Anzaldúa transforms herself into a bridge and creates potential identifications with readers from diverse backgrounds. She models a process of self-disclosure that invites (and sometimes compels) us to take new risks as we reflect on our own experiences, penetrate the privacy of our own lives.

And still, I resist the personal.

So what should I say? Should I describe my first interview with Gloria back in 1991, when I was a new assistant professor and a great fan of her work, and tell you about my nervous excitement when I first met her? (I wish I could recapture in words my astonishment upon first meeting her: She looked so short! Her words are so powerful that I had expected a much taller person.) Should I discuss the interview process and describe how Gloria transformed the conventional question-and-answer format into a conversation between equals, a conversation that has continued (somewhat sporadically at times) during the past nine years? Should I tell you that I was struck by her openness, her vulnerability, and her willingness to discuss her ideas at length—often veering off into insightful tangents that touch on current writing projects and national/international events? Should I describe the setting of our recent interview—Gloria's house filled with paintings of beautiful brown women, images of la Virgen de Guadalupe, and the little altars

in her bathroom, her bedroom, and her study? In a sense, I *am* telling you these "personal" things as I ask my rhetorical questions, and I'm tempted to leave it at this, to return to my original plan and complete my formal introduction.

I am a product of the U.S. university system. I have learned to mask my own agenda—my own desires for social justice, spiritual transformation, and cultural change—in academic language. I use theory as a vehicle for extending the personal outward and making new connections among apparently divergent perspectives. Because it seems to hide private feelings, desires, and deeply held beliefs behind rational, objective discourse and abstract thought, theory can be more persuasive for some readers. As you'll see in the following pages (if you choose to read them, that is), while I've partially unmasked myself—let the mask slip, as it were—I cannot entirely remove it. I now replace my mask, a mask which doesn't fit quite as well as it did before I wrote the words you've just read.

> It's so rare that we listen to each other. The interviewee and the interviewer are sort of a captive audience to each other. I like to do one-on-one talks because I discover things about myself, I make new connections between ideas just like I do in my writing. Interviews are part of communicating, which is part of writing, which is part of life. So I like to do them.
>
> —Gloria E. Anzaldúa

> When I'm speaking it's kind of like I'm writing in process, orally, so that I have to expose myself.
>
> —Gloria E. Anzaldúa

The above quotes illustrate Gloria Anzaldúa's perspective on interviews, an intimate genre she clearly enjoys. In the past twenty years she has given well over one hundred interviews to a wide variety of people, including friends, undergraduate and graduate students, university professors, community activists, and others. She has granted interviews over the telephone, on the radio, at her home, in hotel rooms, in airport terminals, and during speaking engagements on university campuses across the country. In each instance, she made it clear to the interviewer that at some point she wanted to collect the interviews and publish them in a volume. (In fact, it was her comment to me back in 1991 when I first interviewed her that led me to call her last summer and ask her if she'd like me to edit an interview volume with/for her.)

For Anzaldúa interviews are another dimension of writing—oral writing, as it were. But because interviews occur within a specific time frame and consist almost, if not entirely, of dialogue and conversation, they have an immediacy rarely found in written work and a potential openness and self-exposure that perhaps even exceeds the openness Anzaldúa strives for in her publications. There's no chance to call back the words that reveal too much or seem poorly spoken. This spontaneity gives readers unique insights into Gloria's published words and an intimate picture of the ways her mind works. And because Anzaldúa meticulously revises each piece many times and refuses to rush her words into publication, the interviews collected in this volume provide readers with new information concerning her most recent theories and her numerous works in progress.

Spanning two decades, these interviews allow readers to follow the development of Anzaldúa's writing career from the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* to *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, to *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado*, *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y la Llorona*, and beyond. Anzaldúa provides extensive discussions of her motivations for writing and anthologizing and gives us additional details about her writing process and her goals as a writer. In the interviews from the 1980s, you'll find early formulations of ideas like *la facultad*; *mita y mita*; "Tlapalli, the black and red ink" as the path of writing; lesbians' and gays' roles as mediators; and *making face, making soul*—ideas that later appeared in print. In the interviews from the 1990s, you'll read about Anzaldúa's most recent concepts and her works in progress, which include a collection of short stories, a novel-in-stories, a writing manual, a book on theories and writing, a book of daily meditations, and a novel for young adults.

