BORDER PEDAGOGY FOR DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

by

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ABSTRACT

"Border Pedagogy for Democratic Practice" articulates a pedagogy that awakens a more nuanced political consciousness, a sense of empathy and agency about social justice, and an increased comfort with ambiguities, for both student and teacher. By combining a theory of border pedagogy (developed by Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Renato Rosaldo and others), with tenets from cultural studies, postcolonial literary theory and critical pedagogy/literacy, I argue for a new understanding in the way we teach diverse texts, an understanding that can be applied to the ongoing shifts in history and culture, and local and global politics.

The first section historicizes, explores and synthesizes the major theorists and questions from which my framework arises. In the second chapter I analyze the border texts of Sherman Alexie, Rigoberta Menchú, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, which I find useful in classroom exploration of border theory. In the final section, I offer models of courses each designed with the intent of facilitating an environment for critical literacy, political agency and "border thought," including the courses "Contemporary American Indian Literature," "Critical Thinking" and "The Arts in Society."

My hope is that border pedagogy for democratic practice will encourage active citizenship in the interest of social justice.
PART I: HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS


American education extols the virtues of Democracy, yet rarely prepares most Americans to participate actively as citizens with a nuanced social consciousness. Rather, we are indoctrinated into oppositional thinking, as we “take sides” in debates, write the requisite “compare and contrast” paper, regurgitate factoids for standardized tests, and strive to get better grades, and eventually make more money, than our peers. Therefore, my aim in this dissertation is to articulate the praxis for a pedagogy of active citizenship. I call the theory “border pedagogy” because I believe that by contending with the paradoxical concept of “borders” that shape our physical and ideological nation-spaces, we can learn to deconstruct imaginary lines while inhabiting the borderlands of cultural and social terrain for social transformation.

Borders are paradoxical because they delineate both sites of imperial power and of resistance and cultural self-determination in the face of colonizing forces. Borders can be the cause of violent nationalism or serve as potential sites for creativity, hybridity, and change. Therefore, this dissertation will examine my philosophy of “border pedagogy,” contextualize the influence of other educational frameworks on border pedagogy, offer examples of how to practice border pedagogy using literary texts, examine college courses designed with border pedagogy in mind, and raise questions for others, and myself, to explore at a later date. In this introduction, I will start by framing border pedagogy in an American phenomenon I call “the freedom paradox” and then define border pedagogy in greater depth.
The Freedom Paradox

On a daily basis the media and government officials remind us that The United States is prosperous and powerful. Many citizens have internalized this, cherish it, and in turn enjoy a life of pleasure seeking, material gain, and bold free expression, all great luxuries on a grand scale. However, there is a price to pay that is increasingly glossed over in the media, especially during the times when the economy booms or, more recently, as we seek to "defend our freedom" from real or perceived foreign threats.

The cost for private excesses includes poverty in inner cities and rural outlands, flagrantly apparent in the inequities between privileged and under-funded public schools. The cost can also be traced through our history of colonialism and global imperialism, both of which impact the social and political realities of much of the rest of the world. For many prosperous Americans, this hegemony is deemed just and the wealthy are deemed deserved of their access; similarly, the poor are often deemed deserved or responsible for their marginalized economic and political position.

Tucked within capitalist discourse, a covert belief system emerges in the dominant American culture. This belief system is based on the privileging of commerce and related discourses of self-reliance and pre-destination. In order to sustain a competitive and economic market, class tiers and low economic plateaus must be perpetuated. Minimum wage earners and manual laborers are necessary to sustain those who benefit most from our capitalist system. Therefore, a laborer’s job has less monetary rewards and a lower social status than the jobs of business people, stockbrokers, lawyers, or entertainers. Those with more profitable and socially valued jobs not only have more
money, but increased access within systems of political and social power. Is this simply because those with material access are smarter, have worked harder, or are somehow innately better equipped? Many people would say yes, but I see such an argument as an affirmation of Marx' term *false consciousness*, in which the more privileged blame the less privileged for social problems and tensions, ignoring issues of hegemony.

In order to perpetuate the system, those who benefit from hegemonic social and economic contexts have a lot invested in obscuring the ideological and structural causes of inequity. I am less interested in whether or not this is a conscious impulse, but in how education can and does perpetuate dominant values within society, how it constructs definitions of democracy, and shapes our ideological and actual relations to each other.

Here, in the United States, we move within the fissures of what I call “the freedom paradox.” The paradox lies within a system where the valuing of “freedom” of self and the ethic of personal gain requires the oppression of minimum-wage workers and the poor within the United States, as well as those laboring and living in poverty abroad. The (economic and political) freedom of some is dependent on the relative disempowerment of others, and it is important to those who benefit that the power structure maintains this tension.

The material and ideological dynamics within formal education illustrate the American “freedom” paradox, and often effectively serve to ensure its perpetuation. Education as an arm of the state has two roles, an overt and a covert role, and these often contradict. First, since the United States overtly proclaims itself a democracy, suggesting equal opportunity and shared power; public school is guaranteed to all citizens as a
realization of this beautiful ideal. On the other hand, the tracking and vast inequity of resources in public schools do not lead to equal opportunity, and therefore, do not lead to shared power. Paradoxically, the inequities of schools contribute to the economic and political stratification that is still pervasive in the United States (although in some regions less stark than in the 1980s). Because of the inequities in our society, and the democratic ideals which Americans generally hold dear, education faces the challenge of facilitating the conditions and values necessary for a democracy that is actual and ongoing.

I believe the tools for building a vital and equitable democracy need to be consciously excavated. To move towards the goals of shared power we need these tools: empathy, communicative expression, an understanding that social and economic boundaries are constructed (and can, therefore, be reconstructed), a critical consciousness, and sense of agency. I call an education that focuses on these objectives, emancipation education. Emancipation education does not only refer to emancipation from overt political injustices, but emancipation from inherited social roles, economic and political barriers, or deterministic notions about identity.

In order to continually nurture emancipation education within the context of our vast diversity and our individual potentialities, we must ask: What do we actually mean when we say "democracy"? If a democracy is to be inclusive of all the voices in its realm, how, in practical terms, can our schools nurture free critical thinking and agency? How can education fulfill the promise of allowing each citizen to enter history in the making? How can we emancipate ourselves from a history where we have not made good on the promise of basic equality and freedom for all people?
While I cannot yet fully answer these questions, I, like many of the writers and educators whose texts I explore, believe that the pursuit of answers to these questions is worthwhile, and that emancipation education is a realistic goal. Realistic, because I see equity and the freedom paradox as historically and ideologically rooted. Since the paradox is based on human constructions of nationalism and identity, I believe that as we become cognizant of these bounded constructions through critical literacy, the paradox can be unpacked and we can learn a more fluid method of thinking.

That said, one of the greatest challenges for examining the freedom paradox is the political apathy of many of our citizens, especially our youth. Some of this apathy comes from awareness in citizens, conscious or unconscious, about the contradictions we mouth about education as the key to success and happiness. In reality, we often experience schools as stifling and rigid environments, where ideas and skills are folded into subjects and exams, where “knowledge” is regurgitated and packaged in a system of the reward and punishment known as grades. Since there is no one model that works for all students, and since schools demand a significant degree of intellectual conformity, many people experience school as a prison, a place where their individuality is diminished, where individual perception and unique talents are neither discovered nor fostered. In this way, the rhetoric about success through education morphs into a sort of charade. Despite the rhetoric, students with the highest degree of need, those who experience poverty, are essentially discarded in decaying buildings with underpaid and under-prepared teachers, and few resources. The social-economic status of these students’ families further
determines their educational opportunities, which in turn goes far in determining their own future access and agency as citizens.

Furthermore, rhetoric based primarily on self-gratification (in exclusion of community) does little to demystify the complexities of the freedom paradox. Jonathan Kozol argues that our schools perpetuate a sense of decompartmentalization about our lives and those who lived before us, who live far from us, in the next neighborhood, and who will inherit their world from us in the future. Kozol believes the lack of links made between these contexts add to a feeling of ennui and pessimism:

I suspect that many people, who have had their education in the same period as I, will recognize the sense of personal defeat I have in mind. We learn to tolerate, like a low flame on the fire or like a low fever in the body, a reasonable temperature of admitted cynicism. We learn to feel that it is not tolerable to “be” self-compromised if one is open and amusing in the discussion of the matter; or that cynicism, charmingly admitted to and interestingly described, in some sense cancels itself out. It is not corrupt so long as a person is perceptive and articulate concerning his corruption. At this point as we know, the world becomes a distant and quite bearable destination, one scarcely having to do with our own being any longer. (On Being a Teacher 175)

Education, therefore, not only impacts the way we see schools, but ourselves, our social realities and the way we make our social realities. In contrast, the goals of emancipation education emphasize agency and difference.

What then is border pedagogy? For me, it is an apparatus for emancipation education. It is a theoretical perspective through which students and teachers examine the boundaries constructed around literal landscapes, but also around the beliefs and attitudes we take as givens. Border pedagogy helps us see the ways in which borders are made to have real effects and the ways they are imagined—figments of ideology. Border
pedagogy helps us recognize the constructions of limits, change them into possibilities, and find new ways of viewing and experiencing the geographies of history, place, and identity.

**Educators, Their Values, and Praxis**

Growing up in New York City during the 1970 and 1980s, I witnessed many inequities. Homelessness was rampant and often there was, quite literally, a homeless person on every corner. Public schools were prison-like for all but the elite few who were admitted in to highly competitive magnet schools such as Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, or Brooklyn Technology. Unemployment was considerable, and class, race, and gender often determined a person's career options. Because I was fortunate enough to be born in a place where I had a direct window (quite literally on the second floor) to the reality around me, questions of social justice have always been central to my thoughts about teaching. For me "social justice" refers to the goal of equal access to resources, the embracing of multiple perspectives, apparatuses to share power amongst groups that differ in class, ethnicity, sexual preference, religion and belief.

My political objective as a teacher is to provide forums and devise techniques to explore, along with the students, ideas related to social inequities, tensions and justice, including justice as free expression through the arts. Similarly, I believe we, as citizens and educators, would benefit greatly from working together to learn how to access the tools that can make social justice an increasing reality. As part of the goal of achieving *multiple perspectives*, I try to work with each student to embrace voice, creativity, originality, and to help them recognize these qualities in others. It is a formidable task. It
is fun and frustrating. It requires constant self-reflection, experimentation, resilience, and faith that people have a lot of wonderful and mysterious things going on under the surface. I believe that there are endless ways to reach these goals; emancipation education is an ongoing active and critical engagement with the larger goal of social justice and with the worlds of individual students and groups of students. This is what I see as most important.

Working as a teacher in a classroom generally involves performing subject-based methodologies, as we reproduce the techniques and skills through which we ourselves were taught in schools. While there is considerable value in drawing from our own experiences as students and teachers, methods, tasks and the skeleton of contents may turn into the primary goals in and of themselves. But these apparent goals are often the most superficial ones. Teachers continually need to ask themselves, why am I doing this? What really matters here?

As teachers we need to question what it means for us to participate in a democracy. After all, as teachers we are training others to participate (or not) within one. We are modeling our values. And yet, if we are self-reflexive, elastic, open, and committed to reflection and action, it is possible students will also engage questions of substance, and leave with dynamic questions, not only schooled responses.

And yet, we cannot even take the term “democracy” at face value. We need to take the many competing interpretations of this word to task. In Savage Inequalities, Jonathan Kozol’s powerful and exhaustively researched testimony about the extremes of wealth and poverty in American schools, he considers how Justice Powell of Texas
viewed the issue of participation. Powell is quoted as saying that education “is not a fundamental interest” since education “is not among the rights afforded explicit protection under our Federal Constitution.” Furthermore, Powell argues that there is no indication “that the system fails to provide each child with an opportunity to acquire the basic minimum skills necessary” so as to enjoy “full participation in the political process” (Kozol, *Savage Inequalities* 276).

When Powell speaks of what is “necessary” to enjoy what he calls “full participation” in the nation’s politics, we would like to know exactly what he means by “full” participation. A lot of wealthy folks in Texas think the schools are doing a sufficiently good job if the kids of poor folk learn to cast a vote—just not enough to cast it in their own self-interest. They might think it fine if kids could write and speak—just not enough to speak in ways that make a dent in public policy. In economic terms, a lot of folks in Alamo Heights would think that Edgewood kids were educated fine if they had all the necessary skills for their kitchen work and tend their lawns. How does Justice Powell settle on the level of effectiveness he has in mind, by “full participation”? The definition for this term is at the essence of democracy. If pegged too low, it guarantees perpetuation of disparities of power while still presenting an illusion of fair play. (Kozol, *Savage Inequalities* 216)

By demonstrating how a concept such as “full participation” within a democracy can be trivialized, Kozol insists we ask ourselves what democracy and “full participation” actually mean, and how these catch phrases become translated within the boundaries of classroom interaction and learning.

The teacher, who is interested in striving towards equity—and who recognizes the potential diminishment of students’ “full participation” within our democracy—needs to be aware of her or his own political position as a conveyer of knowledge and potential reproducer of inequitable power relations. As Guillermo Gómez-Peña explains, our institutions have the possibility of functioning as “experimental laboratories to develop
and test new models of collaboration between races, genders, and generations, and as ‘free zones’ for intercultural dialogue, radical thinking, and community building” (New World Border 16).

We need to recognize that formal education is a cultural construction, not the given way that human beings learn about and experience the world. When we reproduce the ways of teaching and looking at the world that previous generations were taught, we may find ourselves running on automatic in a way that negates human creativity and agency. In Deschooling Society, Ivan Illich frames the numbing effect of some formal schooling:

Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Then once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. The pupil is therefore “schooled” to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. (1)

Educators who care about equity and creativity need to look squarely at their values and how those values come into play in the classroom. I believe that ethical beliefs can be deepened into pedagogical practices. If one believes education should prepare students for “full participation” in our democracy, then that goal must set the precedent for pedagogy.

For those who teach history, writing and literature, social studies, anthropology, philosophy, and “remedial” courses, and even the sciences, the goal of actual shared power can map the way we look at texts. Since I am especially interested in a particular set of questions concerning the “borders” of culture, identity and equity, my values and
pedagogy draw me towards certain texts, in this case what I am calling "border" texts. There will always be a unique relationship between the texts that are chosen, the values through which they are taught, the methods through which the values are expressed and explored, and between all the different individuals within a classroom. However, any text where teachers and students can explore tensions, depth, and passions can be a valuable text.

Students and teachers who undertake learning as a journey have the beginnings of a meaningful praxis (the merging of theory—or in this case theorized belief—and practice). Still, as classroom teachers everywhere remind us, any given day in the classroom is replete with multiple commitments (to one's ideals; to the competing needs of individual students; to expectations of the administration, school, college boards, and parents) and unplanned tensions that emerge in the classroom (conflict, resistance, lack of sufficient preparation on the part of the students or the teacher). Because of these pressures, the balance between ethical commitment and daily execution can be a very real struggle. Because of the always-changing classroom pressures and dynamics, praxis will often need to be re-examined, re-bridged, and re-mapped. Although I have plenty of days where I struggle with seemingly competing interests and frictions, I accept the disjunction between ethical commitment and daily execution as par the course in the bumpy terrain of border pedagogy.

Pedagogy will always involve a complex interplay of values and methods. It is not constituted of one art or science, but the confluence of many, always interacting and changing. In this sense pedagogy reflects the world(s) we live in. Because of this, I firmly
believe that there are no blueprints for making a critical, emancipatory, or border pedagogy work. Instead, it is about the ongoing journey of teachers to digging into themselves and facilitating the opportunity for students to do the same on an ongoing basis. Neither the destination nor the process can be perfectly charted in a lesson plan before the lesson occurs, only the values and objectives. And even these must be reflexive, always revealing their own secrets and mysteries in the moment, and upon reflection, after the fact.

This brings us to the idea of developing praxis—the practice of one's teaching based on theory and belief. Often we find practice and theory treated differently and separately in schools of education and education literature. Therefore, teachers are always hungry to find the connections between theories (such as in the vast literature on critical pedagogy) and the practical real-life challenges that daily present themselves in our classrooms. Below are quotes from some major theorists in critical pedagogy on how they seek to find praxis:

Henry Giroux: I want [the students] to be able to justify whatever position they do take so they come out with a clearer sense of what they believe in and what effects they might have. I think what I really do is politicize the process of education in the minds of the students. As soon as you say people can be agents in the act of learning you politicize the idea of schooling. It becomes political in the best sense of the word, which is to say that students have to become self-conscious about the kinds of relationships that undergird the learning process. ("Living Dangerously" 16)

Chandra Talpade Mohanty: [Praxis] does not entail merely processing received knowledges (however critically one does this) but actively transforming knowledges. In addition, it involves taking responsibility for the material effects of these very pedagogical practices on students. (qtd. in Lankshear and McLaren 152)
Peter McLaren: We need to develop a praxis that gives encouragement to those who, instead of being content to visit history as curators or custodians of memory, choose to live in the furnace of history. (McLaren 218)

For Giroux, Mohanty and McLaren, classroom praxis should aim for our students to be agents in their learning and in society. Embedded in their views is the belief that each of us matters intrinsically and each has the potential to create a meaningful difference in our shared social/political/cultural contexts. I agree that politicizing our students in the best sense, as Giroux states, will lead to the active transformation of knowledges and a reflexive active citizenship.

As educators, we must ask ourselves: Do I see the classroom as a site to transfer knowledge or a site to make knowledge collectively with others? Does the teacher tell the students what is truthful and what is real? Or does the teacher create a space for the contestation and multiplicity of our myriad truths, and a space to unpack the contradicting consequences?

As an educator, do I want to reproduce the old ideas and rules? Or can we participate together in a struggle over what is meaningful and explore how we can be co-agents in enacting creative change?

The nuance of human emotions and experiences, the crannies where education reform hides, is difficult to access through theoretical language. It is certainly difficult to translate into lesson plan. Yet emancipation education happens all the time. Certainly teachers who engage in it are taking a risk since, as in any moment in the classroom, outcomes can't always be predicted. However, experimentation with methods to
illuminate issues of social justice (equity, voice, agency) rarely does damage if undertaken with respect for others, openness, and compassion. Furthermore, such methods offer a tool to challenge one's own values and practice.

Methods for emancipatory and border pedagogy will be woven throughout this text. Classroom practices will be explicitly discussed in the sections, “Narrating Empathy,” “Border Methods,” and throughout the second part of the dissertation in which I paint portraits of border pedagogy through analysis of border literature and windows into courses designed with border pedagogy in mind.

What is Border Pedagogy?

Borders are necessarily paradoxes. On the one hand, they delineate lines of power, yet they invite collisions of hybrid creativity. They divide lands, political perspectives, definitions, ideas, and values, and yet they are the perspectives, definitions, ideas and values themselves, often things of cultural substance and meaning. Every idea we have, every word we speak is a border. These borders give our knowledges and experiences shape; they make communication possible. Yet with each meaning that we define, there is something left out, something negated.

Border pedagogy is the process of looking at boundaries and re-imagining them, of entering into living history, and seeing how our boundaries are not static.

In order to engage students in thinking about the constructed boundaries of our assumptions and politics, I will examine border pedagogy through border literatures. I
define border literature as a genre that explicitly or deductively deals with the transgression of constructed boundaries. Obviously, this definition is broad, as well as dynamic; for the detection of a given "border" is based on one's own ideology and positioning. Indeed, all things material and all perceptions have borders, even as they shift. Much of the literature applied here deals with the borders and tensions between the identities of indigenous peoples in the Americas and the surrounding landscapes, both physical and mental, as well as other instances of hegemony and resistance. Texts by Sherman Alexie, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, and Rigoberta Menchú are examples of border literature; they are representative of the increasing numbers of texts in myriad genres that explore nations, difference, and political ruptures. They are also set apart in that "border crossing" is an explicit concern. Their awareness of border theory, border questioning, or border consciousness is expressed in their writing. The specific texts I have chosen to look at have important meanings that reflect my interests of the past several years.

The literatures concern people struggling to emancipate themselves within or despite the boundaries set around them by colonial nations, dominant ideologies, and reproductive institutions. The literature I review explores assumptions about one's own social roles and the process of learning to live within constructed boundaries—boundaries that are creative in that they can be transformed, and confining in that they can structure compartmentalization of one's identity and possibilities.

Border theory as an academic discourse has several sources that have dovetailed together over the past decades. Texts by Latina/o Mestiza/o and other Southwest writers, activists, and artists spurred a discourse that examines the identity of mixed indigenous
ancestry on the US/Mexican border. Two decades ago Gloria Anzaldúa’s poetic autobiography *Borderlands/La Frontera* addressed the divides of place, language, identity and sexuality. The borders she explores reflect many of the academic/political discourses influenced by Marxism, such as postcolonialism and subaltern studies. In turn, Anzaldúa, constructing border theory as a legitimate discourse in the academy, influenced critical theorists.

Critical pedagogy has also been influenced by the critical discourses of postcolonialism, subaltern studies, and border theory. Henry Giroux’s 1992 book, *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, advances border pedagogy as a critical pedagogical approach.

I am one of the many teachers of literature and writing, informed by critical pedagogy, who believes in the transformative power of texts. My goal here is not to argue again that texts can transform us, but instead to examine how border pedagogy applied to border literature can in turn lead us to the “borderlands” of thoughts—hybrid thoughts that seek connections, challenge boundaries, and create new meanings. Often I will use the term “border pedagogy” as a double reference to mean: (a) a pedagogical praxis that aims to delve in the borders, and (b) the examination of texts that explore border questions.

Finally, what is border thought? On a superficial level, border thought is reflection about the boundaries of identity and agency at the crossroads of political,
historical, and economic borders. On a deeper level, border thought aims to transform reflection into action in the Freirian sense.¹

Lands, political perspectives, definitions, ideas, and values are explored as constructed borders, measured but shifting, dynamic and alive. It is this activity and life force, this energy, in which we can locate the spaces to create our meanings and have our meanings feed the ideals that we often feel are beyond us.

In this sense border pedagogy is utopian and proud to be so. Jorge G. Castenada writes, “Revolution has become dystopian; but revolutionaries without utopia are inconceivable” (260).

As border thinkers we recognize that the irony of examining borders and defying them is that we create new borders in resistance. These in turn will need to be resisted through the recognition that we must forever rebuild so as to understand the dynamics of our realities and to make our realities just; we encourage movement in thinking. Recognition of this movement affirms that there is not only one approach to our human struggles, but instead a range of humane and creative approaches. To struggle with terms like democracy, justice, and creativity is to recognize that they are always context-bound, and are therefore complicated and ongoing. We realize that knowledge must not be static for static knowledge can never be applied to a world of constant motion.

I do believe that while any thought may be bounded, the imagination itself is equipped to always test boundaries, and may in that sense be boundless. If we want to believe in our ideals, using the imagination is the best tool we have to alter the

¹ See Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed.
boundaries of our existence. And this is the most beautiful and ephemeral part of all, that something as diffuse as our imagination does shape our world in material ways. So part of border pedagogy is to figure out what matters and apply our imagination to make ideals a dynamic reality.

And yes, I have just built a border.
Chapter 1: Historicizing Border Pedagogy As Democratic Practice

In this section I will summarize the development of Border Pedagogy through early examples of democratic practice in the U.S., the shifts brought by Dewey, Freire and the Latin American Left; the movement of critical pedagogy in the US, and the emergence of borderlands theory. I will conclude by emphasizing the historical links that shape my own definition. I assert that education as democratic practice is also a practice of resistance—the resistance of institutionalized hegemony and the Calvinist principles that dominated much of early American thought.

The Foundations of False Consciousness: Calvinism, Manifest Destiny, and Transcendentalism

Calvinism

Many of the assumptions that formed the educational institutions we have today were born out of Calvinism. The philosophy, brought by the early Protestant settlers of America, emphasized predestination and theological determinism (i.e., God chooses some to be saved and some to be damned). Therefore, the world was neatly divided into: (a) those that were chosen by God, and (b) the rest of the world, who were, in the end, sinners. Furthermore a tenet of Calvinism, antinomianism, held that those who underwent a conversion to Christianity were freed from the authority of any laws, both religious and civil.

Calvinism set the foundation for an epic web of rationalization, expansionism, and repression of “savage” people/sinners. Two further schools of thought emerged from
Calvinism, the broad philosophy of Manifest Destiny and the more complex Transcendentalism.

The expansionist agenda of the nineteenth century was rationalized through broad religious dogma known as Manifest Destiny. Building on the Calvinistic tenant of predestination, Manifest Destiny rationalizes territorial expansion as a divine right, direct from God to the settlers. In this equation, indigenous people were "sinners" (i.e., not Christian), and via predestination were rationalized as having no rights as societies and individuals on the very land they occupied for millennia. Over the colonial period, which intensified over the nineteenth century, this philosophy sufficed as the engine for extermination and relocation. Furthermore, champions of predestination also buoyed the slave trade, established the colonial country as a transcontinental empire.

The movement of transcendentalism was at once a resistance to Calvinism and an affirmation of it. The Transcendental philosophers aimed to rejuvenate the mystical aspects of Calvinism, while fostering emerging Democratic ideals. Rather than focusing on a hierarchy with God at the top and Protestant’s firmly underneath, Transcendentalists explored the idea that what all the world contains—in a mystical sense—is within each individual. Knowledge was believed to be intuitive and truth was innate. Given this notion, Transcendentalists were supportive of abolition and challenged the lack of human agency suggested by Calvinism.

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s theory of “self-reliance” embraces agency and the creative possibility of the individual. However, while an important development in democratic thought, the emphasis on intuitive knowledge and innate truth was a
reconfiguration of some of the old Calvinistic principles, in the sense that culture and environment did not come into play. For the Transcendentalists “knowledge” and “truth” were not problematized concepts, but accepted as givens. Though revolutionary for its time, Emersonian self-reliance can be seen as a form of Social Darwinism, where individualism is emphasized outside of the complex interplay of social reality. As Said writes in Culture and Imperialism, “the rhetoric of power too easily produces an illusion of benevolence when employed in an imperial setting” (xvii). In this sense Emerson’s call towards self-reliance, which seems to emphasize the possibilities of the individual, diminishes the socio-economic, historical, and political contexts of that same subject.

To this day conventional educational discourse often emphasizes the self-reliance and accountability of students, as well as the notion of unproblematized “truth” over historicity, multiplicity, and cultural relativity. For example, students from public schools in areas with high property taxes, and therefore well-funded districts, take the same state tests as students in low-income areas or students with different ethnic makeups. Textbooks all too often offer only one version of history or truth. Without focus on historicity, multiplicity, and cultural relativity, the hierarchal deterministic principles of Calvinism are enforced. Educational practices emphasizing self-reliance over these other contexts result in hegemonic curriculum, outcomes, and objectives, leading to what Frederick Engels, Georg Lukacs, and generations of sociologists call false consciousness.

For Engels, the term false consciousness describes a situation where the proletariat is unable to grasp the “true” nature of their historical role in a hierarchal class system. False consciousness refers to false reasoning being attributed to suffering and
hardship, such as the intelligence or the abilities of the proletariat. Georg Lukacs furthered the term false consciousness to refer to the structural relations in society. In contemporary times, it is often used to suggest that the rich or middle class blame social problems on those people who actually suffer them.

My favorite example of the false consciousness in a contemporary setting is from Michael Moore’s documentary film Roger and Me (1989), about the devastation caused to Moore’s hometown of Flint Michigan when its main employer, General Motors, moved their factory to Mexico, so as to spend less money on labor. In one scene, the wives of some of the remaining executives spend the afternoon golfing. When asked about the skyrocketing poverty and home evictions following the GM move, the women scoff and point out that if the people wanted to work they could easily get off the couch and find new jobs—even though there were no new job openings in the area and without money or resources, it was impossible for many families to move. The women have taken Emerson’s notion of self-reliance to the extreme, assuming that the individual is autonomous outside of their economic and social realities.

Therefore, the theory of education as democratic practice, a premise from which border pedagogy derives, had an uphill battle in a country where even a progressive voice such as Emerson’s had such deep roots in Calvinism.

**Early Echoes of Emancipation Education**

Despite the presence of Calvinism, many early thinkers, such as Thomas Jefferson, clearly recognized the contradiction between democracy and capitalism as a concept rooted in predestination (Chomsky 43). However, the most potent voices for
education as democratic practice were not the politicians or the educators, but the poets and activists who crossed the boundaries of their society with both their thoughts and actions.

**Walt Whitman**

Walt Whitman is often categorized as a Transcendentalist, as his poems emphasized human interconnection with the cosmic. However, his writing actively resisted the capitalist and hierarchal roots of Calvinism, continually crossed those inscribed boundaries, embraced difference and shunned the confinements of institutions. Though not totally immune to the prejudices of his time, I see him as a key figure in the exploration of democratic practice and emancipation education, challenging his own intellectual patriarchal lineage/heritage.

Among the institutions challenged by Whitman are schools. For Whitman, schools are prisons through which we are compartmentalized, contained, and through which we forfeit the immediacy of our human experience: “Wisdom is not tested in schools, / Wisdom cannot be passed from one having it / To another not having it” (Whitman 182). Whitman continues to explain that, “now that I re-examine philosophies and religions, / They may do well in lecture rooms, yet have not prove at all / under the spacious clouds” (182).

In Whitman’s stratosphere, the theoretical indoctrination that occurs through institutions is stifling, and that practice and action in the world outside those imposed boundaries makes for an engaging and naturally unfolding learning process. In this sense, Whitman anticipates twentieth century theorists and practitioners of liberatory pedagogy
in both North and South America. Kozol, Illich, Freire, and hooks argue that schools deflate the imagination, sever the child from their community and from nature, and break up fluid thought into compartments such as subjects, date, classes and eras.

Whitman’s call to the open road, his “Democratic Vistas,” seeks decolonization from institutions, leading us towards an American utopia of political and spiritual agency. In “Song of the Open Road,” Whitman declares that no person should be “denied” or “interdicted... None but are accepted, none but shall be dear to me” (179). Americans are urged to “come out of the dark confinement” (188) and join Whitman on the road of “active rebellion” (189). He calls us from our complacency, out of brainwashing establishments and customs:

Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on the shelf unopened
Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain unearned!
Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the teacher!
Let the preacher preach in his pulpit! let the lawyer plead
In the court, and the judge expound the law. (189)

In his poem “Song of the Open Road,” Whitman invites us “joumeyers: with our own “diverse phrases” to accompany him on his metaphoric journey of an active life, experiencing through the body and imagination strides towards possibility (186).

However, while Whitman recognizes the constraint of institutions and elevates the sick and poor and writes the stunning abolitionist poem “I Sing the Body Electric,” he has not fully theorized the concept of the “Other,” often reproducing racial stereotypes in his
poetry, even while seemingly trying to break from them, as in this image from “Song of the Open Road”:

Here is the profound lesson of reception, not preference or denial
The black with his wooly head, the felon, the diseased, the illiterate person, are not denied
... None but are accepted, none but shall be dear to me. (179)

The objectifying image is quite striking when compared to the profoundly humanizing “I Sing the Body Electric.” Here Whitman goes to the slave auction and, ironically, “helps” the auctioneer whom “does not half know his business” (132). The auctioneer, it seems, has under-priced the humans for sale. Whitman informs us that “whatever the bids of the bidders, they can not be high enough for it” (132). Whitman slyly plays along with the auctioneer’s objectification of the human body, metaphorically stripping the skin so that the readers can see the tendon and nerve, the “exquisite senses” and “life-lit eyes” (133). In doing so, Whitman exposes the divine and universal humanness that the institution of slavery tried to obscure:

Within there runs blood,
The same old blood! the same red blood!
There swells and jets a heart, there all passions, desires,
reachings and aspirations,
(Do you think they are not there because they are not expressed in parlors and lecture room?) (133)

Whitman goes further by indicating and connecting the “stripped” individual to human histories of the past and future, beyond the dehumanizing context of the slave
mart. He even indicates (in the second stanza below) a possible genealogical connection between the auctioneer and the individual being sold, or other individuals of African descent:

This is not only one man, this is the father of those who shall be fathers in their turns,
In him the start of populous states and rich republics,
Of him the countless immortal lives with countless embodiments and enjoyments.
How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his offspring through the centuries?
(Who might you find if you have come from yourself, if you could trace back through the centuries?) (133)

In “I Sing the Body Electric” Whitman makes a sly and powerful case for abolition. He crosses many borders: the borders between slavery and freedom; societal construction of race; self and other; present; body/soul (a dichotomy he sees as false); past, present, future. How then is this deconstruction of racism written in the same era as the “Song of the Open Road” where he equates “the black with his wooly head” with other “marked” people: the “felon” and the “diseased,” an ideology reminiscent of the Untouchables of India? It is not clear if he is being ironic about this clumping together of a socially constructed subaltern populace. The illiterate person is also clumped in there, and it is unclear whether or not Whitman recognized illiteracy as the direct result of the construction of social class through economic and hegemonic policies.

While I hope that the imagery in “Song of the Open Road” is ironic, it does open interesting questions for us as “border readers” considering a bard of democracy, who
may have been stuck behind some borders, despite the many ones he crossed. Perhaps
Whitman (a teacher, advocate for the mentally ill and volunteer nurse during the Civil
War) did not have the tools for complete self-reflexivity, even as he made great strides in
the interest of democratic practice, emancipation education, and the decolonization from
the bounds of social thought. In the end, however, Whitman’s poetry always comes back
to conscientization (reflection leading to action), leading a life of action based of love of
humanity and risk. When Whitman states throughout “I Sing The Body Electric,” “the
body is the soul,” he means that divinity is life on earth, achieved by human action—here
and now.

*Whitman’s Contemporaries Crossing Borders*

I shall now consider Frederick Douglass along with Whitman and the Sioux writer
Zitkala-Sa (a.k.a. Red Bird, Gertrude Bonin), barely a generation Whitman’s junior.
These two Americans achieve the privilege of literacy, through trial, risk, and cultural
loss—not privilege or political right. The accounts of their “educations” contain both
overt cultural indoctrination preparing them for subordinate social roles, and covert risky
critical practices: appropriating high fluency in English letters and discourse as tools for
political emancipation. The imperative of critical literacy and pedagogy is also evident in
the narratives of Whitman’s relative contemporaries, Frederick Douglass and Sioux
writer Zitkala-Sa. Like Walt Whitman, they offer critiques of societal education as
indoctrination processes from which one must decolonize. While these writers and
orators, like Whitman, are not commonly discussed in critical pedagogy circles, their
concerns were fundamentally similar to those who are, and stand as early testaments as to what democracy and border pedagogy can be. The predominate assumption of predestination and innate differences between ethnicities during their time are debunked in their powerful voices and testimonies. They expose ignorant racist assumptions, the depth of racist indoctrination in this country and the most undemocratic cruelties that the ideas rooted in Calvinism wrought: slavery and attempts at literal and cultural genocide. Like Whitman, Douglass and Zitkala-Sa urge decolonization. Unlike Whitman, a white male (though likely a gay white male, and therefore also marginalized), they experience colonization directly and build a view of democracy as they decolonize not others, but themselves. Voices such as Douglass’, Truth’s, and Zitkala-Sa’s are historically urgent.

Frederick Douglass

An important idea within border pedagogy was articulated by Frederick Douglass while still in his early twenties, not long after he escapes to freedom. Throughout his first autobiography/testimony, The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. Written by Himself. Douglass holds that oppression does not only oppress the apparent victim, but the oppressors themselves, for he or she loses humanity in the process.

Frederick Douglass raises his voice to testify to the specific details of life in the institution of slavery, and does so with a highly reflexive critical perspective. He writes of sleeping nearly naked as a child, half frozen in the winter night. He analyzes the psychological stages of the fragmentation of identity as people are taken from their families and thrown with others of disparate language and cultures. He critiques the psychological impact of existing in fear of lashings, rape, disease, and death.
Before sociology was a recognized discipline, Douglass detailed "lessons" of behavior modification as a form of control and a learned means of survival. As Blassingame writes, "a number of slaves were so oppressed that they accepted their master's claims about the rightness, the power, and the sanctity of whiteness and the degradation of blackness. As a result, some blacks wished passionately that they were white" (303). Blassingame includes the example of James Watkins who stated, "I felt as though I had been unfortunate being born black, and wished that I could by any means change my skin into a white one, feeling certain that I should then be free" (303). Blassingame asserts that "the idea of the superiority of whites was etched into the slave's consciousness by the lash and the ritual respect he was forced to give every white man" (303).

In this vein, Douglass describes the rare holiday on the plantation, "professedly a custom established by the benevolence of the slave holders" (70). This heavy dose of "liberty," during which "masters" bet on whose slave could drink more rum, serves the indoctrinating purpose of teaching the slave that a life in bondage, under the care of a "good" master might, in actuality, be preferable to other modes of existence:

Thus when the slave asks for virtuous freedom, the cunning slaveholder, knowing his ignorance, cheats him with a dose of vicious dissipation, artfully labeled with the name of liberty. The most of us used to drink it down, and the result was just what might be supposed: many of us were led to think that there was little to choose between liberty and slavery. We felt, and very properly too, that we had almost as well be slaves to man as to rum. So, when the holiday ended, we staggered up from the filth of our wallowing, took a long breath, and marched to the field, --feeling upon the whole, rather Glad to go, from what our master had deceived us into a belief was freedom, back into the arms of slavery. (70)

What Douglass describes is, in effect, an "education" of indoctrination, corrupting to all, intricate and institutionalized. Through this elaborate inculcating process, the individual
perceives no possible emancipation, but finds identity only within taught experience, and, knowing no other life, is dependent upon the asylum of slavery beyond even its literal physical bonds. The goal is to oppress and maintain ignorance and dependence. Douglass notes,

I have found that, to make a contented slave it is necessary to make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate the power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be able to feel that slavery is right. (83)

Such behavior modification and the covert “schooling” of an acceptance of life in bondage were profoundly and repeatedly resisted, not only by Douglass, but most of the people he depicts. However, the institution of slavery was effectual in that slaves were well aware of “cues from whites.” Escape and resistance occurred in the context of the slave being a “lifelong student of the moods, ideas, and actions” and would hence “conduct himself according to the changes in the white man’s behavior” (Douglass 303). For Douglass escape took many years, many failed attempts, lashings, and long periods of despondence. For extensive periods he believed escape to the north impossible. Even as he lives in Baltimore and is allowed to work on the docks, independent of work with “Master” Hugh, working side by side with free men, Douglass is compelled to “deliver every cent of that money” to Hugh. This frustrating position of being engaged in the work of a free man while still being legally possessed, causes Douglass to feel that “whenever my condition was improved, instead of increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom” (83).
Douglass' well known legacy is that after an introduction to the alphabet by the
northern "Mistress" Auld, "a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings" is instructed
by her husband that it is "unlawful" and "unsafe" to teach a slave to read. She effectively
"learns" prejudice. Douglass writes,

The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon
commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of
slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice made all of sweet accord,
changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave
place to that of a demon. (48)

This passage emphasizes how easily procedures and practices of prejudice are learned
and accepted, even when the gleaned behavior is on some level unnatural, as presumably
it was prior to the transmutation of Mrs. Auld.

While Douglass teaches himself to read through clandestine meetings with other
boys on the docks in Baltimore, and through slowly sorting out the letters his "Mistress"
had once taught him—studying the Auld's newspapers in secret—Zitkala-Sa endured a
sanitized system of oppressive organizational instruction. Both Douglass and Zitkala-Sa
find power through language, yet it is the power of mimicking the colonizing tongue as a
strategy for entering the discourse, the very discourse that oppresses, so as to impede
change.

Douglass eventually emancipates himself from the ideologically indoctrinating
institution of slavery through the dangerous, even life-threatening "crime" of literacy.
Douglass acknowledges the struggle of "the pathway from slavery to freedom," but
emphasizes the countervailing empowerment that fear of his resistance engendered in his
oppressors:
I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at what ever cost of trouble to learn to read. The very decided manner with which he [Mr. Auld] spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequence of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he dreaded, that I most desired. That which to him was a great evil, to be shunned carefully, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a determination to learn. (48)

*Resistance Through the Dominant Discourse*

Zitkala-Sa's "indoctrination education" was not through the institution of slavery, but through missionary schools. The accounts of her "education" contain examples of overt cultural brainwashing, preparing her for "assimilation," but in a subordinate social role. The mission aims for Zitkala-Sa to "unlearn" her Sioux customs and cultural values. Like Douglass she resists through risky critical and active practices, and like Douglass she appropriates high fluency in English letters and uses the dominant discourse as a tool for emancipation, using it against itself.

For Douglass and Zitkala-Sa, the genres of oration and testimony serve their political goals of achieving active citizenship and critical practices for their people in an immediate way. The genres of autobiography and testimony are more accessible for literal "teachings" than the sensory metaphoric "conveying" that occurs through Whitman's poetry. Therefore, they write of education within a linear comprehensive framework that calls for immediate political emancipation.

A dominant ideology emerges from the culture of colonization, hierarchy, and hegemony. This leaks into some institutions, and is promoted by others whose interests
are most involved. Whitman resisted the dominant mode of “rationality,” of the mind/body separation. Through the form of poetry he enables himself to stand comfortably on the “margins” of patriarchy, questioning its discourse and assumptions, but ultimately, by virtue of skin, geography, gender, and education, he is protected within this discourse.

In the quest for political agency, “mimicry” in the form of conventional Western discourse becomes imperative for Douglass and Zitkala-Sa. Marginalized by the imperialist society and assumed through its dominant ideology to be ignorant, less intelligent or illiterate, they are compelled to master the very language which has been an instrument in the fragmentation of their respective cultures, and the colonizing of their histories and lands. While the experimentation in form and cadence, so vital in Whitman’s content and craftsmanship, could be evocative for these writers, there would be less common ground for the desired political effect. While Douglass and Zitkala-Sa are clearly attentive to the artistic merit of their testimonies, both have immediate educational and political cultivation in mind. Whitman’s reformist views on experiential education are significantly ahead of their time and might (I hope) over time influence a society that is more accepting of multiplicity and dimensionally. His poetry resonates in the realm of ideals. In contrast, the chronicles of Douglass and Zitkala-Sa insist on clear and immediate attention to educational inequities and injustice. In historical context, their urgency fashions Whitman’s ideals a utopia, though an important one, yet somewhat a license and sanction of the Caucasian literate male.
Zitkala-Sa

Without being allowed official sanction for self-determinism by the hegemonic colonial government, Zitkala-Sa is forced by missionaries to ride “the iron horse.” The train slices new borders in to the land and redefines space, increasingly segmented by colonizers heading west. The train also denotes an immutable division in culture and family traditions. At best it marks the beginnings of hybridity, yet is also packaging children for assimilation and subjugation. Zitkala-Sa recalls leaving her family to go East:

when I saw the lonely figure of my mother vanish in the distance, a sense of regret settled heavily upon me. I felt suddenly weak, as if I might fall limp to the ground. I was in the hand of strangers who my mother did not fully trust. I no longer felt free to be myself, or to voice my feelings. (“School Days” 929)

On the “iron horse” Zitkala-Sa endures one of her first experiences of being “Othered”: “the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us” (“School Days” 929).

Of colonial education Said writes, “No area of experience was spared the unrelenting applications of these hierarchies” (Culture and Imperialism 182). Zitkala-Sa recalls the day the mission school cut off her braids, further severing her from her Sioux culture:

I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and hear them thaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I have suffered many indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And my long hair was shingled like a coward’s! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do: for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder. (“School Days” 932)
Like Douglass, Zitkala-Sa, whose name means “Red Bird,” came to see mastering the colonizing language as a form of resistance, or at least a means of compelling change within the system that stressed assimilation for Native Americans. She becomes a champion debater within the Anglo-based school system and for a time studies with white Americans that recognize and foster her gifts. However, she still confronts the larger environment of prejudice. She wins a college debate even though the “slurs against the Indian that stained the lips of our opponents were already burning like a fever in my breast” (Zitkala-Sa 939). Zitkala-Sa describes

> a vast ocean of eyes, some college rowdies threw out a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it. Under this they printed in bold black letters words that ridiculed the college that was represented by the “squaw.” While we waited for the verdict of the white judges, I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag floating insolently in the air. (939)

Yes, Zitkala-Sa, or Bonin (the sir name of her Sioux husband) masters the colonizing language and wins a debate on the meaning of democracy.

Douglass and Zitkala-Sa achieve emancipation through the critical use of language—despite bondage, stratifying policy and the gaze of hate. However, as Said writes of learning the language of the colonizer and undergoing, as Zitkala-Sa did, a colonizing education, “millions grasped the fundamentals of modern life, yet remained subordinate dependents of a foreign imperial authority” (Culture and Imperialism 264).

Said explains the institutionalized mechanism behind this:

> The annals of schools, missions, universities, and scholarly societies, hospitals in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, and America are filled with this history, which over time established so-called modernizing trends as much as it muted the harsher aspects of imperialist domination.
But at its center it preserved the nineteenth century divide between Native and Westerner (colonizer). (Culture and Imperialism 223)

In the century since the writings of Douglass, Whitman, and Zitkala-Sa, have their concerns regarding education, as colonizing and oppressive (Douglass and Zitkala-Sa) or fragmented and without process (Whitman) been meaningfully addressed? What assumptions remain within us from colonial times regarding education, identity and power? If certain historical assumptions remain, even surreptitiously, how is this significant for us?