Readers unfamiliar with Anzaldúa's work will find useful summaries of her perspectives on *This Bridge*, *Borderlands,* and *Haciendo Caras*. Readers familiar with Gloria's writings will find new information as well, for the interviews contain insightful discussions of a number of issues and theories that Anzaldúa has not yet put forth in published form, including her theory of *convergence* as a method of writing in which "the sexual, the mental, the emotional, the psychic, [and] the supernatural" converge, creating another form of stream-of-consciousness writing that expands previous definitions; her concept of *culture karma*; her beliefs concerning the fluidity of sexual identities and desires; her theory of the *yoga of the body*; her discussions of

multiple, interlocking, and overlapping realities; her concept of a *geography of selves*; her theory of *nos/otras*; and her responses to the reception of *This Bridge* and *Borderlands.*

The interviews also contain discussions of ideas and themes Anzaldúa has only briefly touched upon in her publications. In a number of the more recent interviews, Anzaldúa explores the intersections between postcolonial theory and her work; describes what she calls *conocimientos*, or alternate ways of knowing that synthesize reflection with action to create subversive knowledge systems that challenge the status quo; and explains her use of the term *New Tribalism* as a disruptive category that redefines previous ethnocentric forms of nationalism. Significantly, Anzaldúa does not reject ethnic-specific identities but instead expands them outward, to acknowledge the various forms of cultural fluidity and *mestizaje* we experience today.

In several recent interviews Anzaldúa presents her concept of *nepantla* as both an expansion and a revision of her well-known concept of the *Borderlands*. I find her discussions of nepantla especially exciting, for they enable Gloria to underscore the psychic, spiritual, transformational dimensions implicit in her earlier theory of the Borderlands. As she asserts in the 1991 interview with me, "There's more of a . . . spiritual, psychic, supernatural, and indigenous connection to Borderlands by using the word nepantla." For Anzaldúa, nepantla has multiple meanings that overlap and enrich each other. Nepantla represents liminal spaces, transitional periods in identity formation, or what she describes in the interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego as a "birthing stage where you feel like you're reconfiguring your identity and don't know where you are." This in-between space facilitates transformation; as the boundaries break down, the identity categories that before were so comfortable—so natural, as it were—no longer work; they dissolve, compelling us to find new ways to define ourselves. Nepantla also functions as a metaphor for forbidden knowledges, new perspectives on reality, alternate ways of thinking, or what Gloria describes in the interview with Andrea Lunsford as the "liminal state between worlds, between realities, between systems of knowledge." These discussions of nepantla, conocimientos, and New Tribalism illustrate the exciting developments in Anzaldúa's thought since the publication of *Borderlands* (1987) and *Haciendo Caras* (1990).

Not surprisingly, given Anzaldúa's well-known emphasis on the personal, the interviews are also extremely autobiographical. No matter what Gloria discusses—whether it's ethnicity, sexuality, politics, reading, writing, or spirituality—she anchors her perspectives in her

own body and life. While readers might be familiar with some of this autobiographical information, Anzaldúa offers new details—such as her early sexual experiences and later sexual attractions, the development of her spirituality, her role in Cherríe Moraga's coming-to-Chicana-consciousness, and the impact diabetes has had upon her life—that will expand and revise previous interpretations of her work. Through reading these interviews, readers will also gain important insights into aspects of Gloria's personality—her intense vulnerability, her openness to other people's pains and perspectives, her desire for social justice, her interest in creating new forms of connection among apparently distinct peoples, and her optimism.

Some of this new information might be rather shocking and will invite readers to reevaluate previous conceptions of Anzaldúa and her works. I must admit that when I first read Anzaldúa's comments to Christine Weiland concerning her sexual fantasies—especially her "intense sexuality" toward her father—I was astonished. "Damn!" I said to Jesse (one of my favorite intellectual compadres):

> What will people say if they read this interview? Gloria talks at length and in positive terms about erotic fantasies involving herself and her father. Surely her feminist values will come under suspicion and perhaps even attack. This is—I hate the term, but—it's so politically incorrect! And then there's the matter of sexuality. You know she identifies herself and is categorized as lesbian/dyke/queer, but if people read this material they will have to question their interpretations of these labels. In some of these interviews she talks about her relationships with and attractions to *men* as well as her attractions to women—and to animals and even to trees. Anzaldúa's perspective is definitely polysexual. And the *drugs!* What will people think when they read about the role drugs played in her life? Yes, I know that Gloria has never been one to follow external standards—whether imposed by the Catholic Church, by Chicano culture, by feminism, or by lesbianism. But this might be too much!