Although our national discourse on education and democracy does not generally frame debates in postcolonial terms, 20th century teacher/writer Jonathan Kozol suggests similar processes may still be at work:

The way in which we learn the use of words prepares us for renunciation of our beliefs. The way in which we learn of history and change prepares us for renunciation of our will to take action as the consequence of our perception. Events in the external world are first presented, then accepted and at last perceived, as if they are non-human processes, initiated always by an outside force, related to each adult or each child only in the same way that the verb may be the direct object. Education, books, the university, the public school seem to be things, not that we do but that are done to us. (The Night is Dark 113)

Border pedagogy and emancipation education address this objectification of words and history. While a comparison between our contemporary manifestations of education and narratives of slavery or of missionary indoctrination may seem harsh or extreme, and in many cases may well be, I believe that certain tenets of colonial ideology and education remain prevalent in our classrooms today. And so, questions arise: Whose histories do we learn and why? How much must we conform to convention, denounce radical beliefs or new ideas? How passively do we act to “get through” and “succeed” in
the dominant system? How much do we resist in silence? I wonder if the political subconscious that infuses the general structure of many contemporary institutions of education indoctrinate us into complacent subordination or whether they indeed aim to advocate democracy.

I define democracy as fostering active citizenship where we discover beliefs, claim beliefs, question their ethical implications, think critically, imagine creatively, and take action in the human processes of our humming external world. Indeed, the way we learn words, history and change is critical in border pedagogy and emancipation education, where the words and histories of consensus reality taught in our schools can be used intentionally in countervailing ways to empower democratic practice.

For those of us who take Whitman’s open road literally or figuratively, Red Bird reminds us of the reason she chose to enter the struggle for emancipation through education and language. She tells us why she translates the tales of Americans—her people, native people, the Sioux: “I have tried to supplant the native spirit in these tales—root and all—into English, since America in the last few centuries has acquired a second tongue” (qtd. in Herzog 926).

In 1902 Zitkala-Sa writes,

The racial lines, which were once bitterly real, now serve nothing more than marking out a living mosaic of human beings. And even here men of the same color are like ivory keys of one instrument where each resembles all the rest, yet varies from them pitch and quality of voice. And those creatures who are for a time mere echoes of another’s note are not unlike the fable of the thin skin man, whose distorted shadow, dressed like a real creature, came to the old shadow, came to the old master to make him follow as a shadow. Thus with compassion for all echoes in human guise, I greet the solemn-faced “native preacher” whom I find waiting for me. I
listen with respect for God's creature though the mouth's most strangely
the jangling phrases of a racist creed. (939)

Throughout our genealogical, geographical and subjective positionings as
"Americans," we struggle to conceive our identity and apprehend how it fits into the
larger context of life (and lives) around us. In all our complexities, any of us may be at
once the explorer, oppressor, the native, or the Other.

For those of us who take Whitman's open road literally or figuratively, Red Bird
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tongue" (qtd. in Herzog 926).

Red Bird insists that while we join Whitman's songs of democracy, of this
sweeping mosaic, we must not forget the history of this land, its colonization by
Europeans and all of its people. Otherwise democracy may be a beautiful dream through
which we are encouraged to sleepwalk. But for many, democracy may be a sheen, a lie, a
nightmare.

Education of Experience: Crossing and Creating Boundaries in the 20th Century

Critical theory evolved from social theory as a tool to respond to the workings of
the world. Critical theorists, such as those in the Frankfurt school between World War I
and II, rejected the linear and non-reflexive theories of rationalism and positivist research
in lieu of the theories of Marx, Engels, Hegel and Kant. These theories could be applied
for a new understanding of education, literature, philosophy, art and economics.

Education theorists of the twentieth century influence border pedagogy by their increased reflexivity and understandings about interconnectedness, while resisting determinism. An important advocate of emancipation education was John Dewey who saw education as having a revolutionary character.

*John Dewey*

An important harbinger of emancipation education, John Dewey (1859-1952) was a significant voice in expressing the connection between “democracy and education” in a book of that name, as well as many other works over the course of his life. For Dewey, formal education could escape its colonial framework and transform into a space where the playing field could be leveled. His writing emphasized the importance of interaction, reflection and experience across social classes and fostering individual interest. Like Whitman, he challenged the value of rote exercises and institutional paradigms, believing educators must engage students at all levels intellectually. A key aim was to enlarge their experiences, providing a continuing framework for practice outside the classroom. For Dewey education was not a social sieve, but a key to the participation of citizens “sharing in common life” in a democracy:

Since education is a social process, and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion for educational criticism and construction implies a particular social ideal. The two points selected by which to measure the worth of a form of social life are the extent in which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups. An undesirable society, in other words, is one that internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience. A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which
secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education that gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder. (Democracy and Education, ch. 7).

Dewey believed that knowledge of social conditions and the present state of civilization are necessary in order properly to interpret a child’s gifts, potential, and unique perceptions.

Dewey championed a kind of equity through an education inclusive of difference and experience aimed to challenge the undesirable social consequences of authoritarianism of state-supported tracking and the subordination of the individual to the institution. For example, Dewey saw it as critical that children of the working class were not trained as workers but as intellectuals. Dewey writes, “The ultimate aim of production is not production of goods, but the production of free human beings associated with one another in terms of equality. That includes, of course, education” (qtd. in Chomsky 37). Regarding Dewey, Noam Chomsky writes,

In a free and democratic society, Dewey held, workers should be “the masters of their own industrial fate,” not tools rented by employers.... Dewey held that it was “illiberal and immoral” to train children to work “not freely and intelligently, but for the sake of the work earned.” (47)

Dewey did not see education as “something like a vessel with water but, rather, assisting a flower to grow in its own way.... In other words, providing the circumstances in which normal creative patterns will flourish” (Democracy and Education 38).

Dewey’s Theory of Knowledge challenged the common notion that thought is a unique aspect of the individual self, and not a product or response to learned behaviors,
ideologies, and contexts. He therefore challenged educators to not focus on a child’s
background, but to ascertain their individual powers.

Of Dewey’s enduring relevance to critical pedagogy, Chomsky writes,

The independent Left, of which Dewey was a part, has strong roots in
classic liberalism. It grows right out of it, in my opinion, and it stands in
sharp opposition to the absolutist currents of state capitalist and state
socialist institutions and thought, including the rather extreme form of
absolutism that’s now called conservative in the U.S. (38)

Pedagogy and the Latin American Left

Perhaps the most significant contributors towards twentieth century border
pedagogy come from the Latin American Left. These include radical post-Marxist
contemporaries, Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutierrez, Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire; each
offers an assessment of specific power-struggles in Latin America, the complex workings
of these power-struggles, and their own commitment to social justice. As activists
concerned with the political, material and psychological lives of oppressed peoples, each
develops a complex philosophy about social hierarchies, hegemonic relations, and the
ethical responsibilities of the self. However, the theoretical means, the framing devices,
and ultimately the audience of these four significant philosophers in Latin American
revolutionary thought, have notable differences. While one has become canonized in the
halls of academia—birthing a whole field of study—one has been comparatively shut out,
despite the power and relevancy of his voice. The other two cross the boundaries between
theology and politics in a way that has disturbed the status quo in both camps.
Furthermore they do not conform to the idea of nonviolence that is so frequently
associated with activists from the church.
Freire, Boff, Gutierrez, and Illich, beget the question: How do poor and dispossessed people gain power? Each maintains that social change cannot be handed from the “top-down” but from the “bottom-up,” from and with the people. The oppressed must apprehend the reality of their political environment and intervene in the flow of power. Furthermore, the four men argue that social change is achieved through solidarity—and that numbers count. They all advocate the purpose of a common vision through which change can happen and power can be shared. Liberation happens as a direct affront to oppression and its hegemonic structures. It is achieved through collective power.

Another notable similarity between the four is the degree to which their philosophies were shaped by Marxism and the political conflicts of Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. They were responding to a specific political moment in which military repression from within and imperial domination from abroad increased dramatically. These four thinkers were amongst the many that emerged from the Latin American Left.

Diverging views surface within the basic disciplinary frameworks of their philosophical ideas, their respective views on human self-awareness and agency, and the historical specificity of their audiences. Here I will compare their respective frameworks and views, noting points of divergence.
Gustavo Gutierrez and The Impact of Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology has important resonance for teachers and believers in democratic social change. The influence of Liberation Theology has been noted by Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux in their descriptions of critical pedagogy.

Gustavo Gutierrez is considered the founder of the faith-based activism of Liberation Theology. He is the first to articulate and define the term, which came into being while playing with a title to a speech about unjust social class systems during a long plane ride. His book on A Theology of Liberation followed Vatican II and the Medellin conferences, much of which he attended, emerging as a leading progressive voice at Medellin. Through these conferences, a commitment to the poor was articulated, written, and signed. However, as liberation movements (one-dimensionally framed as communism in the United States and amongst conservatives in Latin America) swept Central America, the Vatican withdrew its support of Liberation Theology.

Regardless, the movement grew as a response to increasing poverty, military rule, and CIA-sponsored death-squads in Latin America. Gutierrez argues for the importance of Catholic social teaching and the necessary calling of “preferential treatment for the poor.” The following is an excerpt from A Theology of Liberation:

Theology is a reflection, a crucial attitude. Theology follows; it is the second step. What Hegel said about philosophy can likewise be applied to theology: it rises only at sundown. The pastoral activity of the church does not flow as a conclusion from theological premises. Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it.... The theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society; this theology must be verified by the practice of that commitment, by active, effective participation in the struggle which the exploited social classes have undertaken against their oppressors. (307)
Therefore, what Gutierrez emphasizes is not how faith grins happily on just acts, but that just acts must be a precursor to faith. Gutierrez also notes that Liberation Theology takes meaning from various other forms, and learns from them, such as the social sciences: Medellin marks the beginning of a new relationship between theological and pastoral language on the one hand and the social sciences which seek to interpret this reality on the other (136).

While rejecting functionalism and determinism, Gutierrez saw Marxism as a useful tool for understanding class relationships, although he clearly saw its limitations. Needless to say, Gutierrez and his colleagues would spend their days confronting the stigma of Marxism from the church and public, and defending their use of it, and how it served as a logical extension of their faith and ethics. As for the relationship between faith, human justice and class, Gutierrez’ writing is very clear. According to Christian Smith he has claimed that he “considers the rich blasphemers because they speak of God in order to oppress the poor” (35).

All of Gutierrez’ writing on social justice that I have reviewed remains contextualized within the parameters of the bible, often using figures such as Job as protagonists for reflection. Through these means Gutierrez writes about human self-awareness and agency. As a major thinker and practitioner within theology and the Latin American Left, Gutierrez has a large audience; however, Leonardo Boff would go even further with expanding the audience reached by Gutierrez.

Leonardo Boff

Practitioners Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutierrez’s scholarship diverges more on the level of subject matter than philosophy. Most specifically, both address the
colonizing forces of religion, emphasizing the respect of other beliefs and cultures, and
dee emphasizes conversion in favor of a sharing of ideas. Although coming from a faith-
based perspective, Boff sees “evangelization” as a dialogical process. While Gutierrez
does articulate a respect for native religions and cultures, Boff goes further with the idea
of hybrid new forms between the indigenous religions of Latin America, and Spanish
derived church. That said, there is no denying the problematic power relations that
emerge from the evangelization of an indigenous society by colonizing forces.

Another shade of difference arises between Gutierrez and Boff. As I have
mentioned, Gutierrez’ writing is largely contextualized in scripture. In contrast, while
theology always under girds his work, Boff increasingly becomes a cultural studies
theologist.

Boff works with the illiterate poor; his views emerge not from academia but from
the oppressed people with whom he has contact. A somewhat younger contemporary of
Gutierrez, Boff was involved in the grassroots development of Liberation Theology. In
Boff I have found a willingness to take on and address contradictions within his theology,
an intellectual honesty that impresses me.

The strength of his views elicited the strongest backlash against Liberation
Theology from the Vatican. Smith writes, “the Vatican’s appointment of conservative
bishops as a long-term means to control liberation has been matched by the more
immediate tactic of criticizing and censuring a specific liberation theologian” (225). In his
book Church, Charism and Power, Boff openly criticized the rigid and hierarchal nature
of the Catholic church and offers a Marxist view of society. As a result the Vatican
insisted that if he were to remain in the church, he must remain silent for a period of ten months:

Iironically, the Vatican’s disciplining of Boff helped to spread further the ideas of Liberation Theology in Latin America [However]. Despite the helpful publicity liberation theology received, by condemning and silencing Leonardo Boff the Vatican demonstrated its increased willingness to take forceful action to maintain its authority and control. (Smith 226)

However, what was most disturbing to the Vatican was the relationship between Liberation Theology and guerilla liberation movements in Central America. The Sandinistas and other movements against the military and totalitarian state, openly sited the works of Liberation Theology, and increasingly the activist priests and bishops also voice support for the revolutionaries. Therefore, power structures were increasingly challenged, leading to the assassinations and disappearances of much of the activist clergy. In addition, many Nicaraguan priests were forced to resign their positions (Smith). While Liberation Theologists openly supported the cause, if not the violence, their relative lack of a stand contrasts them with the practitioners of Civil Disobedience in the United States and India.

Boff’s scholarship maps new territories, most applying theology to activism and casting them out of their expected realms. Significantly, Leonardo Boff has emerged as an environmentalist, likening injustices enacted on the people and the land, and showing how these injustices are entwined on a systematic level. Influential works such as Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor and Ecology and Liberation have cast a net to the broader audience of preservationists. It is important to note that his brother, Clodovis Boff is
known for writing on the importance of praxis. He spends half the year working and living with the poor on sustainability and the other half teaching at the University.

**Ivan Illich**

Radical educator Ivan Illich was once a priest. A native of Europe, he moved to New York, before spending much of his life in Cuernavaca, Mexico where he ran a school for the cultural emergence of new priests. Often Illich urged them to leave the priesthood due to the institutions missionary impulses towards assimilation and conversion of native people. Finally, disillusioned with the institution, Illich leaves the priesthood altogether in 1967. Unlike his the practitioners of Liberation Theology, Illich found it necessary to separate himself from the institution of Christianity, and spirituality takes on a less important role in his work. If Boff is a cultural studies priest, Illich is a cultural studies ex-priest.

Over recent decades, Illich was shut-out of academia because of his radical and anarchistic questioning of institutions. Although I have not read a comprehensive view on this, I cannot help but compare his ideas and communication of ideas to that of Freire’s. While Freire sees teaching as potentially subversive in the direction of human justice, Illich sees formal schools as inherently functioning as machines of indoctrination, arguing they be replaced by the development of “educational webs or networks” that are dynamic and informal in nature. Through webs and networks, “education” can invite opposing ideas, debate, and original thought. For Illich institutions tend to produce their opposite through the rigidity of institutionalization. He asks: Does health care always
result in well-being? Does the food industry always result in nutrition? Do financial services always result in prosperity? Do schools necessarily result in meaningful learning? For Illich rigid formality causes the production of the opposite of what institutions originally intend. For Illich, schools do not facilitate active learning, but are structured to induce brainwashing.

In Deschooling Society, Illich holds that most actual "learning" happens in the realm of cultural discourse and experience outside of school. He believes that schools limit our possibilities of knowing and questioning, training us to be passive, cut off from the community, compartmentalized. Through set curriculums and official histories, schools assure that power-relations are reproduced as schools make us "unlearn" our more revolutionary impulses or calls to service.

Like any thinker within cultural studies, there is a common denominator within Illich's work: the production of knowledge. He engages it in a more dynamic way than Freire, Gutierrez or Boff, who tend to frame theory through the learner/teacher, poor/privileged dichotomies. While both Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Deschooling Society both challenge the position of the reader, implicating the reader within their argument, Freire is more inclined to construct binaries. His dichotomies include: the oppressed and oppressors; objects of the historical processes and "active Subjects"; "liberation education" and "banking" education. While Illich writes scathing critiques of institutions, he sees agency and struggle occur within the boundaries of institutions, and maintains these are not necessarily dependent on an outsider to raise consciousness, as Freire suggests.
Although Illich is no doubt seen by current theorists on resistance and hybridity as having an overly determined point-of-view, I believe his arguments regarding school compel us to look at it anew; he provokes us in a myriad of ways. He certainly did me and, ironically, helped inspire me to be a teacher in schools. To recognize the truth within his perspective and to practice classroom teaching meaningfully, I have had to accept and attempt to understand the irony and contradiction of participating in an institutional construction that I recognize to be problematic.

However, rather than disillusioning me, this awareness has compelled me to be conscious of the dangers of reproduction and engage this question with my classes. It has made me self-reflexive. As a teacher it compels me to be what Gómez-Peña dubs “an insider/outsider.”

For Gutierrez and Boff, the moral imperative of working with and for the poor lies in the lap of faith, and without this commitment, faith is hypocrisy. For Illich the dismantling of ineffective institutions is the most viable means of change. In contrast, the late Paulo Freire (a close friend of Gutierrez) finds meaning in the binary through which one participates as an oppressed or oppressor. Freire maintains we are always implicated and therefore the dichotomy is a call to action.

*Paulo Freire*

Effectively considered the father of critical pedagogy, Freire’s work is increasingly read in the many education programs that consider theory as well as method. Interestingly, Freire’s groundbreaking work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, does not overtly
address classrooms at all. Inspired by Freire’s years working with the poor and illiterate in the countryside of his native Brazil, and written during six years of political exile, Freire’s pedagogy demonstrates a perspective or way of being in the world, and does not bind it to physical examples like classroom teaching. In the author’s own terms it was the “culture of silence,” which he encountered in the countryside, that compelled Freire to create his pedagogy. However, examples of his work in Brazil are few and far between; the author seems more interested in universalizing his experiences than recounting them in specific terms.

Freire’s discussion, while rarely naming physical contexts, does frame a psychological-political context of social stratification, economic alienation, and “fear of freedom.” For the oppressed fear of freedom results from years of accepting prescribed and indoctrinating social roles, shaping their physical and mental landscapes. This fear, in Freire’s view, can be addressed by introducing and illuminating “education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination” (Freire 62).

In the interest of freedom, Freire offers a judicious social analysis interwoven with a pedagogical philosophy about the development of critical consciousness. It must be noted that Freire sees critical consciousness as a step towards revolution, and he is interested in the psychosocial processes that make revolution possible. Freire’s prose is abstract, and although he never ushers us through a literal classroom door, the implications for classroom teachers, and for anyone concerned with education or social justice, are profound.
Freire’s work draws on Marxist theories, theological principles (which he shares with the Liberation theologists), and includes quotes from the usual list of suspects within revolutionary twentieth century thought. These include Erich Fromm, Louis Althusser, John Paul Sarte, Martin Luther King, and Che Guevara. Freire’s dynamic influences combine with his own great gift of synthesis to create an analysis with social-political implications beyond Brazil. The work’s canonical place within critical pedagogy suggests that Freire’s theory, which holds that political change must start with those who suffer, and that those who are moral will work with and beside the oppressed, is not culturally bound. It is interesting that the dynamic process of working alongside the poor, an idea that is anti-institutional in its essence, is now becoming institutionalized in teacher-education curriculums.

In addition to his prominence in education departments, it is not uncommon to read Freire in programs outside of education such as Latin American Studies, cultural studies, sociology, and other disciplines concerned with power relations. His theory of pedagogy is revered to the point of being an impetus for what is in effect a franchise of books and theories overtly derivative and inspired by his (see Giroux, McLaren, etc.).

Indeed, Freire’s critique of social relations and his view of education as a subversive force have proved enduring and empowering for students and teachers. His view of the oppressor/oppressed relationship goes beyond pedagogy within schools, and can be clearly applied to praxis in or beyond the classroom. He holds that in the interest of power, oppressors do not want the oppressed to practice democratic agency. Instead they hope to pour or “deposit” thoughts into their heads that will perpetuate hegemonic
social positions. In other words, oppressors do not want the oppressed to nurture a critical consciousness. Instead, political education and social roles are institutionalized in school and public discourse.

However, what Freire does that is especially useful is to offer pedagogical solutions in the interest of “the practice of freedom.” Instead of “banking” rote knowledge in an oppressive teacher-down fashion, he urges that teachers work with and for students to “problem-pose”—to ask questions for reflection. The questions are posed within a critical framework about social positions, applying directly to the immediate political and economic environment. Problem-posing marks the difference between passivity and activity, compliancy and agency, holding that pedagogy can be used for either domination or liberation. Problem-posing is necessarily dialogic and treats people as subjects that act rather than objects to be acted upon.

Freire is clear that any other configuration is oppressive and dehumanizing. For Freire you are part of the solution or part of the problem. The desired goal is “conscientizacao,” or in English, “conscientization,” a dialogic process of perceiving “social, political, and economic contradictions, and [taking] action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire 17). Conscientization involves naming one’s immediate world/reality, bringing power-relations to the fore, and learning to interpret power relations through critical analysis. Students and teachers become fully conscious, and aim to transform the world into a more just place through a dialogic reflection/action process.

Therefore, while Freire does explicitly deal with class relationships and ideology, he offers the type of solutions that can, at least in The United States, be applied within
existing frameworks (such as classrooms), and can be further theorized. Within conventional classrooms, teachers can engage students in reflective dialog while maintaining that they are using a Freirian approach. In this particular time and place, it is perfectly conceivable to apply Freire in relative safety (in this case the safety that is most in jeopardy is job safety). When compared to Illich, Boff, or Gutierrez, Freire is downright user-friendly, at least in North American constructs. His work foreshadowed future theoretical movements such as post colonial theory and cultural studies, seeing such theoretical habits of mind as connected to epistemological efforts.

Central to Freire’s pedagogy is the notion that those who are not oppressed are oppressors through complicity. He holds that the only meaningful way to move from the position of oppressor is to effectively switch camps. Together the oppressed and former oppressors engage in “problem-posing,” a cognitive act resulting in “conscientization,” or the conscious process of being and taking action in the world. Writes Freire,

The important thing, from the point of view of liberation education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing their thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. Because this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people, it serves to introduce the pedagogy of the oppressed, in the elaboration of which the oppressed must participate. (105)

Much of the book focuses on “conscientization” as a dynamic process, the product of dialog. Supported by this dialogical framework, Freire presents a version of social change that can not be offered from “top-down” but from “bottom-up,” from and with the people. Freire is clear that any other configuration is oppressive and
dehumanizing. While unsparingly pointing out the psychology of the oppressor, Freire's precise analysis insists we evaluate our own culpability.

Citing Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as the capstone moment, a movement called critical pedagogy began to emerge in the 1980s. Critical pedagogy builds on Freire's model to articulate a postcolonial education of reflexivity and the application of a critical perspective on the ideological constructs of society such as capitalism and patriarchy—and their attending institutions. Some of the many prolific contributors include Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, bell hooks (Gloria Watkins), Jonathan Kozol (also a sociologist), Michael Apple, Donald Macedo (Freire's frequent translator). All of these important contributors will be quoted extensively in the pages to come.

Articulating a Third Country: The Borderlands

*Gloria Anzaldúa*

Border art and theory are generally traced to the writing of revolutionary Mestiza feminist Gloria Anzaldúa. In her landmark book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa articulates a metaphor that resonates throughout border studies, throughout the disciplines:

The U.S. Mexican border *es una herida habierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture.... A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (3)
For Anzaldúa the “undetermined” geographic border between the U.S. and Mexico is analogous to the theoretical borders between constructs of sexuality and gender and between Indian, Mexico and Chicana/o cultures. Geography, gender-roles, and cultural norms are all social constructs that rub against each other, causing friction. They are zones of confrontation, creation, and translation. For this pioneer of border theory the friction is full of meaning.

Anzaldúa explains that people of mixed ancestry, or “the new mestizas” cope with the mixed messages of their cultural environment(s) by, in the words of Renato Rosaldo, “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (53). Anzaldúa learns to be Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point-of-view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (Rosaldo 79)

Just as the number and kind of species that inhabit the border between ecosystems exhibit diversity and variability, while cross-pollinating, so does personal, social, and political hybridity manifest when one crosses the border region between identities. Renato Rosaldo illustrates this point in writing about Anzaldúa.

Gloria Anzaldúa has further developed and transformed the figure at the crossroads in a manner that celebrates the potential of borders in opening new forms of understanding...in making herself into a complex persona, Anzaldúa incorporates Mexican, Indian, and Anglo elements at the same time she disregards the homophobia and patriarchy of Chicano culture. In rejecting the classic “authenticity” of cultural purity, she seeks out the many-stranded possibilities of the borderlands. By sorting through and weaving together the overlapping strands, Anzaldúa’s identity becomes stronger, not diffused. She argues that because Chicanos have so long
practiced the art of cultural blending, “we” now stand in a position to become leaders in developing new forms of polygot cultural creativity. (Rosaldo 216)

Anzaldúa was one of the first writers to insist her readers switch language midstream. Seyhan writes that Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza “which perfectly mimics spoken Chicano Spanish, offers numerous instances of code switching. Since Anzaldúa neither translates nor explains through context, code switching is her preferred mode of linguistic juxtaposition or bilingual enunciation” (109). Through her code switching she is able to express a broader range of nuance. She demonstrates how language denotes and legitimizes constructs of power. In Borderlands/La Frontera she creates “not an imaginary and mythic space of refuge in text but a forum from which the subjects of borderlands can speak” (Seyhan 114).

Although Anzaldúa can be seen as a postcolonial writer, she rejects bounded notions of nationalism in favor of more fluid ones. For her, authenticity is not bound within frameworks of cultural purity. Instead she embraces the idea of borders, locating her explorations on conceptual crossroads and the intersections, constructing herself as a complex person. As Azade Seyhan writes, Anzaldúa depicts her personal and historical destiny as a “gendered and ethnic subject at the intersection of different languages, idioms, and generational and cultural terms” (114).

In Writing Outside the Nation, Azade Seyhan conveys that although the metaphor of the border could inadvertently romanticize the adventure of crossing borders and hide the real issues at stake, such as: “the constant threat of detention and arrest at borders, exploitation of human labor, loss of dignity and money, imprisonment and even death”
(114), these issues are not glossed over in Anzaldúa’s writing: “In a powerful and poetic voice she not only portrays the trials of border citizens, but critically engages questions of bilingualism and interlinguality and reflects on relations of power and language” (114).

Seyhan observes how Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* illustrates ways

ethnic individuals and groups can situate themselves sequentially and simultaneously in contesting or overlapping positions of cultural memory.... A poetic performance of its own critical message and a crossover of various genres, her book presents its story in a collection of poems, reminiscences, personal and collective histories, and critical combat. The text itself emerges as a mestizaje, a cross-fertilization of ideas, images, mourning, and memory.... It resists generic limitations that may be geographical, historical, or cultural. The act of inscription at the border establishes a position of questioning and challenge. (114)

The influence of Anzaldúa on border theory and border artists cannot be overestimated. Since the production of her seminal book, artists, theorists, and activists have explored the border’s metaphoric properties, framing national identity through migration and nomadism, rather than through bounded notions of the nation-state.

After Anzaldúa, borderlands never again signified just a geographical border or line on a map, as much as a metaphor for a place of contact, dialectical tensions, and resulting transformation, between nations and identities. She has helped theorize the concepts of hybridization and the “third space” which has become increasingly important in cultural and border studies as well as postcolonial theory.

*After Anzaldúa: Rosaldo, Saldívar, Michaelsen and Johnson*

Many literary, social and interdisciplinary critical theorists have emerged in the wake of Anzaldúa, exploring, extending and recontextualizing her ideas, often using them
to make direct challenges to academies, their pedagogy and their curriculums. Such an influential theorist is Renato Rosaldo who argues against the elitist notions of culture maintained by literary theorists such as Matthew Arnold. It is Arnold’s book *Culture and Anarchy*, which touts the virtues of Eurocentric values and education, which Rosaldo challenges in his 1993 seminal work, *Culture and Truth*. For Arnold, all meaningful knowledge is rooted in the Western Canon, viewing both critical theory and multiculturalism as direct affronts on (what he views as) essential and superior knowledge constructs. In *Culture and Truth* Rosaldo defies the notion of perpetuating a static Eurocentric education, instead advocating an approach in the academy of “structures of feeling”—lived experience as critical multicultural borderlands where “our everyday lives are crisscrossed by border zones, pockets and eruptions of all kinds” (21). He also exposes the visibility and invisibility of ethnic groups and cultures within the academy, recalling his Harvard professors who emphasized objectivity while making claims like Filipinos “are people without culture” (197). From that point on he questioned the elitist impulses of American academia, for he knew that “the notion of ‘people without culture’ or people with ‘more’ or ‘less’ culture made no sense” (197).

Throughout *Culture and Truth*, Rosaldo renders and debunks the institutionalization and normalization of ethnocentrism and hegemony in American education.

On these premises, Rosaldo applies border theory to move away from such undemocratic academic practices. Jose Saldivar writes, “A crucial research agenda for U.S. and global studies opens up [as a result of Rosaldo’s book *Culture and Truth*]. This not only redefines and deconstructs the position of the ‘attached observer’ in the social
sciences, it brings new objects of study into focus, namely ‘culture of the borderlands’” (24). Indeed Rosaldo sees the border zones of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and age not only as “analytically empty transitional zones but as sites of creative cultural production that require investigation” (24).

Similarly, in Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies, Jose Saldívar frames border studies as an important response to such “challenges and deterritorializations” both in geography and the academy, therefore reconceiving literary and cultural practices. Influenced by the interdisciplinary methods of cultural studies, he sees border theory as a way to move beyond fragmentary knowledges. His book focuses on “the yet unwritten literary and cultural history of Chicano/a and Latin American social cultural ‘theorists’ and postmodernist intellectuals” as well as examining the “politics of modernist border culture” (9). Much of his book “remaps” cultural studies by contextualizing border writing “within the context of nineteenth-century U.S. cultures of imperialism” (13). Saldívar describes his methods:

In my attempt to suggest a historical and intercultural approach to U.S.-Mexico border writing and cultural studies, I use some terms and concepts that require additional defining. ‘Transfrontera contact zone’ refers to the two-thousand-mile long border between The United States and Mexico and to other geopolitical border zones, such as Raymond William’s border zone between Wales and England. This zone is the social space of subaltern encounters, the Janus-faced border line in which peoples geopolitically forced to separate themselves now negotiate one another and manufacture new relations, hybrid cultures, and multiple-voiced aesthetics. I borrow the term “contact zone” from Mary Louise Pratt’s colonial discourse coinage, which owes much to sociolinguists and improvised languages that develop among speakers of native languages and in which the term “is synonymous with colonial frontier.” (13)
While Rosaldo and Saldivar explore the parallels between geographical ideological borders, championing the crossing of monolithic border zones in academia, Michaelsen and Johnson reflexively point out that while border crossing intends to deconstruct boundaries, it is also generative of different boundaries, and one must accept responsibility for doing so.

Their book *Border Theory: The Limit of Cultural Politics* holds that most border theorists and artists hold the place or concept of the border to be “a place of politically exciting hybridity, intellectual creativity, and moral possibility” (3). However, they urge that the cultural diversity and creativity elevated by border theorists is still born of drawing boundaries that are necessary exclusions. They hold that the model “used by liberal-to-left scholars, by border theorists, is the one in which differences count, make a difference, in which particular constellation of practices are understood to be essentially related or organized by some principle of identity” (4).

Instead, they favor focusing on the “limit” of the border as the place of possibility. While cultural difference is the foundation for the new relationship or dialogue,

... it remains a problematic, ambivalent ground, one that threatens the security of identity, the authority it supports... “we,” this community without ground and without identity, will have to decide about “culture,” and will have to be responsible both to and for “our” decision concerning “borders” and “difference,” if “we” are to bring such effects forward. (6)

Michaelsen and Johnson reiterate a difference between the notions of cultural borders being “crossed” in counterargument to being “rationalities” in “interplay.” They hold that
The cultural knots—the sorts of borders that strangely elude the difference between inside and outside—are products of beginnings. What is typically described as an identity difference is nothing more than an effect of an identity relationality that makes it seem as if cultures are still 'crossed' rather than analyzed for their "constant interplay." (10)

However, like Rosaldo and Saldívar, Michaelsen and Johnson see the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and ethnohistory leading to overly determined senses of borders. These socially constructed "traveling logics" are false oppositions where the "recognition that cultural borders are effects produced in the mental operation that pulls two groups of people together...(con) fusing them in order to contrast them" (Michaelson and Johnson 10).

I maintain that through the misleading approach of contrast and optional thinking, geographic and oppositional borders become "fixed." However, when the crossing of "fixed" geopolitical and academic borders is reframed in a context of postcolonial cultural awareness, it can lead to a mending of fragmented knowledge and an openness to both the blending of cultural forms and respect for cultural self-determination. And acceptance that hybridity and self-determination can co-exist.

And so emerges the borderlands theorist, exploring assumptions and beliefs rooted in monolithic views of culture. Metaphors of the literal border run throughout border theory, posing interesting critical questions for the classroom and suggesting methodological approaches for pedagogy.

The Convergence of My Influences

I now briefly illustrate how these divergent influences converged upon me to become synthesized in my theory of border pedagogy as democratic practice. Early in my teaching career I began to explore the writing of nineteenth century thinkers to see how slavery and genocide were resisted. Of the writers I researched and brought into the classroom, the voices of Whitman and Douglass spoke most relevantly to our historical ideologies of hegemony as well as perspectives of resistance and the urgency of democratic action. As I mentioned earlier, their voices along with Zitkala-Sa (whom I discovered later) were echoed in the works of many critical educators and perhaps are still the most resonant to me.

When I began to teach, Illich, along with Jonathan Kozol, first provoked me to critique the underlying hypocrisies of schools and the reproductive or radical possibilities of my job. Through Illich, I always retain skepticism of the institution of schooling, and try to find creativity and meaning within that tension. At this stage I had discovered Freire, but had not meaningfully probed into his ideas.

Growing up in New York City, I was used to the absolute clutter and compartmentalization of space in the form of buildings, vehicles, and the descending crowds of people. During my first cross-country drive West (for my master’s program at New Mexico State University), I discovered a new fluidity of landscapes, and recognized the imaginary nature of boundaries between states. I suppose that in some way I believed that boundaries were self-evident, separating one coherent space from another. I now realized on a visceral level how states were constructions of human device, serving a
cultural sense of power and ownership, perhaps a way to make sense of the vastness. While in southern New Mexico, it was not long before I began regular crossings from one country to another, experiencing a more radical manifestation of borders, and seeing the actual material effect that emerged from these “imagined” lines.

Very early in my time there, I saw a show by the performance artists Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes, and recognized the metaphoric nature of borders in their multi-media skits. Borders not only divided up land, but also divided up the landscapes of our own world views, an idea that is quite reminiscent of Illich’s critique of educational institutions. While departments, periods, tests, grades, and diplomas stand in for the fluidity of learning that occurs outside of schools, so countries, states, cities, zoning, houses, leases, and rent checks stand in for a fluidity of landscape and for a sense of community and a connection to nature.

After my first year in New Mexico, it became apparent to me that I needed to cross more borders and arranged to spend six weeks in Guatemala. During that time I saw the living realities of the postcolonial theories I had been studying. My observations of the social, political, and racial hegemony of the country—supported by the reading of testimonial literature—provided insight into the politics and social conditions, and prepared me for my next step in articulating a border pedagogy.

In Guatemala I attended a lecture by a former priest named Henry Estrada, a practitioner of Liberation Theology. I knew nothing about it at the time, nor could I understand most of what the man said; I had only studied Spanish for a couple of days. Yet I did glean basic themes through his inflection, his gestures and the use of Spanish
words with recognizable English equivalents from the works of Illich and Kozol, such as "emancipation." (For a couple years after, I would call my view on pedagogy "emancipation education.") Later I learned that the former priest was an activist who developed underground radio stations with Liberation Theologists in Honduras and El Salvador. I also learned that, after several close calls with the military and the unstable governments, he was laying low as a teacher at the language school I attended. I quickly switched teachers. From the beginning I said, "Forget grammar, and teach me about Liberation Theology." So we looked at pictures, talked with Spanish/English dictionaries in hand, and walked to relevant sites. He gave me the works of Gutierrez and Boff—in Spanish. I could only infer the broadest of their ideas, but it sent me on the journey of new questions.

Because of my cynical New York upbringing, I became convinced that, because of his intellectualism, Henry must have seen Catholicism as a functional symbol system to express his views on social justice. When I asked him this, Henry paused a long time, looked to a spot over my head, and with both force and calm responded that of course he believed in the holy trinity, the sacraments, the mission of Christ, and that his view of humanity made these obvious and essential. He did not believe in many of the institutionalized interpretations of the church, such as the inferior position of women, and internal corruption. He was accepting of other belief systems and valued different cultures. However, for Henry, the symbol system, his view on society, and his convictions were inseparable. He had no inclination to divide them up as I did, and I
couldn’t understand. That is until I read Gutierrez and Boff in translation. Now to some degree I do.

The significance of Boff and Gutierrez, and their influence on my philosophy of border pedagogy is essential. When I returned to New Mexico, and learned more about them and the movement, I admired their praxis, moral conviction, and refusal to compartmentalize their work in Liberation Theology into a mere vocation or an “issue” of concern. Instead their holistic view was liberating and empowering, for their faith made their call to service and social justice fluid and absolute, a vocation.

Through this journey, I was able to experience Freire in more depth and deepened context. Although I still resisted aspects of the binaries articulated in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire helped synthesize the institutional critique of Illich with the faith and moral imperative in Liberation Theology. Conscientization (reflection leading to action) is something I could believe in and practice. My appreciation of “conscientization” was heightened through my encounters with Liberation Theology, how reflection and action continually infuse each other.

The shift from my theory of emancipation education to border pedagogy did not happen until after my move to Tucson. Through discussions with teachers and students in the Cultural Studies, the Latin American Studies, and the Language, Reading, and Culture departments, I saw the increased power of the symbol of the border. Whereas emancipation education focused on liberation through writing, observing, critiquing society and texts, border pedagogy focused on the creativity that comes in the hybrid border spaces between physical spaces and ideas.
It took awhile to discover that Henry Giroux had already articulated the idea of border pedagogy. On the one hand I was disappointed (I had thought I’d invented it!), while on the other I recognized the possibilities for dialog and cultural work that the theorizing of the border opened up, a notion shared by activists from different mediums and positions. For me Freire, Gutierrez, Boff, and Illich were all helpful in developing a theory of border pedagogy. All articulate liberation as praxis, and this inspires me towards Whitman’s open road, in the most inclusive sense, moving out towards action in new artistic and activist mediums, and forms of pedagogy.

In the next chapter I will begin to explore the applicable uses of border pedagogy, specifically as an apparatus of critical literacy, an invaluable tool for democratic practice.
Chapter 2: Understanding Border Pedagogy as an Apparatus of Critical Literacy and Emancipation Education

The Importance of Critical and Creative Literacy

Like many of my colleagues who are engaged in critical pedagogy for active democratic citizenship, I ask: How can power be truly shared and how can we prepare all students to share power justly while developing their own creative and original voices and ideas? As discussed in the introduction, I believe that a true democratic education is one of emancipation from the political and cultural dogmas of our time and the development of tools for critical and self-reflexive evaluation of our dominant cultural discourse.

Admittedly, these big-picture goals often feel slippery and elusive. Critical pedagogues struggle to find the praxis necessary to move the theory of critical consciousness into the realm of school practices. Fortunately, there is no formula and there likely never will be. I say fortunately, because I enjoy the creative possibility and challenge of the journey, and I like that no two students, two teachers, or two teaching experiences, are ever the same.

After all, critical consciousness awakens in starts and stops within people's inner worlds; the process is emotional just as much as it is individual and enigmatic. However, the space to develop conscientization (reflection that leads to action, an ongoing dialectic) can be fostered, and I do believe it is learnable through classroom dialog, through creative and critical explorations and experiences.
It is the intention to read, write, and dialog critically—and doing so as preparation for democratic citizenship—that sets "critical" literacy apart from "basic" literacy. As Freire notes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the difference between literacy, as broadly defined in popular discourse, and critical literacy, is the difference between "reading the word" and "reading the world," a difference that is transformative in the Freirian sense. A literacy that is decontextualized from historical and cultural processes is a vapid and unempowering literacy. Instead Freire emphasizes the economic, political and social contexts of one's life as the essential sites for achieving meaningful and *critical* literacy.

However, despite an extensive literature on the subject, we as teachers tend to reproduce the contents and methods through which we have been taught. Similarly, the constraints of institutional regulations and expectations often prevent a deep engagement with a critical and exploratory emancipation education. Because our schools are apparatuses of the state, they serve to inculcate the reproduction of old models of linear, compartmentalized, and non-critical learning.

In his article "Teaching at the End of Empire," Stephen Slemon maintains,

> Ever since Althusser identified education itself as a primary state apparatus for producing the work of ideology, an enormous amount of archaeological research has come forward on the frontline role that literary education—especially English Studies—has played in the manufacture of hierarchal social lessons. (238)

Awareness of this stratifying component of teaching in society's schools can be overwhelming and discouraging, but also creates a space for breakage.
The reality of formal education is, after all, the institutionalization of learned knowledges and cultural practices, in conscious or unconscious contract with dominant ideologies. However, formal education is a thing created and produced by human beings. Its content and structure can always be challenged and extended, in both structural and subtle ways. A teacher can facilitate student awareness about the inculcating function of schools, encouraging students to question singular and rigid perspectives (even to question the questioning). Although teachers may face some testing from students at this point (for example, "Then why don't you give us all A's?"), engaging schools as sites to construct social knowledge can open up new directions and spaces for reading, writing, and discussion. Students are given a chance to examine the ways we construct our worlds. The texts studied in schools—be they fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or non-print mediums—provide a creative means to challenge the assumptions we have been "schooled" into, not only through the literal school, but through other cultural discourses we are exposed to amongst friends and family, the media, and other state institutions, such as the law.

After all, as Michael W. Apple reminds us, "reality doesn't stalk around with a label. What something is, what it does, one's evaluation of it—all this is not naturally preordained. It is socially constructed" (194). Gaining a self-awareness of one's reality as being socially constructed, and therefore subject to change and to human agency, is the goal of critical literacy. Critical literacy is posited in contrast to "literal" literacy that comprehends texts superficially, but takes texts and curriculums as givens. Instead, critical literacy asks students to look at social, historical, economic, and cultural contexts.
Students explore how these contexts shape the given "reality," presumption, "fact," text, or dominant idea. By engaging in such a critical journey, students have the opportunity to examine the conditions that might facilitate or provoke change in their current life or historical environment. Critical literacy helps students see themselves as agents, moving outside of their comfort zones—their longstanding frames of references—to questions and contextualize in systems of relationships.

As Apple writes, "Our aim should be to create not 'functional literacy,' but critical literacy, powerful literacy, political literacy which enables the growth of genuine understanding and control of all of the spheres of social life in which we participate" (193). It is this kind of active literacy that lends itself to a fuller democratic participation, in that we do not take the information we are given for granted, but learn to break the text down, question the source and structure of the information, cease to feel intimidated by it, and have the skills to find alternate sources. A powerful and political literacy enables the reader to see many angles, to critique these angles with an eye to connecting the critique to the social and political realities of one's own world.

To achieve the goal of critical literacy, Shor argues for Freire's method of dialogic "problem-posing" as it "offers all subject matter as historical products to be questioned rather than as universal wisdom to be accepted" (32).

Interestingly, a fear I have heard articulated by several thoughtful people, especially in creative writing workshops, is that critical literacy's focus on context and problem-posing may in action diminish the pure joy and magic of experiencing a text, robbing the reader of an aesthetic experience. In my time attending both New Mexico
State and The University of Arizona, students of cultural studies and creative writing found themselves across a divide while discussing texts in class. Creative writers often felt cultural studies students over-analyzed texts, while cultural-studies students often felt the creative writers possessed an underdeveloped critical perspective, sometimes unable to detect unconscious or socially-constructed oppressive representations. As someone who is a creative writer and a cultural studies student, I view the perceived dichotomy between creativity and critique as false. While we can let ourselves get lost in reproducing these learned divisions and ideologies, I think we could all benefit by deepening the connections between our creative and critical perspectives.

While I concur with theorists of historicism that even our most raw and deeply felt responses to literature and art are culturally and historically rooted, I don’t believe that a contextual approach need rob readers of the magic of the written word and an elusive emotional experience. Instead, the magic is a resource to respond to, bounce off of, gravitate towards, and savor. There need not be the annihilation of one approach in order to make room for another. Instead, it is the multiplicity of approaches and layers of reading that make the reading experience rich. A critical literacy should also be a creative literacy, an imaginative literacy, for if we want to live long and well, part of learning must be joy.

The Difference Between Border Pedagogy for Critical Literacy and Multiculturalism

For years a colleague of mine insisted that my use of the Alice Walker story “Everyday Use” in Composition 1 was inherently less valuable than his use of the Greek
myths, which he sees as a foundation of Western Civilization—in his view the height of all civilizations. Although his chides were rooted in affectionate banter, he heartily maintained that literacy involved building blocks of classic literatures, without which contemporary literature could not be truly understood. Although an unusually compassionate and charismatic teacher, this friend’s syllabus in no way represented the demographics of his students, a majority of which, in any given class, might be African-American. When I would raise this point, he would tease me for being a “touchy-feely” or “multi-culti” teacher.

My friend’s criticism is a common one waged against multiculturalism, implying that texts outside the Western tradition are less substantial. It is a criticism that for practitioners is deeply frustrating, as many view multicultural education as a reflection of students’ basic right to be an actor within an inclusive curriculum, to hear relatable voices whose stories are relevant to their lives. Furthermore, multicultural education can include an endless spectrum of powerful and substantive voices, as well as potent traditions.