As always, Jesse offered sound advice: "Well, why not ask her how *she* feels about including these things?"

And so, I picked up the telephone and called Anzaldúa to make sure that she really wanted this material included in the book: "Hola. Gloria. Listen, you talk about some pretty radical stuff in these

interviews: your erotic fantasies about your father, doing drugs, your attractions to and experiences with men. People might react negatively and surely they'll have to rethink their conceptions of 'Gloria Anzaldúa.' Are you *sure* you want me to keep these things in the book?"

The response was typical Gloria: "Yes. I think so. If I've exposed it to myself, I can expose it in the writing. Self-exposure is the hard part." (I'm paraphrasing, of course, but this was the gist of our conversation, and you'll find a similar attitude expressed in some of the interviews.) Because some of Anzaldúa's comments are so very startling, I felt it necessary to be absolutely certain that she was willing to risk such self-exposure. So I sent her copies of what I considered to be the most potentially explosive statements. Again, she told me to go ahead and keep this material in the book. I'm pleased that Gloria has agreed to include her provocative statements, and I'm eager to see readers' reactions to her words. Tell me, reader: Will you revise your conception of Gloria Anzaldúa, the Chicana dyke, or will you skip over the conversations that challenge your views of Anzaldúa and her words?

These interviews also provide Anzaldúa with opportunities to clarify her positions and "talk back" to the critics who have tried to define her and classify her works. In several interviews she insists on a broader definition of her concept of the Borderlands than those suggested by some scholars, who focus primarily on the geographic, ethnic-specific dimensions of the term. In other interviews she intervenes in debates concerning essentialism and social constructionism by elaborating on her statement in *Borderlands* that she "made the choice to be lesbian." In the conversation with Jeffner Allen, she takes issue with scholars who have focused too closely on a single aspect of *Borderlands*, thereby enacting a form of "character assassination" that diminishes the text. She also worries that the spiritual components might turn off some readers. As she explains in a 1993 interview, scholars have ignored the more dangerous, metaphysical dimensions of her work:

> The "safe" elements in *Borderlands* are appropriated and used, and the "unsafe" elements are ignored. One of the things that doesn't get talked about is the connection between body, mind, and spirit. Nor is anything that has to do with the sacred, anything that has to do with the spirit. As long as it's theoretical and about history, about borders, that's fine; borders are a concern that everybody has. But when I start talking about nepantla—as a border between the spirit, the psyche, and the mind or as a process—they resist.[3]

This resistance to the spiritual components of Anzaldúa's work occurs for at least two reasons. First, "spirituality" and "spirit" are slippery terms that defy logical explanation. As Dona Richards explains, "Spirit is, of course, not a rationalistic concept. It cannot be quantified, measured, explained by or reduced to neat, rational, conceptual categories as Western thought demands. . . . We experience our spirituality often, but the translation of that experience into an intellectual language can never be accurate. The attempt results in reductionism."[4] I am fully aware of the irony here: in the following pages, I will attempt to explain a nonrational concept in at least partially rational terms. However, I see no alternative. Gloria's insistence on the spiritual—reaffirmed in almost every interview—is one of the most striking characteristics of this collection. These interviews demonstrate that Anzaldúa's spiritual vision is central to her lifework and cannot be ignored. Indeed, I would argue that Anzaldúa's long-standing belief in the interconnections among body, mind, and spirit is a key component in the theories for which she is best known.

Scholars' reluctance to examine the spiritually inflected dimensions of Anzaldúa's work occurs for another reason as well: Because the spiritual is so often assumed to refer only to the nonmaterial dimensions of life, spirituality can easily be conflated with religion and dismissed as an apolitical, ahistorical form of escapism that inadvertently reinforces the status quo. At times, in fact, the interviews collected in this volume might seem to confirm the belief that spirituality is another form of escapism: Anzaldúa's conversations often take on a distinctly "New-Ageish" tone, with talk of near-death experiences, meditations, astrological signs, spirits, and extraterrestrial beings. But, for Anzaldúa, the metaphysical components of life are never divorced from politics, sexuality, writing, and daily living. Unlike those people generally labeled "New Age," who use their metaphysical beliefs to focus almost exclusively on personal desires and goals, Gloria anchors her metaphysics in her deeply held desire for personal, social, and global transformation.

For Anzaldúa, spirituality is a highly political, always embodied endeavor that has nothing in common with conventional forms of religion. Both in her published writings and in several of these interviews, she rejects organized religions as highly divisive systems filled with restrictive categories and rules that separate people from each other and from themselves. In the interview with Weiland, for example, she asserts, "The spirit evolves out of the experiences of the body. . . . Spirituality has nothing to do with religion, which recognizes that spirit and then puts a dogma around it. . . . Religion eliminates

all kinds of growth, development, and change, and that's why I think any kind of formalized religion is really bad." Not surprisingly, given this belief that the spiritual simultaneously evolves from and is one with the body, Anzaldúa especially takes issue with conventional religions' rejection of the (female) body. As she explains in the interview with Linda Smuckler, it was this rejection of the physical, coupled with her own very early, extremely painful menstruation, that led her to disassociate herself from her own body and view it as other. Only when she recognized that "[m]atter is divine," that the spirit so often identified exclusively with the nonmaterial disembodied dimensions of life is itself a vital part of the material world, could she accept this alien other as a part of herself. She explains that she experienced "a type of conversion" during her hysterectomy, when she realized that the body itself is divine. This insight transformed her: "When I found myself, it was the beginning of my spirituality, because it was like getting in contact with who I really was, my true self. My body wasn't dirty." Clearly, for Anzaldúa spirituality begins with and is rooted in the body.

Anzaldúa's spiritual theory and praxis is based on a metaphysics of interconnectedness that posits a cosmic, constantly changing spirit or force that embodies itself in material and nonmaterial forms. As she explains in an interview with Kim Irving, "Everything has a meaning. Everything is interconnected. To me, spirituality and being spiritual means to be aware of the interconnections between things."[5] Similarly, in the interview with Weiland she states, "Spirit exists in everything; therefore God, the divine, is in everything—in blacks as well as whites, rapists as well as victims; it's in the tree, the swamp, the sea. . . . Some people call it 'God'; some call it the 'creative force,' whatever. It's in everything."

Whether this spiritual-material essence "really" exists—and how could we possibly prove its existence except, perhaps, by referring to David Boehm or a few other twentieth-century physicists—is far less important for us here than the pragmatic, performative functions it serves in Anzaldúa's lifework. On the collective level, Anzaldúa's belief in a divine cosmic force infusing all that exists enables her to create a new identity category and a theoretical moral framework for social change. By positing a universal commonality she can insist that—despite the many differences among us—human beings are all interconnected. As she explains in her 1991 interview with me, she believes that we are *almas afines*, or "kindred spirits," and share an interconnectedness that could serve as "an unvoiced category of identity, a common factor

in all life forms." This recognition leads to an ethics of reciprocity. As Anzaldúa states in the interview with Weiland:

> I'm a citizen of the universe. I think it's good to claim your ethnic identity and your racial identity. But it's also the source of all the wars and all the violence, all these borders and walls people erect. I'm tired of borders and I'm tired of walls. I don't believe in the nationalism. I don't believe that we're better than people in India or that we're different from people in Ethiopia. . . . [P]eople talk about being proud to be American, Mexican, or Indian. We have grown beyond that. We are specks from this cosmic ocean, the soul, or whatever. We're not better than people from Africa or people from Russia. If something happens to the people in India or Africa—and they're starving to death and dying—then that's happening to us, too.

On the personal level, Gloria's belief in an underlying constantly changing cosmic energy allowed her to develop a highly positive self-image that affirms her personal agency. Ana Castillo makes a similar point in her discussion of what she calls "espiritismo." According to Castillo, the

> acknowledgment of the energy that exists throughout the universe subatomically generating itself and interconnecting, fusing, and changing . . . offer[s] a personal response to the divided state of the individual who desires wholeness. An individual who does not sense herself as helpless to circumstances is more apt to contribute positively to her environment than one who resigns with apathy to it because of her sense of individual insignificance.[6]

I want to emphasize the pragmatic dimensions of this spiritualized worldview. Anzaldúa's increased sense of personal agency empowered her to resist the various forms of oppression she experienced both from the dominant culture and from her own culture. As she explains in her conversation with Weiland:

> This awareness was the strength of my rebellion and my ability to cut away from my culture and from the dominant society. . . . I didn't have the money, privilege, body, or knowledge to fight oppression, but I had this presence, this spirit, this soul.