The purpose of multicultural education has always been inclusion of the many cultural, linguistic, economic, and religious experiences that make up our every-changing society, and the valuing of these diverse experiences and viewpoints. The premise is that through this valuing will come tolerance. However, despite the shifting demographics of class, race, sexuality, language, and religion in the U.S., the transition toward inclusion has been fraught with resistance from scholars and educators who fear the removal or the devaluing of “Great” works in favor of perceived inferior ones. Since American education was long rooted in a canon of work by persons from Europe or of European
descent, and in a Protestant ethic of pre-destination, there have been several decades of struggle about the contents and objectives of curriculum. There has also been a much-debated backlash that assumes inclusion translates into an education of band-aids and vapid political correctness. People from the Left have generally interpreted the resistance of multicultural educators, parents, students, and community members by the people from the Right as a rationale for racist practices—institutionalized racial hegemony. The debate can be polarizing, often locked in territorial rhetoric and knee-jerk assumptions from all sides.

Several critics of multicultural education have also emerged from cultural and postcolonial studies, but for a very different reason. Scholars from these disciplines raise the point that if multicultural education focuses only on inclusions, and is not theorized or critiqued, it becomes depolitized and ahistorical, robbed of its important critical contexts. Of course, political and historical context brings up issues of power, an even more radical change than the multicultural inclusion of “minority” voices in the curriculum. With a critical and postcolonial lens, “classical” texts can be read in a new way alongside “inclusionary” texts. Through such methods, postcolonial theorists have challenged the perceived celebratory tendencies of multicultural education by infusing important new questions about historical power relations between cultures:

We are by now familiar with the various charges made by critics of multiculturalism—its polarizing or contentious stance, its alleged lack of intellectual rigor, its supposed potential for reverse discrimination, and its “exaggerated and preferential treatment of a “minority” point of view. The energies of proponents of multiculturalism have been so thoroughly absorbed in responding to these criticisms that they have been effectively distracted from vigorous analysis of the theoretical questions and
pedagogic challenges posed by the entry of postcolonial texts into the discursive and intellectual arenas of literary study (Mohanty 261).

Therefore, a postcolonial lens asks the reader to look beyond cultural difference and sameness, towards the historical power relationships that have affected the course of given societies, of groups of people, and individuals. Postcolonial theory points to the objectification of difference that occurs when we see a person from a different background as “the Other.” In this sense, multicultural education runs the risk of exoticizing people who are of different backgrounds than given student readers or teachers. Henry Giroux explains,

Questions of Otherness are generally fashioned in the discourse of multicultural education, which in its varied forms and approaches generally fails to conceptualize issues of race and ethnicity as part of the wider discourse of power and powerlessness. Questions of representation and inclusions suppress any attempts to call whiteness as an ethnic category that secures its dominance by appearing to be invisible... Multiculturalism is generally about Otherness, but is written in ways in which the dominating aspects of white culture are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of struggle is muted. (Border Crossings 117)

Giroux maintains that there are “a number of political and pedagogical challenges that can be taken up by radical educators as part of a border theoretical attempt to deconstruct and displace some of the more powerful ideological expression of a hegemonic theory of multicultural education” (Border Crossings 118). Border pedagogy as an apparatus for critical literacy is especially useful for exploration of the boundaries of nations, identities, and accompanying ideologies.

Giroux goes on to explain that:
First, critical educators need to reveal the political interests at work in those forms of multicultural education that translate cultural differences into learning styles; the ideological task here is to challenge these mystifying ideologies that separate culture from power and struggle while simultaneously treating difference as a technical rather than a political category. Second, critical educators need to challenge those educational discourses that view schooling as a decontextualized site free from social, political, and racial tensions. What has to be stressed here is the primacy of the political and the contextual in analyzing issues of culture, language, and voice. Third, critical educators must ideologically engage theories of multicultural education that attempt to smother the relationship between difference and power/empowerment.... (118)

Whereas multiculturalism celebrates and includes difference, postcolonial theory goes further in evaluating hegemony and resistance. Border pedagogy (as influenced by postcolonial theory) goes even farther with the democratic ideal by asking us to reflexively examine our own ideological roots as they relate to constructed boundaries of space and difference. This way we become increasingly aware of the facets of sharing power.

Furthermore, whereas multiculturalism has the potential to totalize and objectify cultures, a goal of border pedagogy is to recognize cultures as shifting and dynamic. While drawing heavily on postcolonial theory, border pedagogy is not limited to the questions of postcolonialism, recognizing that the impact of historical colonial relations are only one type of border. Furthermore, although border pedagogy’s roots in Chicano studies offers a useful model for the premises of border theory, the premises can be engaged in infinite other contexts, such as gender, sexuality, class, and other issues of identity. With an active focus on the “crossing” or movement of constructed boundaries, border pedagogy asks us to not only look at epistemologies of difference or of sameness, but also at the zones where these ideas collide.
Representation and the Nation

One of the most critiqued books by postcolonial theorists is Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Years before I was familiar with postcolonial theory, I used *Heart of Darkness* in my classroom, and found the text to be a challenging and problematic tool with regards to critical and creative literacy. While Conrad depicts the brutality of colonial Africa, and the grotesque nature of bloated European power, he also inscribes colonial relations through his “noble” but simplistic and monolithic portrayals of Africans, many of whom die at the hands of Kurtz and other colonialists. To further complicate the matter, Conrad employs the motifs of lightness and darkness, with lightness as a symbol of knowledge and darkness as a symbol of ignorance. I remember this motif disturbed an African American student in the class who told us, “I don’t like how this book always makes *dark* be evil and *light* be good.”

I feel fortunate that this young man shared his feelings and that it opened up an important conversation about representation as limited by the worldview and familiar context of the authors, and to some extent his teacher’s. If this student hadn’t openly resisted Conrad’s motif, many students would have received Conrad’s re-inscription unconsciously and silently. Instead the student helped us decolonize ourselves from this framework. While my focus all along had been to use *Heart of Darkness* as a condemnation of slavery and irresponsible power, and had tailored my lesson plans accordingly, I myself would have glossed over the unsettling, but common motif. The experience furthered my awareness of the importance of dealing with issues of
representation. Below are some questions regarding interpretation that I try to bring into my pedagogy:

* How does representation form our impressions and assumptions?
* When does representation trivialize, stereotype, or obscure its subject?
* When do we reproduce these stilted representations in classroom discussion, or other areas of our lives, unknowingly?
* How can/does our interpretation of representations reinscribe current structures of power?
* How does our definition of the very word “culture” depend on issues of perspective, position, ideology, and power?

All of these questions can be engaged while critiquing objectification within literature. It is easy for teachers and students alike to objectify “others” when discussing them in a social or political context. Yet, I believe that if we avoid these discussions, we are allowing for the social realities discussed above, and are not adequately preparing our students for democratic participation. My personal solution has been to not be scared off by colonial texts like Heart of Darkness, but to read them critically and include readings from different perspectives (all the while engaging the power of Conrad’s storytelling). Critical strategies applied to primary texts are useful in seeing how writers genuinely struggle with the representation of people of different backgrounds, even as they are critical of colonial practices. Incorporating texts from other cultural/political perspectives is not a phony gesture towards inclusiveness, but a commitment to exploring the myriad
dynamics of place and mind, for I think the myriad dynamics (especially as they appear
to contradict) offer a more truthful and useful picture than examining a single text. As
Megan Boler maintains, “Intervention at the level of representation does suggest a
starting point for interrupting powerlessness” (149).

Another aspect of representation is the question of what is missing from the text.
Important political injustices against groups or individuals are re-inscribed in literature by
ignoring them altogether. “Silence and omission are by no means neutral. One of the
central manifestations of racism, sexism, and homophobia is ‘erasure’: omission and
silences that often stem from ignorance and not necessarily desires to hurt or oppress”
(Boler 184).

It is useful for critique to discuss that the representations of power relationships
help construct a national identity. In postcolonial countries these representations may
reinscribe or resist the hegemonic structures. Renato Rosaldo maintains that cultural
politics erase the “self” only to highlight the “other.” He holds that ideological conflicts
inform the play of cultural visibility and invisibility within the nation state, encouraging
homogeneity and assimilation (198). For Rosaldo, a bi-product of colonialism is that the
more “culture” a group has, the more the group tends to be marginalized within the
nation-state:

The classic model of social structure holds that, although individuals or
social groups may move upward or downward, the rungs of the social
ladder remain unchanging... Social mobility from the ‘bottom’ brings
people into contact zones where culture flourishes.... Curiously enough,
upward mobility appears at odds with a distinctive cultural identity. One
achieves full citizenship in the nation-state by becoming a culturally blank
slate. (201)
Therefore, in a “classic model” of the nation-state, as invoked by Rosaldo, social mobility is connected to cultural homogeneity. A cultural “other” assimilates into the dominant group or lives on the margins. In turn, these hierarchies shape collective and individual identity.

However, before postcolonial theory was branded as such, the top-down tension between dominant and marginalized groups were problematized through the works of Franz Fanon and Aimee Cesaire. Having grown up as colonized “others,” their writing emphasizes the postcolonial body as a site of signification and inscription. The body becomes a text to be interpreted through constructed assumptions about class, race, and gender. It serves as a metaphor for the national body, in its oppressive geographical and ideological forms. Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* and the essays and poems of Cesaire remind us that the imagined idea of a nation has concrete and living human consequences.

More recently, theorists such as Bhabha and Spivak explore the connections between language and power in the nation-state, challenging the assumption of a clear and total dominance on the part of the colonizing culture, and finding a creative tension in the spaces explored by Fanon and Cesaire—resistance on the margins. Homi Bhabha challenges the monolithic view of nations by articulating a theory of ambivalence between subject and object. For Bhabha, the observer and the observed both emerge, questioning and blurring the strict lines of power within colonial relations.

In a groundbreaking work, Gayatri Spivak complicates the postcolonial view of nation through posing the question, “Can the subaltern speak?” For Spivak the very
question is essentializing as the “subaltern” (those of lesser social rank) do not occupy one clear speaking-position, but several. “They” cannot, therefore, be determined as a class. Spivak reminds us that gender alone (not to mention culture, historicity, and subjectivity) complicates the question. From this perspective, a nation is not merely composed of dominant and subaltern groups, but an interaction of many moving and overlapping ideologies.

Therefore, with the help of postcolonial theory, border pedagogy suggests that we deconstruct representations not only with hegemony in mind, but resistance and the complex interplay within groups.

The Politics of Location

Next we must consider these questions: What are the subject-positions of the students? What is the subject-position of the teacher? How do these subject-positions influence the reading and interpreting of the given text? How do they influence the dynamics of class discussion?

Foregrounding the historic and political context in which a given work is written and received allows students to see beyond the pages and begin to reflexively critique their own world view and notions of history. The presence of context also urges the student to relate their own political conditions, and how these conditions contribute to the formation of their own interpretations.
Where we position other people and where we position ourselves will influence our reading of a given text. In this sense, Talpade Mohanty points out the tension between speaking about people and for people:

This is evident in the classroom when the specific “differences” (of personality, posture, behavior etc.) of one woman of color stand in for the difference of the whole collective, and a collective voice is assumed in place of an individual voice. In effect, this results in the reduction or averaging of Third World peoples in terms of individual personality characteristics: complex ethical and political issues are glossed over, and an ambiguous and more easily manageable ethos of the “personal” and “interpersonal” takes their place. (153)

It is easier for us to form an equation or diagnoses based on our own experiences. This is normal and even useful. However, Mohanty challenges us to complicate our readings.

The danger of co-optation and generalization are ever present, and sometimes may be unavoidable. The important element is to try to avoid the slippery slope where generalization becomes staked out and immovable. We need to keep moving to avoid the trappings of a pre-determined location.

How do the class, race, and gender of the teacher play into the politics of the classroom and the discussion of texts? For Christine Sleeter and Peter McLaren, part of their practice is to address their own location as white middle-class educators in what they see to be a “racial and social class hierarchy.” They aim to go beyond white guilt and ask “what to do with the privileged positions” they occupy (22). They see the deconstruction of white supremacy to be an important part of the politics of location.

In this regard, Giroux explains his own position in advancing ideas written by African-American feminists:
I make no claims to speak as, for, or within a similar politics of location. My own politics of location as a white, academic male positions me to speak on issues of racism and gender by self-consciously recognizing my own interests in taking up these practices as part of a broader political project to expand the scope and meaning of democratic struggle and a politics of solidarity. (Border Crossings 123)

Giroux sees his recognition and challenge of location as an important part of border pedagogy. As he crosses borders along with his students he attempts to “further rupture a politics of historical silence and theoretical erasure that serves to repress and marginalize the voices of the Other” (Border Crossings 125).

The challenge is to overcome an over-simplified framework of identity politics:

While identity politics was central to challenging the cultural homogeneity of the 1950s and providing spaces for marginal groups to assert the legacy and importance of their diverse voices and experiences, it often failed to move beyond a notion of difference structured in polarizing binaries and an uncritical appeal to a discourse of authenticity. Identity politics enabled many formerly silenced and displaced groups to emerge from the margins of power and dominant culture to reassert and reclaim suppressed identities and experiences; but in doing so, they often substituted one master narrative for another, invoking a politics of separatism, and suppressed differences within their own ‘liberator’ narratives” (Giroux, Border Crossings 31).

For Arun Mukerjee the text is read as a contested site, as a dialogic gesture that supports or opposes the discourses that share a social-cultural space with it. Mukerjee insists the narrative “weaves in several other narratives. To read then, is to read culture, and there is no short cut around it” (119).

Therefore, to theorize the politics of location is to urge students to see questions of representation and identity as multiple, as dynamic and, necessarily, in motion.
The Authorization of Experience

Jonathan Kozol writes,

It seems almost impossible, after twelve years of public school and four of college, to stand and speak in the first-person present undisguised: “I am alive right now. I see the world around me. I see much that is unjust and evil. I have the power to change it.” (Night 115)

For decades we have been taught to suppress the “I” in our essays. This suppression inculcates that there is an empirical separation between the writer and their subject, and their feelings about the subject. The inculcated omission of first person, as an umbrella rule, discourages direct connection, and therefore discourages empathy, dissent, and ultimately individual agency. When it comes to agency, school structures often do what they can to render us powerless.

Of course, most of us have had a handful of teachers that encourage free-thought, and there are innovative schools that encourage student agency through approaches such as service learning and interdisciplinary curriculums. In theory and sometimes in practice, the classroom can create spaces for youth to represent themselves and experience the perspectives of others, where they not only find their voice, but learn to see their own experience as historically, culturally and politically relevant.

The issues of student voice and agency have been extensively explored in cultural work in the content of college composition courses. The tendency of college composition courses, which are often taught by new graduate students with minimum pedagogical experience, is to encourage a universal or even generic model, focusing on skills like the overly dichotomous compare-and-contrast paper. The result (which I witnessed first hand teaching in comp programs while a graduate student) can be sanitized and depoliticized
writing with more attention to form than ambiguity and revelation. Generic academic
writing has been addressed by writers such as Linda Brodsky, who proposed revising the
course to use public documents such as court documents and legislation as content. This
would provide real-world context and antagonisms for students to respond to. Other
critical educators, such as bell hooks and Talpade Mohanty, have passionately argued the
importance of articulating personal political commitment in the classroom. So as to
encourage a sense of agency, the geography of students' experiences and assumptions
become the center of writing, research and subsequent dialog. Knowledge is produced
through private reflection, writing, and discussion.

Mohanty urges that composition classrooms follow that model of women's and
ethnic studies programs that are

fundamentally grounded in political and collective questions of power and
inequality, questions of the politization of individual along race, gender,
class, and sexual parameters are at the very center of knowledges
produced in the classroom. The politization often involves the
authorization of marginal experiences and the creation of spaces for
multiple, dissenting voices in the classroom. (153)

Because of this, exploration of identity and experience, as well as difference and dissent,
can become a context for a composition of discovery, a “crucial form of empowerment
for students—a way for them to enter the classroom as speaking subjects” (Mohanty,
153).

In her essay “Talking Back,” bell hooks frames self-authorization as a
revolutionary catalyst for student agency:

... moving from silence to speech [is] a revolutionary gesture... the idea
of finding one's voice or having a voice assumes a primacy in talk,
discourse, writing, and action.... Only as subjects can we speak. As
objects we remain voiceless—our being defined and interpreted by others. Awareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives, is one way to begin the process of education for critical consciousness. (12)

When the self is empowered through the authorization of experience, students create a dialog with history, finding the connections between their experience, the conditions of culture and society, and how agency can change these. Bigelow claims historical concepts serve as “points of departure to explore themes in students’ lives and then, in turn, use students’ lives to explore history and our society today” (438). Through such an approach, “students find social meaning in individual experience... to use their stories as windows not only on their lives, but on society” (439). Identity then opens up to multiple contexts and our own experience comes to embody a rich intertextuality.

There is not a single authoritarian voice. There are multiple voices. But we author our verse and our verse enters the conversation, allowing our thoughts a life beyond us. Through the authorization of experience, we can cross ideological borders and enter into history. By combining the authorization of experience with our moral imagination, empathy, and an attending reflexive critical perspective, we can not just understand our larger social conditions, but make them more just.

The Moral Imagination, Empathy and Its Limits

And these I see, these sparkling eyes,
These stores of mystic meaning, these young lives,
Building, equipped like a fleet of ships, immortal ships,
On the soul’s voyage. (Whitman 418, 5-9)
Whitman wrote the lines above for the inauguration of a public school in Camden, New Jersey. It is an excerpt from the poem called “An Old Man’s Thoughts of School.” In these lines, Whitman embraces the human voyage, the voyage of the metaphoric soul. It is a voyage of risk, hope, emotion and determination. It is a holistic vision that embraces the connection between what goes on in school walls and students’ hearts.

I think Whitman’s vision is an important and relevant one. Unfortunately, it often counters the job our schools do in giving students the tools for both agency and hope. As I have mentioned previously, the division of ideas into subjects is furthered by systematic divisions of the larger world: divisions of rules, institutions, bureaucracies, socially-constructed differences—a world of borders. Because of these borders, we separate our beliefs and actions, drawing boundaries around our actions:

Little by little, we learn to remove ourselves from the immediate field of forces, actions, options or intentions, on which we briefly stood, but always and forever at its indecisive margin, and situate ourselves instead on a safe and sober ledge from which to look down on the action. (Kozol, Night 198)

Therefore, in this section I explore the role of empathy and the moral imagination in crossing borders, and helping students achieve the kind of hope Whitman depicts, preparing students for their own voyage across uncharted political, artistic and intellectual boundaries. I also hope to illustrate the important ways empathy and the moral imagination interact with critical literacy, the issue of representation, the politics of location and the authorization of experience towards the goal of border pedagogy for democratic practice. I argue that an education emphasizing connections, imagination, and innovation can lead students toward political empowerment.
In her essay, “Developing Empathy in Children and Youth,” Kathleen Cotton maintains, “research supports the provision of empathy training to enhance empathetic feelings and understanding and increase prosocial behavior. This applies to children of all ages and to adults, and characterizes both full-scale empathy training programs and short-term treatments” (4). In all cases the empathic process includes responding emotionally to another person and finding similarities to oneself. Cotton sites the following pedagogical components as being associated with increases in empathy:

* Training in interpersonal perception and empathetic responding.
* Initial focus on one’s own feelings.
* Focus on similarities between oneself and others.
* Role-taking or role-playing.
* Ongoing practice in imagining/perceiving another’s perspective.
* Exposure to emotionally arousing stimuli.
* Positive trait attribution.
* Modeling empathetic behavior.
* Studying famous empathetic persons. (4-5)

While fairly prescriptive and monolithic in presentation, Cotton’s research suggests that classroom activities can deepen empathy. This is further supported by Kohn in his article “Caring Kids: The Role of the Schools” where he draws upon classroom and psychological research to demonstrate that prosocial behaviors are as inherent to human nature as antisocial and selfish behaviors. He also holds prosocial traits (compassion, curiosity) can be learned through activities stressing the imagination and modeling. Kohn writes: “Cooperation is an essentially humanizing experience that predisposes participants to take a benevolent view of others. It allows them to transcend egocentric and objectifying postures and encourages trust, sensitivity, open communication and prosocial activity” (504).
To me the most compelling case for the transformative power of empathy is made by Robert Coles who calls this humanizing prosocial quality the "moral imagination." Like Kohn, he maintains that the fostering of empathy and critical questioning is a native process for children and adults, which can be fostered through engagement with texts. He contextualizes his discussion on the "moral imagination" in literature through which the reader can be meaningfully activated by an engagement in an imaginative, detailed, context-specific encounter. In such an encounter, the teacher is in a unique position to activate the moral imagination through assigned reading and discussions that focus not only on critical literacy and the authorization of experience (discussed in the previous sections), but the crevices of the imagination. The teacher can reach the moral-imagination through Freire-like "problem-posing," asking the reader to imagine and voice a connection to the subject, crossing from one subject-position to another.

Drawing on Coles in his essay "Truth and Ethics in School Reform," Thomas. McCollough maintains the moral imagination has several layers: "the capacity to empathize with others, i.e., not just to feel for oneself, but to feel with and for others. This is something that education ought to cultivate and that citizens ought to bring to politics." He argues that school reform should give prominent attention to the ethical and moral dimensions of schooling, work, and life in general, and that this is an imperative if we are to facilitate a country of citizens who contribute in a compassionate and prosocial way.

However, Megan Boler complicates the issue of empathy in her study of the disciplining of emotions in schools. She argues that our culture has increasingly
capitalized on emotions since Daniel Goleman's 1995 book on emotional intelligence. As a commodity and shaper of values, the discourse of emotional intelligence becomes a form of social control, creating a hierarchy of intelligent—and socially appropriate—emotional responses. Valuing self-control, the discourse of emotional intelligence “serves capitalism at several levels. If workers and schoolchildren are conversational in emotional literacy, the labor system profits” (Boler 76). For Boler the curricula that have been shaped from literature on emotional intelligence are “in large part behavior modification programs that employ sociological discourses to authorize which emotional behaviors authorize a good citizen” (76). The danger is in examining emotional responses and behaviors without also examining issues of power and culture, thereby creating the illusions that all people have the same political realities.

Boler further questions whether political action does indeed grow from empathy, or whether “learning empathy” merely conditions a superficial compassion that ultimately leaves the learner congratulating themselves on their own “open-mindedness.” She suggests these bursts of compassion via literary encounters are “fantasy spaces” that “students come to occupy through the construction of particular types of emotions produced by certain readings” (156). Boler explains that empathy alone may give

the illusion of universalized experience; empathy cannot produce one kind of universal relation between the reader and text. Empathy is produced within networks of power relations represented by reader and text, mediated by language, narratives, genres and metaphors. The missing paradigm in theories of emotion across disciplines is an account that the shifts of emotions from being seen as the property or idiosyncrasy of the individual, towards a collectivist account. Who benefits from the production of empathy in what circumstances? Who should feel empathy for whom? If no change can be measured by the production of empathy,
what has been gained other than a "good brotherly feeling" on the part of the universal reader? (164)

Therefore, without drawing on critical literacy and a reflexive perspective on power differences and tensions across contexts, the prosocial transformation (emphasized by Kohn, Cotton and to a lesser degree Coles, who employs a problem-posing technique) may be an illusion. Notice that Cotton's list focuses on the similarities with others, not the differences, and doesn't address any potential connection with the reader absorbing or reproducing any oppressive classes or ideologies. Does empathy without a reflexive critical perspective risk decontextualizing the moral or hegemonic themes or problems within a literary work?