> Spirituality—through ritual, meditation, affirmation, and strengthening myself—was the only way I could fight the oppression. Spirituality is oppressed people's only weapon and means of protection. Changes in society only come after the spiritual.

But what does it mean to describe spirituality as a "weapon" capable of effecting social change? What forms does this spiritual weapon take? Do we simply meditate our way into a better world, a world in which social justice has—somehow—been achieved? As later interviews reveal, Gloria does not believe that ritual, meditation, and affirmation *in themselves* bring about collective transformation. They are simply the first steps, steps which give her the vision, the desire, and the energy to work actively for social change.

More specifically, Anzaldúa embodies her spiritual vision and the metaphysics of interconnectedness upon which it relies in her writing. She offers an alternate mode of perception, a holistic way of viewing ourselves and our world that empowers individuals to work for psychic and material change on both the personal and the collective levels. As she asserts in the interview with Jamie Lee Evans, "Writing is a form of activism, one of making bridges." Anzaldúa makes a similar point in the interview with Debbie Blake and Carmen Abrego. After drawing an analogy between contemporary women and the Aztec mythic story of Coatlicue's daughter Coyolxauhqui, who represented such a threat to Huitzilopochtli (one of her four hundred brothers) that he cut off her head, chopped up her body, and buried the pieces in different places, she explains:

> [T]o me [Coyolxauhqui's story] is a symbol not only of violence and hatred of women but also of how we're split body and mind, spirit and soul. We're separated. . . . [W]hen you take a person and divide her up, you disempower her. She's no longer a threat. My whole struggle in writing, in this anticolonial struggle, has been to . . . put us back together again. To connect up the body with the soul and the mind with the spirit. That's why for me there's such a link between the text and the body, between textuality and sexuality, between the body and the spirit.

As this statement indicates, Anzaldúa views writing as a form of activism, an effective tool to bring about material-spiritual change. She

is a modern-day Coyolxauhqui, a writer-warrior who employs language to "put us back together again." Because she believes that "[m]yths and fictions create reality," she seizes the existing myths—the stories that disempower us—and rewrites them, embodying her spiritual vision—her desire for social justice—in her words. Her writing invites us to see ourselves differently, to recognize the connections between body and text, between the intellectual, spiritual, and physical dimensions of life, between self and other. This recognition can transform us and motivate us to work actively for social change.

In many ways Anzaldúa's spirituality and the ethics of interconnectedness it entails resembles the "visionary pragmatism" and the "passionate rationality" Patricia Hill Collins associates with African-American women's spirituality. As Collins explains, in their quest for social justice many black women have developed moral frameworks and spiritual worldviews that combine "caring, theoretical vision with informed, practical struggle."[7] Their desire to achieve social justice is infused with deep feeling, or what Collins describes as "passionate rationality," which motivates them and others to work together for social change. According to Collins, "This type of passionate rationality flies in the face of Western epistemology that sees emotions and rationality as different and competing concerns. . . . [D]eep feelings that arouse people to action constitute a critical source of power."[8] Like the African-American women Collins describes, Anzaldúa attempts to generate this passionate rationality in her readers.

Given Anzaldúa's growing importance as a contemporary thinker and cultural theorist, I find her emphasis on this passionate rationality, or what she sometimes describes as "spiritual activism," especially exciting. This past year, when I was on the job market, a number of schools told me that applicants for positions in women's studies, American studies, and multicultural U.S. literature referred to Anzaldúa more frequently than to any other theorist. And two days ago a friend sent me an e-mail informing me that, at a conference she had recently attended, *Borderlands* was repeatedly cited as "*the* text of third-wave feminism." It is my hope that at least some of the many scholars who read Anzaldúa's words will adopt this passionate rationality as their own. Talk about transformation!