While the vital dimension of empathy cannot be overestimated, border pedagogy should invite the moral imagination to interact with the critical consciousness, encouraging connections and pairings of these two. Chris Searle calls this the "linking imagination" (178), which can initially be activated through creative responses to border literatures, such as poems, stories, plays, drawings, exploratory essays and responses, and other means of performance and expression. However, other important steps follow to expose that literature is not "merely" literature, but a frame for the emotional/social/historical connections that are directly and interdirectly embedded within ourselves. Literary texts invite empathy, but also a critique of our own subject-positions. As Michael Apple says:

Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of the curriculum, they participate in no less than the organized knowledge system of a society. They participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They help set the canons of
truthfulness and, as such, also help create a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief, and morality really are. (198)

However, Apple is also reflexive about his statement. While texts promote emotional resonance and possible connections to our places in the past, present and future, they also “participate in constructing ideologies and ontologies.” He holds this is misleading in many important ways for,

it is not a “society” that has created such texts, but specific groups of people. “We” haven’t built such curriculum artifacts in the simple sense that there is universal agreement among all of us and therefore this is what gets to be official knowledge. In fact the very use of the pronoun “we” simplifies way too much. (Apple 198)

In the essay, “Words to a Life-land: Literacy, the Imagination, and Palestine,” Chris Searle recounts working with thirteen-year olds on English literacy—many from Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Libya—by focusing on the peace process in the Middle East, especially racism against Arabs and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Students explore recent Palestinian history, watch films and read poems by Palestinians. Searle notes that the personal nature of these texts “strongly moved the students” (188) and therefore encouraged them to think about peace and justice in terms of lived lives and specific human voices. During the period while Searle was teaching this course, the first Gulf War broke out. Searle notes how their studies enabled the students to struggle meaningfully with the latest crisis. He notes how through the reading, films and discussions, the students had built up “their own language” through which to probe meaning. He sites the importance of “a part of the curriculum of extended literacy for young people that fuses the abilities to develop new skills with words, to sharpen human
consciousness and stretch the imagination to enter the lives of others in a shared world, creating new, communal forms of expression” (188).

In conclusion, critical literacy must involve a deep and active engagement through empathy; however empathy can not operate alone, but through reflexivity and critical/contextual engagement. In this way, empathy, emotion, and the imagination don’t merely work as sympathy and compassion, but as tools for critical engagement and possible integration into real-life perceptual shifts.
Chapter 3: The Praxis of Border Pedagogy

Praxis is the lived synthesis of theory and practice. In this section I shall explore praxis by identifying ten themes that bridge theory and practice in border pedagogy. I shall then discuss ten strategies and methods that facilitate democratic praxis in the classroom. However, it is important that I state that while I am enumerating these themes and strategies/methods for the purpose of exploration and communication, they are in no way monolithic. In every way they collide, interconnect, and overlap. They can and should be reinterpreted and transformed for new contextual meanings.

Ten Themes in Border Pedagogy

1) Border crossings as threshold phenomenon

Border praxis is fundamentally concerned with metaphoric doorsteps, stepping from one experience or perspective to another and often staying and creating on the limits between experiences. Border praxis is about edges, verges, margins, collisions and intersections—all thresholds into new perceptions. As McGuires write in his introduction to the text Order and Partialities: Theory, Pedagogy, and the Postcolonial:

> It is always worth taking note of where one has crossed a border into the territory of the other, and of what one carries over and what is left behind. It is worth paying attention to what one has crossed when one has crossed a border (1).

However, to be meaningfully synthesized into one's critical consciousness, the threshold experience must be reflected upon. It is not just about rushing over and across, but
reflexive self-examination and questioning. Because of this self-reflexivity, border crossings are not linear processes.

…border crossings are threshold phenomena, both desired and dreaded. They mark a gap in experience that is crossed and recrossed by machines of power under whose influence fantasy, prejudice, ambivalence, and dispositions of panic and violence thrive. Indeed the question is not whether such mythic energies will emerge, but which ones are preferable—which ones will lead not deeper into defensive hostilities toward the unknown into which one enters, but into practical knowledges that rendered those borders negotiable, even as zones to be dwelt in rather than cross (McGuire 2).

As a theme in the theory of border pedagogy, which is then applied in practice, border thresholds serve as zones for multiple realities where agents can take power back. Therefore, border crossings are necessarily (un)bound with discovery and (dis)comfort, for those ruptured thresholds are where learning happens.

2) Relationship between internal and external borders

An important theme in the praxis of border pedagogy is the relationship between internal and external borders. This theme asks us to consider that our world views and beliefs (internal borders) have direct connection to historical indoctrination and national conquest (external borders).

Literal borders indicated on the earth through walls, wires, highways, and signposts, are external signs of power struggles between nations and classes. The victors of these struggles tend to control the history books and mainstream press, determining our state-sanctioned ideas about “truth.” In turn we are “taught” these versions of the past, the present and “the other” in both explicit and implicit ways via all “educational”
mediums: schools, the mainstream media including entertainment, and daily discourse—as the ideologies are pervasive. Only when we make the connections between our inner and outer borders, can we begin to cross both with honestly and creativity.

When we have reflected upon the connections between internal and external borders, we can then begin to see the terrain of continents, countries, states, cities, towns, street and minds as different levels of interactive maps through which we all travel and impact. Border praxis invites us to become geographers of internal and external worlds, cartographers of maps of power, emotion, resistance, economics, and cultural collisions. We explore the connections of our inner maps—the destinations of major events and emotions that have informed our perspectives and actions. These external and internal maps run parallel reflecting and inflecting each other, often changing the map altogether. When one contends with a layered inner/outer map, it becomes increasingly clear that the map is not static and we have power to change it continually.

3) Locating colonial and postcolonial tensions

As we endeavor to identify and cross constructed boundaries of power and power relations, it is important to deconstruct the specific histories (often competing histories) of power and change. A specific area of concern in border pedagogy are the colonial developments of the last several hundred years in the Americas and across the oceans, and the many forms of postcolonial resistance. These developments have resulted not only in lines on maps, but master narratives that attempt to erase the multiple perspectives and truths that underscore any historical moment.
A significant border question responding to the theme of colonial and postcolonial tensions involves hegemonic discourse and assumptions—and the people that master narratives attempt to represent. Analysis of any type of cultural or literary text from a postcolonial view involves the negotiation of wide-ranging discursive and institutional practices, opposing political interests, and historical antagonisms. The theme of locating these points of tension helps us to gain a more rounded perspective and begin the ongoing process of decolonization. It is a significant goal for students and teachers to try and emancipate themselves from narrative structures and tropes that dominate Euro-American representations of history and peoples of non-European descent.

4) New conceptions and relations about power, including resistance

Early postcolonial theory suggested that power ran one way, from oppressors to the oppressed. However, increasingly cultural, postcolonial and border theorists maintain that power isn’t only a top-down proposition, but is far more complex, running in multiple directions at once. Ever more praxis calls for a “greater need for new conceptions of the relations of emotion and power” (Boler 172). Hegemonic power is, after all, crossed all the time despite efforts of erasure. Power of the seemingly oppressed is manifested in subtle and subversive ways, such as resistance.

This is a significant theme for border praxis, as those of us in the classroom figure into larger power relations. The classroom is “both complicit with, and yet somehow distinct from, the economic order that extracts work from one and all” (McGowan 18). While the institution is subject to the regulations of old power structures, the classroom
can be transformed into a zone of resistance, decolonizing from structures of tracking, or old perceptions of intelligence and power, reconfiguring our social and cultural possibilities, creating a dynamic process-oriented zone.

5) The necessary ambiguity of multiple truths

As much as people want the comfort of knowing “the right answer,” there is necessarily dishonesty in stable constructs of truth. A stable truth is certainly a master narrative, a power mechanism that has become normalized and unquestioned. However, because of the multiple perspectives, positions, and knowledges experienced by individuals, groups, and nations, border pedagogy poses there is no single truth and that all events have a necessary ambiguity.

Ambiguity can be in turns frustrating and emancipatory. Sometimes it is easier to accept that a given perspective, structure or practice is “just the way it is” (as my students often assert). However, it is empowering if we realize that as agents we do always interact with “truths”-- and transform them, that our subjective knowledges are significant and that our actions count. For border pedagogy, the ambiguity of multiple truths is necessary for pluralistic and democratic citizenship, requiring “not only the admission of not knowing the other but also a willingness to learn about the other” (Seyhan 124).

6) Relationship to language and symbols
Resistance is manifested in semiotics/tropes (symbols and signs through which we experience and understand culture) and also semantics. When engaging in border pedagogy, texts reveal the transformations, power and creativity inherent in languages. Therefore, an important theme for the praxis of border pedagogy is central to Spivak’s question in the essay of the same name, “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak, 1987). Spivak asks if perceived “subalterns” are, due to hegemonic power relations, communicating through coded language, and asks if they are being heard. Through theory and practice, Spivak’s question is explored and problematized through the voices of postcolonial and border artists, and in the perceptions and self-authorization of students and teachers.

Furthermore, border pedagogy actively seeks to generate and identify hybrid language of cultural collision, languages that are not rooted in empiricism, but instead in multiplicity and transformation. (Hybrid languages range from “Spanglish” to dialects, from the southern-inflected raps of pop icon Nelly to the language constructions of border writers and artists such as Gómez-Peña and Anzaldúa, to unique theoretical discourse of hooks and Giroux.) Hybrid language forms are “continually in progress, changing and reforming in contrast to a static store of objects or knowledges” (Haladay 37). Border pedagogy, therefore, is expressed explored through a fluidity and hybridity in language/s, transforming discourse into codes of possibility. (I further examine this phenomenon in my discussions of texts by Sherman Alexie, Rigoberta Menchu, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña).
7) Decentering through dialog and problem-posing

The center is a safe and comfortable place to be, a space of non-confrontation and effective conformity. Border pedagogy endeavors to help students acquire the ability to reflexively decenter and challenge the status quo.

Since the praxis of border pedagogy is interactive, consistent decentering and re-evaluating may happen through forms of questioning and dialog, such as Freire’s “problem-posing” approach (further discussed in Chapter 1). New borders drawn means new borders to be crossed. Therefore, dialog and Freirian problem-posing are not just methods, but essential concepts of border thought. These concepts/processes are significant due to the decentering involved, pushing us over the margins of what is normalized through hegemonic constructs, and doing so in a communal and reflexive way.

8) The formation of creative hybrid spaces

As we decenter old versions of knowledge, we cross a border into a new territory. Anzaldúa calls the new territory a third space, Bhabha a third space of enunciation, Mary Louis Pratt calls it a contact zone, and in postcolonial parlance it is often referred to as an alternative nation-state. Either way, border praxis necessitates the creation of a space of subjective response and resistance to colonial binaries—a site to dialog and act to create new meanings. It is a site of hybridization, the interaction between the colonial culture(s), the colonized culture(s), and the new culture(s) that displace, borrow, and resist the old constructs.
While an institutional classroom is a paradoxical site for such transformation to happen, praxis for border pedagogy engages the paradox directly. On the one hand, the classroom is contained in the borders of the lines of power. It has a compartmentalizing nature and often exists as an island from the various other pulls of our lives. However, it is still a space of possibility, especially as we shift our perceptions to consciously, along with our students, recreate it as a zone for creativity and democratic change in the larger world.

The theme of the formation of creative hybrid spaces also extends to the increasing presence of global technology. Just as the imperial and colonial worlds replaced the medieval pre-colonial world, the global world is, as Rosaldo suggests, reorganizing our power structures:

Rapidly increasing global interdependence has made it more and more clear that neither “we” nor “they” are as neatly bounded and homogenous as once seemed to be the case. [We inhabit a world] marked by borrowing and lending across porous national and cultural boundaries that are saturated with inequality, power, and domination (p. 216).

While global corporate powers have a monopoly on resources, border texts and border praxis subvert the monopoly through the emergence of new uncharted anti-colonial “territories.” In conjunction with other forms of classroom praxis, new cultural realms and communications are made possible through electronic media, such as the internet. Dispersed groups now have a space to refine their ideas, build solidarity, and collectively challenge and resist the status quo. Through border praxis, porous boundaries can be transformed as fertile sites for change.
9) Self-reflexivity

As my oft-repeated use of the words suggests, self-reflexivity is central to every aspect of border praxis discussed in these pages. “Self-reflexivity” refers to the awareness that we as individuals and overlapping communities are implicated in history-making, that much that is assumed to be innate is in fact constructed, and that even as we resist labels we also (in endeavors to communicate and seek new meanings) create new ones. However, despite moments of contradiction, tension, and implication, awareness of these inevitable foibles help us from becoming stuck in given ideological constructions, as well as fostering openness to new perspectives. Therefore, through self-reflexivity, we are agents who can make choices and cross (and re-cross) boundaries. Self-reflexivity is not only an act to convey to students, but an ongoing process for teachers who need to constantly engage new ideas and questions, and constantly re-question their methods and goals. For teachers, self-reflexivity involves admitting that education is political and value-laden:

To teach literature represents a choice, a choice that is staged for my students every time I walk into the classroom. I am saying that this pursuit—reading books and talking about them—is so valuable that I have chosen to devote my life to it, and what I model in the classroom is what it looks like to live that choice. Like any true believer I am racked with doubts, and I model those as well. But there is no way to deny the fact that I (alone among those in my classroom of twenty year olds) have made a choice based on what I deemed was worthy of my time and energy, and that my students, who make choices of their own, look to their teachers to gauge the consequences, the possibilities afforded, by this choice or that. Just like the novels I read, by turning their back on a certain mundane existence, were value-laden despite their claims to be beyond good and evil, so my pursuit of this activity conveys a judgment even if I strain for even-handedness on every topic raised in class” (McGowan 69).
The dynamics in the classroom, and society as a whole, forever shift. We are better equipped to engage the nuances of shifts if we recognize that none of our responses are outside historical processes. Therefore, border pedagogy calls for an awareness of one’s own situatedness. It asks us to be rigorous and honest in implicating ourselves and, therefore, to engage ourselves in emancipation from oppressive ideologies. Border pedagogy is not only about identifying, questioning and deconstructing external borders, but continually being reflexive about the borders we ourselves inevitably build.

10) Conscientization: Reflection to Action

It is easy to identify problems. It is even easier to bitch about them. Or to ignore them. Therefore, the recognition of social injustice can be, in and of itself, an apathetic act, if its recognition is not transformed into agency. Therefore, conscientization is, for me, the ultimate theme is border pedagogy. As discussed in Chapter 1 (and to be further discussed in the Chapter “Active Utopia: Rigoberta Menchu”), the Freirian term conscientization refers to the transformation from reflection (identifying problems) to action (conscious efforts to transform a given circumstances). This process is not linear, but ongoing and dialect, hence action leads back to reflection, or is framed as “reflective action.” Conscientization involves many of the themes discussed previously: engaging ambiguities, awareness of language, questioning, crossings, the formation of hybrid spaces and self-reflexivity transformed into action in the world.
To develop an awareness of injustice, of borders crossed and needing to be crossed, and of dynamic hybridity, is not engage in a purely a cognitive activity. It is also is a call to action—to cross the border from passive reflection to active democratic reflective/active citizenship.

**Methodological Strategies for Border Pedagogy**

The ten methodological strategies for the praxis of border pedagogy discussed below do not correspond directly to the themes discussed above. However, each attempts to offer more specific strategies for students and teachers in classrooms, to aid in the exploration of border themes.

The first five strategies are ways for the teacher to facilitate learning that may potentially result in some form of border crossings. The last five strategies are general types of assignments that may compel students to resituate themselves as agents with the goal of transforming social relations.

I derived these strategies through a synthesis of my academic studies and my twelve years of direct experience in the classroom. I discuss them in general terms so as to be applied to specific contexts.

1) Dialogic Engagement

Engendering the dialogic engagement of students is critical to achieve a diverse and democratically-minded classroom experience. Teachers can, therefore, help students build and seek knowledge through dialog (as opposed to the “banking model” of rote
learning). Despite the assertions of skeptics (such as Camille Paglia, Dinesh DiSouza and Harold Bloom), dialog shouldn’t “dumb-down” classroom content, but—if approached with intellectual curiosity and rigor—accelerate critical thinking, challenging students to engage and contextualize through multiple perspectives.

The emphasis is on the exploration and the application of ideas, and is often initiated in group work, such as discussing a series of diverse sequenced and/or critical exploratory questions about a text, or better yet building ones themselves. This way students can seek and negotiate answers together. Pursuing questions challenge the students to investigate different contexts and perspectives, while urging teachers to not fall into the banking-model and to embrace the model of multiple truths. As McGowan writes,

I take it as both necessary to my own democratic desires and as pedagogically required that I be swayed by what happens in the classroom as I hope my students to be. That transformation that happens over a semester is more important than any particular transformation or conversion occur (26).

Dialog engagement as a strategy does result in teachers and students sharing power and, in exchange, creating a dynamic and genuine learning environment.

2) Problem-posing

Problem-posing is a specific type of dialogic engagement that I have discussed at some length in my chapters on the historicization of border pedagogy and critical literacy. Rooted in the experiential learning models of Dewey and Piaget, problem-posing is largely seen as a Freirian strategy. It is a process-oriented strategy through which students
address critical questions and create meanings together, actively constructing dynamic
knowledges from the ground up.

In my classroom, problem-posing specifically involves the creation of critical,
inferential and creative questioning, which students generate and pose to the class.
Problem-posing becomes an important habit of mind, since it is all too easy for
knowledge to be encountered without reflection on its source, the material conditions of
instruction, and questions about who has access to given knowledge, why, and how.

Felman and Laub see the issue of students generating multiple critical questions
as essential for creating a complex dynamic reading of a text or political/cultural event, a
kind of critical matrix. This “exploratory structure and process of unfolding” moves us
towards “vaster questions of the mutual interaction between theory and history (Felman
& Laub xv).

3) Testimonial Interpretation

In the previous chapter, I discussed the role of empathy in critical literacy and
introduced Boler’s notion of a deeper more reflexive empathy called testimonial reading.
The distinction between empathy (which Boler sees as potentially passive) and
testimonial reading is “the responsibility borne by the reader” (Boler 164):

Instead of a consumptive focus on the other, the reader accepts a
commitment to rethink her own assumptions, and confront the internal
obstacles encountered as one’s views are challenged.... As we hear about
and witness horrors, what calls for recognition is not “me,” and the
possibility of my misfortune, but recognition of power relationships that
defines the interaction between reader and text and the conflicts
represented within a text. (164).
Therefore, through testimonial reading, we underscore the subjective and critical importance of the witness. Boler defines testimonial reading as “not only the ability to empathize with the very distant other, but to recognize oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront” (166). This is a difficult but meaningful task for students who often see themselves as outside of contestations of global and local events. However, through testimonial reading, they become active witnesses. Laub and Felman write:

the question of the witness, and of witnessing, as nonhabitual, estranged conceptual prisms through which we attempt to apprehend—and to make tangible to the imagination—the ways in which our cultural frames of reference and our preexisting categories which delimit and determine our perception of reality have failed, essentially, both to contain, and to account for, the scale of what has happened in contemporary history (xv).

Although not identified as such in the book The Freedom Writer’s Diary, teacher Erin Gruwell engages her students in the process of testimonial reading. Through journal writing and problem-posing, students interact with the books Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl and Zlata’s Diary: A Child’s Life in Sarajevo. They aim to push beyond empathetic identification towards a sense of historical context and situatedness. It is through the context and situatedness that individual and collective dialogs with the books emerge and reach past empathy to critical comparisons. The Freedom Writers Diary parallels with their own experience, as well as cite historical differences. Writes Gruwell: “Through their writing, they discovered they shared a common identity, which united them into a community that connected them, not separated them, from the world” (276). The Freedom Writers’ reflections surpassed identification and came to involve contextual
analyses of violence and power and eventually turned into various social actions, such as peace demonstrations, a Basketball for Bosnia Fundraiser, and mentoring programs.

4) The Narration of Border Crossings

Azade Seyhan writes, “Multicultural citizenship requires not only the admission of not knowing the other but also a willingness to learn about the other” (124). Therefore testimonial reading can be strengthened by students narrating aloud, or through writing and art, the experience of crossing borders. This way, encounters with “the other” or with any ideological boundaries can be marked with declaration. Of great importance is the cognition of power relations encountered and that “as we hear about and witness horrors, what calls for recognition is not ‘me’ and the possibility of my misfortune, but a recognition of power relations that defines the interaction between reader and text and the conflicts represented within a text” (Seyhan 164).

Through the narration of border crossing, attending to the detail and reflexivity of experience, each student expresses his/her own understanding of the text, relating their ideas and feelings concerning the borders presented. In doing so, knowledge of the “other” has an opportunity to be learned concurrent with the inherent power relationships, thus individual identity and self-interest has the potential of crossing to a space of collective experience and reflexivity.

5) Cross-Disciplinary Projects
An important aspect of border pedagogy is the crossing over of misleading institutional boundaries—such as those between their history, art, science and English classes. To synthesize diverse ideas, and create new ones, students need to decolonize knowledges by stepping outside the institutional compartmentalization of paradigms and disciplines.

Cross-disciplinary projects infuse classroom learning with versatility, cultural literacy, and new breadths of understanding. Students engage more deeply with specific themes through projects that feel like they are larger than jumping hoops for a grade. Also, cross-disciplinary projects urge collaborative exchange between students and teachers with strengths and experience in different disciplines.

6) Publishing

As oft expressed by critical literacy advocates, teachers can facilitate spaces where students’ words and ideas can interact with the larger world beyond the classroom. Finding a way to “publish” student work is a natural and crucial step in the writing process, compelling students to be more engaged in their writing, because they are writing for an audience. For border pedagogy, the strategy of “publishing” helps students become self-reflexive, active citizens. This way they can utilize the other strategies discussed above, like dialogic engagement, problem-posing, testimonial interpretation, and the narration of border crossings to “enter in” in a public way. Words are not for the teacher or the grade, but for an inherent purpose of their own making.
Furthermore, students gain confidence and the notion of taking action in the world becomes concreted.

Ways to publish extend beyond literal newspapers and magazines and into letters to editors, politicians, corporations, or any institution or individual; reviews in on-line bookstores such as amazon.com; live poetry readings, street theater, galleries, and other types of performance acts. On-line journals, zines, blogging, and other internet forums, as set up by students, instructors or schools, are especially effective showcases. There is the potential to reach a broader audience and to have audience members respond, creating substantive dialog in a space that would not otherwise exist. By publishing electronically, a forum and community can be created for feedback and substantive dialog -- students learn their work is really being read and has an impact.