> This almost finished product seems an assemblage, a montage, a beaded work with several different leitmotifs and with a central core, now appearing, now disappearing in a crazy dance. The whole thing has a mind of its own, escaping me and insisting on putting together the pieces of its own puzzle with minimal direction from my will. It is a rebellious, willful entity, a precocious girl-child forced to grow up too quickly, rough, unyielding, with pieces of feather sticking out here and there, fur, twigs, clay. My child, but not for much longer.
>
> —Gloria E. Anzaldúa

I borrow the above statement from Gloria's description of *Borderlands*. To be sure, I cannot claim that *Interviews/Entrevistas* is my own precocious girl-child—since most of the words are Anzaldúa's, not mine. Despite this major difference, however, I see many similarities between Anzaldúa's perspective on *Borderlands* and my own feelings toward *Interviews/Entrevistas*. Like Anzaldúa's text, this collection of interviews is a "montage," a "crazy dance" around a number of recurring themes. And like Anzaldúa, I do not feel that I'm in control of this crazy dance. This collection has a life of its own, a life that will change—shift shapes, as it were—with each new reading.

But before I let *Interviews/Entrevistas* go, I'll attempt to tie up a few loose ends by telling you a little something about the process of editing this collection. While a few of these interviews have been previously published, in each instance I went back to the original transcript and incorporated material omitted from the published versions. Generally, this new material concerned issues related to Anzaldúa's spiritual-imaginal vision. Its inclusion here adds an important dimension to the published versions and provides a more complex view of Anzaldúa and her works.

My goal as an editor was to make the interviews compelling and readable—to make them flow—while remaining true to the spoken word, to the oral rhythms, and (of course) to the original meaning. To achieve this goal, I broke several grammatical rules and tried to punctuate the dialogues in ways that replicate how we speak. I also tried to avoid excessive repetition. Almost all of the interviews began with questions about Anzaldúa's life—her childhood, adolescence, and family background. Although the words vary, Anzaldúa's responses generally follow the same format. I have cut some (but not all) of this repetition out. These deletions were made at the suggestion of Anzaldúa herself who took time out of her busy schedule to read and comment at length on the entire manuscript.

I have organized these interviews into a format that in some ways mimics Anzaldúa's own defiance of rigid boundaries. The interviews are arranged in chronological order, beginning with the earliest and

ending with an interview between Gloria and myself that summarizes and expands on the earlier interviews. But threaded through this chronological organization are portions of a 1998–1999 interview I conducted with her: At the beginning of each interview I've included questions that allow Anzaldúa to return to and elaborate on the issues raised in the interview itself. This arrangement serves several purposes. First, it connects the present with the past, enabling readers to see the changes in Anzaldúa's ideas and life; second, it offers readers a preview of the upcoming interview; third, it allows Gloria to explain herself more fully; fourth, it answers questions readers might have as they read the interviews; and fifth, it breaks down the boundaries between the interviews themselves. Readers interested in tracing the development of key ideas like the Borderlands, mestizaje, nepantla, conocimientos, or nos/otras can read selectively by utilizing the subheadings and the extensive index.

I hope you will enjoy reading this collection and learn as much as I have.

Notes

1. Throughout this introduction I shift between "Gloria" and "Anzaldúa" when referring to Gloria/Anzaldúa. I recognize the danger in referring to women authors by their first names, and I worry that referring to Anzaldúa simply as "Gloria" might seem like name-dropping—another form of showing off. But despite these reservations and in keeping with my decision to risk the personal, I've decided that shifting between "Gloria" and "Anzaldúa" replicates the ways my own mind works.
2. My thanks to Randall Robbins for allowing me to include this insight.
3. "Working the Borderlands, Becoming Mestiza: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa," conducted by K. Urch, M. Dorn, and J. Abraham, *disClosure* 4 (1995): 75–96, 85. Quoted from transcript. See also Marcus Emberly's assertion, "[A]nother accusation leveled at [*Borderlands/La Frontera*] is that it is full of 'New Age'-type passages, although these charges are the quietest and most pernicious, because they directly contradict the idiosyncracies of the text that have been so widely celebrated" (89). In "Cholo Angels in Guadalajara: The Politics and Poetics of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8 (1996): 87–108.
4. "The Implications of African-American Spirituality," in *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*, ed. Molefi Kete Asante and Kariamu Welsh Asante (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1993), 207–31. Quoted in Patricia Hill Collins, *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 245. Collins makes a similar point, noting, "Thus, spirituality not merely a system of religious beliefs similar to logical systems of ideas. Rather, spirituality comprises articles of faith that provide a conceptual framework for living everyday life" (245).
5. Due to space limitations, we were unable to include this unpublished interview in the volume.
6. Ana Castillo, *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 159.
7. Collins, *Fighting Words*, 188.
8. Ibid., 243.