“Published” speech that is true to one’s experience of border crossings fosters a cultural process of multiple subjective truth tellings, individual agency and empowerment -- whatever the medium.

7) Documentary-Collage Learning

Disciplinary and ideological borders can be crossed through a strategy especially useful for decoding the media and drawing on students’ visual strengths. The strategy is documentary-collage, which focuses on ironic, potent and interpretive visual and textual juxtaposition through collage, PowerPoint presentations, or video. This strategy resonates as we as a society witness changes in the ways culture and technology relate to each other.
Students gather, place, and mix images, sound bites, and text, etc., to comment on social ironies and present these using contemporary digital media or simple collage. In doing so, techniques of persuasion used by mass media and in advertising to influence and indoctrinate can be explored to reveal the social assumptions and power relationships inherent in the original, and can be crossed and subverted by each student's agency.

Through these strategies, students develop multiple techniques for decoding historical texts and cultural symbols. Students can incorporate concepts in interviewing, critiques of advertising, storytelling and cultural critique. This strategy combines creativity with the complex multiplicity of culture, history, technology and perception.

8) Service Learning

Service learning combines ground-up community service with the reflexivity of the classroom. The service experience becomes a text and the students are implicated as co-subjects, along with those they encounter during their service. With roots in Dewey's experiential education, service learning helps teachers and students cross the border between the classroom and citizen action in the larger community.

In their book *Enriching the Curriculum Through Service Learning*, Carol W. Kinsley and Kate McPherson claim that service learning endeavors to achieve the following:

*encourages youth to understand the way their community is governed and how to have input and impact
*when students actively participate in their community, they see that they can make a difference and will, we hope, make participation a habit.
*it develops the capacity to see issues from a broader perspective.
*it enables students to see the relationship between their private rights and interests of the public good.
*community involvement develops the “habits of the heart” and fosters an ethic of service and volunteerism without which our communities could not survive.
*as students extend themselves to help others, they feel a greater sense of social responsibility. (4)

Notwithstanding for or with whom service learning is undertaken (one’s neighborhood or the police department, for example), it can be contextualized in the process of border pedagogy to draw out any assumptions and power relationships inherent in the situation.

9) Civic Interventions

Civic interventions are hands-on strategies that focus on facilitating conscientization through reflective citizenship and activism. Civic interventions involve an immediacy and realness in education as they are responses to current and/or communal events.

Civic interventions may be as simple as letters to congressional representatives or individuals in the community. They may be manifestos, inquiry-based website responding exploring communal or societal concerns, plans for non-profit organizations, or in-the-moment activism, such as staged media events and acts of civil disobedience.

10) Conceptual/Performance Art

Conceptual and performance art involve cultural interpretation and critique, as well as the combination of multiple art forms, with or without technology.
Through the crossing of borders via conceptual or performance art, students question broader social contexts while connecting theory, semiotics and semantics to concepts of the body, time, and space – both public and private. This creative and critical process can be engaged with individual or group projects.

Although intellectually challenging, conceptual and performance art is practical for many reasons. It can be done for very little cost, in any space or context (a classroom, theater or in the streets), with or without technological resources. The environment occupied usually has a relation to the content of the piece and therefore emphasizes the themes of geographical borders and situatedness.

A Note on Assessment

Given the border themes and methodological strategies I have suggested, border pedagogy calls for a form of assessment that differs from quantitative numerical and letter grades. This might include written evaluations or grades that involve holistic rubrics.

Because the goal of democratic practice involves an appreciation for diversity, there must be recognition of multiple intelligences in the classroom (Armstrong) and therefore multiple ways of expressing one’s understanding.

However, while writing this, I do recognize the increased pressure put on teachers during the presidential administration of George W. Bush to conform to standardized curriculums and test. Tightening of the borders of academic freedom ironically turns democratic practice into a kind of transgression across institutional lines. Increased
pedagogical restrictions are destructive to students’ and teachers’ critical/creative thinking abilities and, therefore, to democratic practice itself. Although I am not presently able to offer solutions to this very real bind, and do not mean to diminish its impact on classroom, I believe we as educators must keep challenging the restrictions imposed upon us and, whenever possible, innovate in the interest of liberatory pedagogy.
PART II: LITERATURE THAT EXPLORES BORDER SPACES

In this section I explore three authors whose literature asks the reader to cross geographical and socially constructed ideological borders. They challenge the reader to engage "the Other" and see "the Other" in themselves. Each writer uses a different narrative strategy and crosses and challenges boundaries within their own genre. The authors include fiction writer Sherman Alexie, testimonio writer Rigoberta Menchú Tum, and performance artist/writer Guillermo Gómez-Peña.

I have chosen these authors because through my own teaching experience, I have found them to be especially useful for border-crossing – for both my students and myself. Therefore, because I am drawing on participatory ethnographies from my own classroom, I feel I must address the issue of self-positioning; the reality of being a predominantly white teacher, descendent of the colonizing culture, teaching diverse border texts by people indigenous to the Americas. I recognize the delicacy of these identity politics as they are rooted in ongoing colonial/imperial histories, and further recognize the potential of "recolonizing" if I were not actively attempting to conscientize by applying critical theory and self-reflexivity in my pedagogy. I certainly have struggled internally with my role, and while I feel I have come to a place of agency and understanding, I remain dialogic on the issue of my positioning.

As I discuss at the end of Chapter 1, my own conscientization developed through reflection on the social injustices I saw around me growing up in New York City: homelessness, classism, sexism, racism. I saw racism first-hand as my Black friends were profiled by police and as I felt the judgments of others about these friends, based on
social ideologies about race. The awareness of dehumanizing socially constructed and
deterministic racial categories augmented by witnessing the injustice I saw individuals
face based on these constructions, compelled me to analyze my own stance about equity
and responsibility while a teenager. In Freirian terms, I had to consider if I stood with the
oppressed or oppressors. And while I am skeptical of the very determinism of that
binary, and the lack of resistance and agency implied, there is a fundamental level to
which it was that simple. When it comes to human rights and social justice, where did I
stand?

The knowledge of having Cherokee ancestry through my paternal grandmother
also played a role in my reflection about truth, narrative, and social action. Although
there is nothing apparent about my physical appearance or cultural upbringing that
reflects this heritage, the knowledge of indigenous ancestry built a curiosity within me.
Early on I questioned the master-narratives about Indian and white relations. Although I
feel it would be an unnecessary appropriation to actively claim this ancestry, it pushed
me past empathy into critical awareness. I am also aware that the majority of my ancestry
is that of the European colonizer, weaver of the dominant master-narrative of American
institutions. Therefore, the misrepresentations and hegemony of these master-narratives
are something I feel a responsibility to address in the classroom and as an individual.

When my path led me into the vocation of teaching, and then across geographical
borders into the Southwest and Guatemala, I increasingly built issues of social justice into
the content and practice of my pedagogy. In retrospect, I consider it a gift that I struggled
with “white guilt” at an early age, for I think this is a healthy struggle. Critical theorizing
of my own "whiteness" stripped away at an unconscious acculturated sense of entitlement and helped me see social relations in historical ideological contexts. Although assumptions may not be "fair" or "just" or "true," all human individuals are interpreted by others in daily life; we inherit, and have projected upon us, the privileges and oppressions of our forbearers. With this knowledge, therefore, I make a choice to not reproduce colonizing assumptions, discourse, and reading of texts. I do not claim to know more about the identity of "others" or of any given culture than what an individual writer from an individual text conveys, and I recognize this to be subjective. Therefore, as a white teacher teaching texts by indigenous writers of the Americas (and writers of other backgrounds as well), I try to be self-reflexive and humble. I engage my students in a conversation about the ethical issues about identity politics and potential appropriation that arise from my subject-position as a white teacher. I hope to emphasize that we all can be self-reflexive, and while we inherit certain social-positions, we can choose whether or not to use them in the interest of social justice and freedom. To me, that is an example of democratic practice. By using texts by Alexie, Menchú Tum, and Gómez-Peña in the classroom, I apply the lens of post-colonial theory and allow their texts to instruct us, the students and the teacher, mutually engaged in decolonizing from the hegemony of the past and the present.
Chapter 4: “Traitor Fictions”: Identification and Subversion through the Works of
Sherman Alexie, or “What Is an Indian?”

For me, obviously, the largest border is between the Indian and the white world. So, because I grew up on a reservation, that border is political, geographical and racial. But I've always crossed that border freely, easily moving back-and-forth. As a result, I've been seen as a traitor on both sides...I think political and racial borders are based on fears. What are borders but mostly imaginary? (Alexie, P.O.V.)

I will open my section on border texts by discussing the literature of Spokane Indian writer and border crosser Sherman Alexie. Alexie creates stories that are particularly accessible for students while compelling them to cross an array of borders – not just political, geographical and racial, but emotional, subliminal, and ideological. Students initially identify with his caustic humor, relatable contemporary characters, and pop-culture imagery. However, before long they are pulled into more contentious territory: struggling with notions of “Indianness,” the paradoxical implications of Reservation borders, and the distortions of history books. But Alexie delves beyond these more obvious borders to the porous issues of identity that seep through the boundaries of socially sanctioned and personally transformative sex acts and even the bubbling no-man’s land of the individual subconscious. Most significantly, students are challenged to question and engage their own subject-positions and unconscious culpability in race relations between Indians and whites, through exploitation of resources and indoctrination about Indian identity through media imagery.

While there are countless Native writers whose work immerses readers in contact zones, Alexie is unique due to his blend of youthful Rez and urban sensibilities, his recurrent use of pop-culture imagery, his frank non-formal language and his ability to
transform it into startling lyricism. Like his contemporaries, Louise Erdrich and Leslie Marmon Silko, Alexie explores collective cultural survival, individual struggle within the collective, and the process of decolonization from assimilative structures. However, unlike writers James Welch and some of the works of Diane Glancey, who have written stunning historical epics, Alexie’s work is rooted in the idiosyncrasies, humor, and little nightmares of the present day. He employs the multiple lenses of his multiple identities: a Generation Xer, a spoken-word poet/filmmaker, a Spokane insider/outsider, and (since the onslaught of the second Bush administration) an anti-war or—as I heard him put it at a reading—“anti-fundamentalist” activist. His accessibility and frank hybridity easily engage students. However, these qualities just as quickly decenter them through their indeterminate and ironic meanings.

Therefore, in analyzing the border texts of Sherman Alexie, my goal is to demonstrate how his work is concerned with border themes and how it serves as a potent context for emancipatory border pedagogy by placing student in a decentering contact zone of identification and subversion. I will focus my remarks on specific stories from two of his story collections that have been effective in achieving border pedagogy in my classes: Tonto and the Lone Ranger Fistfight in Heaven and The Toughest Indian in the World. From The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven I will discuss the stories “A Drug Called Tradition” and “The Trial of Thomas Build-the-Fire,” and briefly “Every Little Hurricane.” This collection primarily takes place on the Spokane Reservation in the state of Washington. Then from The Toughest Indian in the World, which tells the story of Indians living in urban areas and moments of temporal cross-cultural contact, I
will focus on the stories “The Toughest Indian in the World,” “South by Southwest,” “The Sin Eaters,” “St. Junior,” “Dear John Wayne,” and “One Good Man.” I will illustrate Alexie’s strategies of identification and subversion as moments of border crossings, offering some observations of the impact of the reading and the resulting discussions on students in my classes.

As soon as we begin reading the stories from both collections, the class fills up with belly-laughs. Students identify with the contemporary and youthful aspects of Alexie’s characters and his unusually accessible conversational prose style. Early identification is made with young Victor the first story, “Every Little Hurricane,” as he tests the emotional waters of parents, pondering their security and the hence the security of his own future:

Victor lay between his parents, his alcoholic and dreamless parents, his mother and father… Victor put one hand on his mother’s stomach and placed another on his father’s. There was enough hunger in both, enough movement, enough geography and history, enough of everything to destroy the reservation and leave only random debris and broken furniture. (10-11)

While Victor’s visceral experience is generally tangible to students, it isn’t long before many begin to struggle with the haze of their totalizing concepts about Indian people. The internalized power of these concepts, ingrained in students through the media and their own educations, often results in them initially perceiving Alexie’s characters as stereotypes, especially in Tonto and the Lone Ranger, where characters face daily life in a reservation context. After reading “Every Little Hurricane,” where a pre-adolescent Victor is surrounded by the chaos of a party at his parent’s reservation HUD house—a student named Dominic asserted that all Indians seemed to be alcoholics. Alfredo,
initially reacting monolithically to the outer actions of characters rather than their internal and cultural dynamics, claimed Alexie was perpetuating stereotypes.

Similarly, students eagerly seek moments that will help them penetrate the “Indianess” of Alexie’s characters and his own narrative voice. When the stories are not being read through the lens of alcoholism and general social decline, students often seek examples of Indian “spirituality,” “connection to the earth,” shamanism, and (though they don’t use this term) “Noble Savagery.” I believe their initial search for a monolithic Indian identity is an impulse to stabilize the unwieldy dynamics of Alexie’s characters and themes and possibly to alleviate historical co-implication in the colonial process.

Alexie, however, resists projections at every turn, frustrating and engaging student readers in a border zone between popular, traditional and shifting hybrid cultural constructions. This is why Alexie, in the quote on the top of this chapter calls himself a “traitor”—as a writer he resists being bounded, journeying back and forth freely between the “white” and “Indian” words, between “traditional” and “popular” cultures, combining them. When asking Dominic and Alfredo to consider the nuanced dynamics between Victor and his parents, the subtle longing for connection displayed by Victor gauging their emotional “temperature” by feeling their bellies, they struggled to shift their focus from the need to label to empathy for the vulnerable human emotion depicted. Alfredo shared his own experience with his parents’ alcoholism and Dominic with his father’s elusiveness. Therefore, as a “traitor,” Alexie has lured them into a contact zone where they both identify with characters but struggle with the relationship between stereotype and social/individual context.
Like Alexie himself, his characters are motivated by multiple influences: reservation and urban, spiritual and technological, gay and straight, daily-life and subliminal undertows. In Alexie’s border zone, basketball takes predominance over the sweatlodge, magic-mushrooms drive drifter teenagers’ “vision-quests,” a sexual encounter with a gay boxer connects a young man to a sacred collective past, and John Wayne is in touch with his feminine side. Throughout the readings students are intrigued and vexed, debating vigorously: Does Alexie want us to understand his culture? Why does he share some cultural and psychological insights, but not others? What audience are his stories written for? Does he hate white people? Why does sexual politics (particularly in Toughest Indian) become a metaphor for identity politics? Students struggle with all of these questions and produce a diversity of responses. Through deeper engagement with Alexie’s characters and symbolism students recognize Alexie’s subversiveness—his funny and ironic reappropriation of stereotypes complicated by genuine pathos, and the deep pull of the (collective and individual) subconscious of his characters.

Conversations are never too tidy as Alexie’s work is rife with ambivalences. Like other postcolonial writers, he depicts characters that long for liberation from one or many of their socially constructed identities—and they seek to construct new identities. However, Alexie’s characters can’t quite envision the identity they seek, as their influences are so multiple and their individuality so specific. They struggle with their own iconic notions of what it means to be Indian, what they are told by their own loving and/or dysfunctional families, and by Hollywood. They struggle with how to be “Indian”
in a white world, with how to represent themselves and communicate who they are. The characters are caught in webs of ironic and self-deprecating discourse, conflicting loyalties, and self-doubt, doubt of others, and guilt, as well as keen intelligence and a sense of irony. The identifications and subversions that characterize Alexie’s fiction capture a stage in post-colonial literature that theorist Azade Seyhan calls: a “borderland of different languages, rites of passage, and negotiations between myth and reality, memory and presence, madness and reason, and factual account and revolutionary experimentations in language and style” (107). All of these post-colonial transfigurations create tensions as empathy and discomfort collide to subvert students’ assumptions. As I have begun to demonstrate with their first encounter with Victor in “Every Little Hurricane,” students are challenged to go beyond passive reading and easy identification to contend with the complexities of Indian identity and experience, formerly seen to be monoliths.

A Borderland of Different Languages

As any transformative writer unique to his or her age, Alexie makes language and structure his own, merging modern and traditional idioms to create new ones. Often, in post-colonial literatures, this merging takes shape in the form of code-switching. Moving between languages and dialects signifies that a character is negotiating two or more cultures. Often code-switching implies the struggle between inclusion and exclusion from a given culture—perhaps one’s heritage culture as the character becomes seemingly “assimilated.” It may also signify the negotiation of the culture into which a character has
immigrated and is perceived as "the Other." Code-switching often, as in the case of Anzaldúa, signifies a form of resistance. Her inter-weaving of Spanish or Spanglish, and suffixes or prefixes of Aztec words is a way to decolonize or, as Seyhan suggests, "living bilingually" or "resisting monolingualism" is "the best revenge" (106). Stylistic code-switching is often emphasized by italicizing heritage culture words, as is often the case in Latino literatures use of Spanish or Spanglish. The italics emphasize inclusion (or sometimes exclusion) and are often asserted as a form of resistance.

The code-switching that often characterizes post-colonial literatures takes a different form in Alexie's work. He does not move between a Spokane perspective marked as "traditional" and a contemporary post-colonial English one. Instead he creates his own amalgamation, signifying the merging of perspectives in a state of flux. In other words, Alexie's "traitor" fictions are less interested in moving from one side of the border to other than colliding in the tensions of the border crevice. Even when characters long for a more traditional past, they can not easily envision that place in purely traditional terms (if there is indeed such a thing). Therefore, the borderlands of language are situated in a space of yearning and resistance, where colonial English is a first language, but one in which one has an uneasy or self-deprecating relationship. It is by no means a "standard" or assimilative English, but often a playful and satiric one; sometimes a tool for emotional warfare, sometimes healing.

"St. Junior"—the portrait of a middle-aged married couple who chose to live on the Rez despite years of thriving outside of it—opens with songs from the ghosts of The Cold Spring Singers. The narrative use of the Cold Spring Singers and their songs is
perplexing to students, as the singers are not characters that figure in the plot of the story
nor do they make any further appearances (though they do make brief appearances in
other Alexie stories). To boot, The Cold Spring Singers are not even, well, alive (they
died in a van accident years before). Yet “they all sang because they understood what it
meant to be Indian and dead and alive and still bright with hope” (153). And most
significantly because their songs, the 49s, are hybrids:

Basketball, basketball.
Way, ya, hi, yo, way, hi, yo
Give me the ball, give me the ball.
Way, ya, hi, yo, way, hi, yo.
And let me shoot, and let me shoot.
Way, ya, hi, yo, way, hi, yo.
And win the game, and win the game.
Way, ya, hi, yo, way, hi, yo.
And then she’ll love me, then she’ll love me.
Way, ya, hi, yo, way, hi, yo.
Forever and ever, forever and ever. (153)

Drawing (very) loosely on tribal music and depicting Alexie’s ongoing reverence
for basketball, the seemingly silly 49s, situated in the borderlands of language, take on
eventual evocative meaning in the story. On the most basic level, they foreshadow the
plot (the protagonist is a formal basketball pro enduring a midlife crisis, rooted by his
love for his wife). More profoundly, the songs of the Cold Spring Singers, which
emanate during a snowy reservation night, connect the unorthodox married couple to the
larger lore and ethos of the reservation – and connect the reservation to its own hybrid
identity. The code of the Cold Spring Singers exists in the borderlands of culture
formations; they play with them. They find an ease in their fusion, and become a source
for affirmation and healing.
A more complex relationship about the borderlands of language in Alexie's fiction is depicted when characters shift identities, taking on different voices. In "The Trial of Thomas Build-the-Fire," Thomas represents the historical collective when he goes on trial for "a storytelling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth" (93). He is at once the traditional storyteller and a modern one; he is neither and both. During his testimony, Thomas traverses over centuries and inhabits the voices of historical Indian figures from different stages in the colonial process—even the voice of a young pony. The pony is identified as a relation to the Indian characters and his capture becomes analogous with the colonization of indigenous people. In this manner, Thomas crosses the borderlands of voices and languages—conduits for the identities that make up the total story of "the future, the immediate present and, of course, the past" (93).

Through much of the story, Thomas' position on the borderlands of language serves as a type of nonviolent warfare against a history of oppression. However, at the end of the story, the borderlands of language transcend the boundaries of Indian identity in a colonizing white world, in favor of an image of solidarity. Alexie concludes the story with an image of oppressed and under-represented peoples forging links together through the language of storytelling. While traveling to the Walla Walla State Penitentiary, Thomas finds himself seated with "four African men, one Chicano, and a white man from the smallest town in the state" (103):

"I know who you are," the Chicano said to Thomas. "You're than Indian guy who did all the talking."

"Yeah," one of the African men said, "You're that storyteller. Tell us some stories, chief, give us the scoop."

Thomas looked at these five men who shared his skin color, at the white man who shared this bus which was going to a new kind of reservation,
barrio, ghetto, logging-town tin shack. He then looked out the window, through the steel grates on the windows, at the freedom just outside the glass. (103)

Each man on the bus comes from a culture with a different code, a different background, and a different story. But in the crevices between oppression and freedom, acceptance and fear, in the realm of the imagination, the men identity with each other, finding solidarity in the borderlands of language—the subversive gift of storytelling.

Rites of Passage

As Alexie’s characters try to negotiate their hybrid identities, they often experience some kind of rite of passage, though hardly the type readers are prepared for. In “A Drug Called Tradition,” three restless teenage American Indian boys find themselves reconstructing a rite of passage identified with a distant but coveted past. However, this is seemingly incidental, as their overt and original goal is to get high after a party. In the story, narrator Victor Joseph (now a teenager), a young Thomas Builds-the-Fire, and their friend Junior engage in a makeshift vision quest through the use of street drugs. Each has the vision of another taking on different historical Indian identity constructions, in which they assume (their idea of) tribal languages and understandings.

In the first vision, Thomas witnesses Victor as a young warrior-type stealing a horse as a rite of passage towards manhood. The horse is beautiful horse and is named Flight (16), signifying the possibility to flee over borders. Next, Junior envisions Thomas in an apocalyptic scene of biological warfare; he stands amongst early reservation smallpox blankets; he stands amongst the dead, and he too will die. In
solidarity with those who suffered from this historical atrocity, Thomas sheds his clothes, feels the air, splashes water on his face, and performs the Ghost Dance. "I'll bring them back," Thomas says in Junior's vision, "Can you hear the drums?" (17) And he dances and dances, and his tribe rises from ash and joins him, and the Buffalo join him, dancing in circles, growing larger and "watching all the ships return to Europe" (17).

Victor then envisions Junior. "Singing. With a guitar" (18). He is such a famous singer, that even the President of the United States—Mr. Edgar Crazy Horse, the great-grandson of the Lakota warrior—comes to hear him sing with his guitar. In Victor's vision, Junior croons:

Crazy Horse, what have you done?
Crazy Horse, what have you done?
It took four hundred years
And four hundred guns
But the Indians finally won.
Ya-hey, the Indians finally won.

Crazy-Horse, are you still singing?
Crazy-Horse, are you still singing?
I honor your old songs
and all they keep on bringing
because the Indians keep winning
Ya-hey, the Indians keep winning. (18-19)

Through Victor's vision of Junior, history is rewritten, creating a passage into a very different present, an empowering subversion of historical oppressions. Alexie turns the scene of stoner teenagers, the hallucination, into a right of passage, a culturally hybrid form of resistance. Furthermore, it is not a right of passage that each character experiences individually. Since their visions are of each other, they strengthen their collective in the present, and their collective relationship to the past.
Finally, at the conclusion of “A Drug Called Tradition,” Victor meets (or has a vision of) a shaman of sorts, but her name is not the mystical sort readers expect. Simply, her name is “Big Mom.” She gives Victor a “little drum,” so small it can barely fit in the palm of his hand (23). For Victor, the drum is a “pager,” the indication of a connection to something ideal and larger, to a history he is distant from, one he barely understands. The drum is something he probably will not use, yet he will keep close to him, “just in case” (23).

Negotiations Between Myth and Reality

Is Thomas really on trial for a “storytelling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth” (93)? Or is “The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire” an analogy for real suppressed Indian histories and voices? Is Thomas an individual, a schizophrenic (as at least one student invariably suggests), or the collective consciousness of Indian people? Are the young men in “A Drug Called Tradition” really just rationalizing their drug use? Or does a connection with a mythologized version of the past somehow deepen and infuse their reality? Why do Seymour (a white character) and Salmon Boy (a Spokane) in “South by Southwest” seem to exist in a dreamscape of Americana tropes, slipping within a moment from one iconic location to another? Does a young male journalist’s sexual encounter with a boxer hitchhiker reveal a repressed sexual identity? Or is it a story about identity itself and seeking one’s Indianness through the immediacy of a sexual encounter, connecting him to an elusive past?
As Thomas slips between stories, as the boys slip between drug-induced hallucination, as Seymour and Salmon Boy slip between locations, as Jonah from the “Sin Eaters” slips deeper into an apocalyptic nightmare, Alexie is illustrating the collisions on the borders of a mythic desire and the more complex, often ugly, reality. The borders cut across the pathos and lyricism of daily life; across the horror and mystique of a potent past; across the desire and fetishizing of popular culture.

In “The Trial,” Thomas takes on Indian identities that are signifying a history of genocide and colonization. In addition to the identity of a young pony, Thomas negotiates the voices of two young warriors. One is the empathetic Wild Coyote, who is “not sorry we had to fight” but is “sorry those men had to die” (102). The other is Qualchan, who attempts to escape from Colonel Wright of the 9th Infantry, but is dragged to the noose and hung (99). Then in a sort of reverse myth (where the past is loosely historical and the present takes on the quality of myth), Thomas opens his eyes in the courtroom:

“Mr. Builds-the-Fire,” the judge asked and brought Thomas back to attention. “What point are you trying to make with this story?” “Well,” Thomas said. “The City of Spokane is now building a golf course named after me, Qualchan, located in that valley where I was hanged.” (99)

Here myth and reality collide shockingly. Such a golf course does indeed exist in Spokane, Washington, the closest city to the reservation where Alexie grew up (“Creek at Qualchan”) and Qualchan did exist and was killed the way Thomas describes. Therefore, the surreal magic of the story in fact negotiates a harsh reality, weaving its horror in to Thomas’s contemporary story-telling shamanism.
In “South by Southwest,” Seymour, a lonely white drifter, jumps onto a table at The International House of Pancakes to begin his “non-violent killing spree” (57). Seymour, influenced by popular culture fancies himself a “gentleman bandit” and, more interested in the romantic experience than the money, extracts merely one dollar from each customer. However, every cowboy bandit needs a sidekick and Seymour openly solicits for one: “I need somebody to go with me... I need somebody to fall in love with me along the way” (58). A “fat Indian,” wearing “a t-shirt embossed with a photograph of Geronimo” raises his hand (58). The t-shirt suggests the fat Indian seems to have his own iconic ideals. Seymour accepts the offer and dubs his sidekick, a Spokane Indian, “Salmon Boy.”

The story is a surreal mixture of “Bonnie and Clyde” and “The Lone Ranger and Tonto” films, as well as a contemporary commentary on loneliness and isolation. Seymour and Salmon Boy drift, as in a dream, between iconic Western and Americana landscapes: the uncharted road West, the spooky isolated farmhouse, the Grand Canyon, the Mexican border, Disneyland, and the aforementioned International Pancake House. Interspersed is the coyote “trickster” trope so commonly emphasized in books and classroom discussions about Native mythology. Here the coyote is merged with the image of Jesus, crucified “on a fence post” (63) and later “nailed to a speed-limit sign,” “howling from an overpass,” “drinking a cup of coffee in a truck-stop diner” (69). In the Southwestern landscapes, the trope of the coyote asks us to think about the appropriation of symbols and the desire that myths create within us.
Poignantly, while the mythic crusade describes the friendship between a white and an Indian, it still emphasizes the very “real” hegemonic tensions between them. Seymour, throughout the story, relegates Salmon Boy to side-kick status; he never inquires about Salmon Boy’s real name, and refers to him as Salmon “Boy,” even though the character is a middle-aged man. Alexie also emphasizes Salmon Boy’s lack of access to the country outside of the Rez, suggesting the borders of the reservation follow him wherever he goes. Salmon Boy recalls the time his father won a trip to Disneyland, receiving half of the money for the trip beforehand that the family used to make the trip from Washington:

They were supposed to get the other half once they got to Disneyland, but something went wrong. There was nobody there to greet them and nobody answered the telephone back home. Salmon Boy and his whole family walked up to the gates of the Magic Kingdom and peered through the bars. (62)

Therefore, for Salmon Boy, even while immersed in the symbols and structures of American myth he, as an Indian, must still negotiate the “real.” Myth becomes a site for desire, but still an indeterminate and unstable place. When Seymour and Salmon Boy find themselves on a lonely road heading towards a farm house they encounter an old lady who looks curiously at the two men and asks “Are you real?” This question is quite literal. In response, “Seymour and Salmon Boy looked at each other. They weren’t sure” (64).

The negotiation between myth and reality is also explored through the clash of perceptions between whites and non-whites about Indian history and culture. In Alexie’s
short story "Dear John Wayne," a white anthropologist named Spencer Cox aims to interview Etta James, an elderly powwow dancer, for an academic paper about the effect of European ballroom dancing on the Indian powwow. Spencer’s premise alone is rooted in colonial hegemonic myth of European cultural dominance (that European ballroom dancing has effectively colonized the powwow) and his belief in the myth is deepened by the cultural assumption that academic degrees constitute real-world knowledge. He believes his institutionally sanctioned knowledges and ivory-tower research make him a genuine authority on the authenticity of Indian lives. The anthropologist proudly announces, “I am a cultural anthropologist and the Owens Lecturer in Applied Indigenous Studies at Harvard University. I’m also the author of seventeen books, texts, focusing on mid- to late-twentieth-century Native American culture, most specifically the Interior Salish tribes of Washington State” (190).

Etta quickly subverts Spencer Cox’s control of the interview by refusing to give straight answers, defusing his “real” script as myth. Much to the anthropologist’s confusion she asks if he is in fact here to interview her about John Wayne. Perplexed, the anthropologist responds, “Well, no, but the John Wayne mythology certainly plays an important role in the shaping of twentieth-century American and Native American culture, but…” (191). In a seeming spell of delusion, Etta asserts that she was an extra on John Wayne’s film The Searchers, and that the two had a love affair. Her details of the affair flip the John Wayne mythos completely. Instead of a macho, he is sensitive and silly, and as he tells his cross-dressing sons, he is consciously in touch with his feminist side (203). “Oh sons,” John Wayne declares to his two boys as he finds them applying
lipstick, “you’re just engaging in harmless gender play. Some sexual experimentation. Every boy does this kind of thing. Every man likes to pretend he’s a woman now and again. It’s very healthy” (203).

Through Etta’s tale, Alexie has taken on the myth of the testosterone-infused cowboy in a surprisingly subversive way. Rather than critiquing the Indian-killing cowboy, she transforms and even erases him—replacing him by a liberal equalitarian who assures his children, “I may act like a cowboy, I may pretend to be a cowboy, but I am not a cowboy in real life, do you understand?” (203)

Etta destroys Spencer Cox’s mythic icons and informs him calmly that she has read his books, all the canonized English texts, and that they are filled with lies. She explains that she lives in a white world for “fifty-seven minutes of every hour.” The anthropologist inquires what she does with the other three minutes. Explains Etta, “That, sir, is when I get to be Indian, and you have no idea, no concept, no possible way of knowing what happens in those three minutes” (194).

To students’ frustration and intrigue, Alexie, like Etta, will not denote a clear line between the “real” and the “myth.”

Memory and Presence

Memory is a place where cultural and historical knowledges are designated, often in the form of stories. Alexie tells stories of reconciliation and resistance, and many of his characters, such as Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Etta James, or Jonah from “Sin Eaters” are storytellers. These characters infuse awareness about the present through their stories
of the past, negotiating a brutal colonial history with present-day representations and
misappropriations. As Indian literary theorist Jane Hafen writes:

Alexie’s sharp edge of essentialism and tribal awareness unmasks institutional and historical racism. As American Indians we have the collective historical and genetic memory of Phillip Sheridan, Mr. Armstrong, and George Wright from Reservations Blues. We play with popular cultural images like those found in Lone Ranger. Like the characters in Indian Killer, we live with the exploitative novelist wannabees like Jack Wilson, professors like Dr. Clarence Mather who fill our children and students with misdirected Noble Savage romanticisms, and those well meaning individuals who...want to possess us in the name of rescuing us. (77)

Memory, therefore, can be painful and haunting. It can exist in unstable places. It can pursue us in our subconscious. In “Sin Eaters,” Alexie’s most powerful story about the infusion of memory on the collective subconscious, young Jonah relays a story that contrasts the intimacy and affection of family and tribal identity with the often apocalyptic Indian and European colonial relations. The story takes place in the late 1950/early 1960s, in the wake of the Jewish Holocaust. It was a time when many Indian children were still forced to “assimilate” in government boarding schools and when many poor women on reservations were sterilized without their knowledge after giving birth. In today’s present, knowledge of these acts of human hegemony and hatred serve as “genetic” or cultural memory, along with the more obvious examples of Custer or the massacre at Wounded Knee. Therefore, Jonah’s story takes place “before the first color televisions were smuggled onto the reservations, but after a man with blue eyes dropped two symmetrical slices of the sun on Japan... before a handsome Catholic was assassinated in Dallas... but after the men with blue eyes carried dark-eyed children into the ovens and made them ash” (77). The story combines Jonah’s lyrical storytelling
voice with elements of science fiction, an apocalyptic plot, and a theme of quiet resistance. It indicates a collective nightmare, the recurring and ongoing genocide, colonization and the dehumanization

Together my parents and I stepped into out front yard and stared up into the sky. We saw the big planes roar noisily through the rough air above the reservation. We saw the soldiers step from the bellies of the planes and drop them toward the earth. We saw a thousand parachutes open into a thousand green blossoms. All over the Spokane Indian Reservation, all over every reservation in the country, those green blossoms fell into empty fields, into powwow grounds, and onto the roofs of tribal schools and health clinics. Those green blossoms fell between pine trees, beside deep and shallow rivers, and among the sacred and utilitarian headstones of our dead. (82)

Collective memory works its way into dreams, such as the dream-premonition of war, also experienced by the Indian strangers who Jonah meets after being corralled into a bus and then an underground concentration camp, forcibly separated from his parents. Through the trauma he experiences unfamiliarity with his own body; he can no longer conjure the faces of his parents, and finds that he himself is “strange and foreign” (86). In a world transformed by hegemony and hatred, everything Jonah sees looks distorted and dangerous: “Sharp stars ripped through the fabric of the morning sky. Morning dew boiled and cooked green leaves” (87).

A goal of cultural genocide, or any colonial “education,” is to strip away at memory and identity. Indeed Jonah finds the memory of parent’s faces fade, only moments after he is taken from them:

By the time our bus crossed the border of the reservation, taking us away from all we had known and into what we could never have predicted, I had forgotten almost every piece of my parents’ faces. I touched my face, remembering that its features owed their shapes to the shapes of my parents’ faces, but I felt nothing familiar. (86)
Soon Jonah finds himself stripped naked. He is assigned a number. His hair is sheared. He is cut off from all semblances of his prior identity where he was once “the maker of songs” (78). Jonah must now negotiate his immediate past with the incomprehensible but overwhelming presence of his current reality.

While reading Jonah’s story, students are immersed in his feeling of disembodiment and serve as witnesses to Jonah’s kidnapping and torture in which Indians are experimented upon much the way Joseph Mengele “experimented” on Jews, gypsies and homosexuals during the Holocaust. Like Mengele, Jonah’s captors rationalize that what they are doing is for the benefit of science and human kind in general.

Because of the overwhelming physical and technological power of the white captors, resistance is primarily mental. When a sheared naked woman who has been repeatedly forced to “breed” with random strangers in a sterile room surrounded with double-mirrors is told to have intercourse with Jonah, she physically refuses. “He’s just a child,” she shouts, “A boy. Look at him. Look at him” (118). After she is repeatedly beaten with an electrical stick and told she will “be eliminated,” she is forced to surface comply. “Keep your eyes closed...And they can’t see you” she tells Jonah (120). Resisting the only way they can they transform the situation into one that is not rape, that is not sex:

“Hide,” she said, “Don’t let them see you.”
Inside of her, I breathed the dark, I was warm; I was safe.
“Are you my mother?” I asked.
“Yes,” she said. She said, “Yes.”
“Mother,” I whispered. “Mother, mother, mother.” (120)
The shocking story asks students to think about the role of collective memory in Indian lives and to question the role of resistance, the forms of which are not always as obvious as an armed revolution. Students are asked to struggle with Jonah’s story, Jonah’s dream, and that this dream is collective, extending beyond his own experience—beyond his tribes.

How are these memories negotiated with a living presence of mind and action? Alexie’s best clue is through Etta: “Those three [remaining] minutes belong to us. They are very secret. You’ve colonized Indian land but I am not about to let you colonize my heart and mind” (194).

Although Etta can be seen as an “unreliable narrator” due to her unlikely age and her trickster subversions, “Dear John Wayne” suggests she is content in her truths, while the anthropologist Spencer Cox is the one who is alienated. Perhaps this is because Etta’s stories and memories (whether literally true or not) endure from lived experience while Spencer’s are appropriated from socially constructed theories and learned from empirical texts as monolithic conclusions:

Sitting alone in his car outside of the retirement home, Spencer ejected the cassette tape from his recorder. He could destroy the tape or keep it; he could erase Etta’s voice or transcribe it. It didn’t matter what he chose to do with her story because the story would continue to exist with or without him. Was the story true or false? Was that the question Spencer needed to ask?

Inside an old woman kneeled in a circle with her loved ones and led them in prayer.

Outside a white man closed his eyes and prayed to the ghosts of John Wayne, Ethan Edwards, and Marian Morrison, that Holy Trinity.

Somebody said nothing and somebody said amen, amen, amen. (208)
Madness and Reason

Does late 20th-century Thomas indeed believe he is a young pony, the Indian warrior Qualchan and Wild Coyote while he is on trial? Did Etta really have an affair with John Wayne, who insists she call him “Marion?” (196) Are Seymour and Salmon Boy really being instantaneously being transported across geographical boundaries, through an Americana dreamscape?

My students often are quick to label Thomas as crazy or schizophrenic. They are suspicious of Etta who, it so happens, is one hundred and eighteen years old. (“Dear John Wayne,” furthermore, takes place in 2052.) And many suspect Seymour and Salmon Boy are on the wrong side of sanity with their “non violent killing-spree” and conscious plan to fall in love Bonnie and Clyde-style, while both claiming they aren’t gay. Furthermore, other characters within the stories—specifically white characters trained in different ways of knowing—are all too quick to affirm the diagnoses of madness, such as Thomas’ judge and jury and Etta’s anthropologist.

While Alexie’s story challenges many students’ sense of the literal, and what is possible and sane, wisdom and meaning emerge from the “mad” characters and “mad” narrative style. Through his embodiment of literal and figurative historical figures, Thomas Builds-the-Fire gives voice to under-represented stories and histories. Through Etta subversive stories, she pulls back the curtains from “empirical reason” and Hollywood misrepresentations that showcase socially-constructed identities. Seymour and Salmon Boy’s surreal behaviors and experiences suggest the human drive for love
and purpose, inspired by the unconscious tug of omni-present culturally-charged images and tropes (for both whites and Indians).

Students contemplate Alexie’s stories as metaphors for the subliminal experiences of conflicting Indian identities and as reasoned theories of ways to synthesize the past, present and future. The madness of the characters, their hallucinations, dreamscape experiences and shifting of voices, point instead to the overlooked collective consciousness, the sanity of internal struggle when external circumstances seem insane.

Revolutionary Experiments in Language and Style

At the outset, Alexie, who is a spoken-word poet, writes prose that is populist, street-smart, and parodic. His writing is not unlike the most clever rap music: in your face, playful and full of inside jokes. Yet underneath are Alexie’s rhythms of lyricism and pathos:

Alexie has the near fatal, comic bravado of surviving an everyday rez, where every day is a blow to the stomach and a blaze of understanding. Being Indian means you’re hanging on for dear life, hanging in there with catastrophic humor, kicking back at sunset, staggering through the ‘49 to dawn, laughing your ass off and on again, and accepting that bottom line of your neighbor’s butt next to you, misplaced, displaced, re-relocated into the present Red reality, so real that it hurts. So unreal in its hurtful beauty, so surreal that it makes you blink and smile to see another dawn. (Lincoln)

Sherman Alexie’s experiments in language and style continually distance themselves from the literary practices of the “dominant” culture, even though Alexie himself (just like his characters Etta and Roman Fury) is well acquainted with the English literary canon. Instead Alexie adapts a voice that is informally poetic, lyrically spinning
“plain language.” Through layered but accessible prose, caustic humor stands shoulder to shoulder with pathos and compassion.

In Alexie’s fiction “paradoxes are not avoided; they collide against each other like so many angry atoms” (Mudede TheStranger.com). His experiments with language and style subvert cultural forms and a norm through sudden narrative twists, shifting voices, seemingly tangential jokes, and the startling rhythms of spoken-word poetry. These carry the reader through expressions of longing, sadness, resistance, and often love.

By identifying with non-Indian audiences through his wry contemporary voice, and with Indian audiences through his informed context and inside jokes, Alexie collides both popular and source-specific allusions. He is a “traitor” to the monolithic constructed assumptions of both white and Indian cultures, and therefore, much more inclined towards the individuality of the borderlands. Through identification and subversion, his narrative style claims a unique authoritative zone from which to speak, at once “presenting an American Indian cultural and political view of subversion and resistance” and compelling readers to “reconsider the popular imagery of the American Indian” (Hafen 71).

Pedagogical Context: “What Is an Indian?”

Alexie’s “traitor” subversions give voice to apparent silences and provoke students to see the incongruities between the dominant culture’s representations of Indian people, and the actual dynamic diversity of Indian individuals. By intervening in the dominant colonial narrative, he exposes our cultural biases and ideologies. The story “Every Little Hurricane” challenges the over-simplistic media image of the drunken
Indian by humanizing the characters, depicting their resistance to hegemony and the cyclical nature of poverty. "A Drug Called Tradition" compels students to see the subliminal importance of the heritage culture and of tradition. "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire" engages students in the often oppressive process of history making, exposing them both to alternate histories and ideological mechanisms that are devised to silence dissent. In "South by Southwest" students encounter the tensions of similarity and difference between an Indian and white man; tensions that are rooted in systems of tropes. "The Sin Eaters" lays bare the inhumanity of genocide, exposing how we all too often look away. In one of my favorite stories, "St. Junior," students encounter married couples that have excelled academically, "killing" the "Colonial Aptitude Test" (165) and thriving in the world off the Rez. Yet they choose to return there, and they choose each day to be with each other; they choose consciously. And in "Dear John Wayne," Etta challenges the hegemonic white male dominant voice that has come to represent "authority."

The title story from The Toughest Indian in the World takes on the unfortunate homophobia of many of my students, and does so through both shock and grace. In the story a middle-class Spokane journalist, who lives in Seattle, makes a habit picks up Indian hitchhikers, out of nostalgia and an urge to be closer to his ideal of his culture. One such hitchhiker is an especially tough street-boxer who the narrator sees as an idealized warrior-type. When, to the surprise of the students, their banter morphs into a sexual encounter, the students must contend with its spiritual significance: why the
narrator, from a salmon tribe, returns barefoot upriver to the reservation and how he has been given the gift of reconnection and identity (34).

While “The Toughest Indian in the World” inevitably exposes biases about sexuality, its power also creates dialog where students engage and acknowledge the complexity of the story. However, the greatest challenge to students is that through their strong initial responses they become implicated in the process of appropriation or stereotyping.

Occasionally Alexie’s stories depict “white” characters, such as Spencer Cox, who claim to have “authority” about Indian people. In “One Good Man,” a “Cherokee-Chocetaw-Seminole-Irish-Russian” professor, who appears primarily of European descent, repeatedly asks his class the question, “What is an Indian?” He appears to seek a specific answer (224). The professor is challenged by the protagonist’s father, a Spokane, who claims, “I can see a little bit of that aboriginal bone structure in your face, but you ain’t Indian. No. You might even hang out with some Indians or get a little of the ha-ha when one of the women is feeling sorry for you. But you ain’t Indian. No. You might be Native American but you sure as hell ain’t Indian” (228).

When the professor counters that he was at the American Indian movement occupation at Alcatraz, the Spokane father says that on that day, “I took my wife and kids to the Pacific Ocean, just off Neah Bay. Most beautiful place in the world” (228). The professor then counters with the Wounded Knee occupation: “Where were you?” The father replies, “I was teaching my son to ride his bike. Took forever. And when he finally did it, man, I cried like a baby, I was so proud” (229).
What is an Indian? My non-native students often want an answer to this, but Alexie's writing critiques the very question. Each story emphasizes the border space where identity is unstable, hybrid and multidirectional. The push and pull of students' identification with Alexie's stories and discomfort with his subversion makes his fiction especially potent for border pedagogy. As much as any book I've used in the classroom, Alexie's work has the ability to identify with and subvert its readers, assure that representations are no longer static, and no longer containable.

The final story in The Toughest Indian in the World is the funny and elegant "One Good Man." Despite the title implying there is "one," the story is virtually populated with "good men" – both Indian and white. And it is never stated who that "one" good man is. The basic framework of the story, however, depicts a son who comes back to the reservation to care for his beloved father, who is dying of diabetes, and has recently lost his feet. On impulse, the son realizes his father has never been to Mexico, and in a last-ditch effort, they decide to make the trip. His father, of course, is in a wheelchair.

In a burst, Alexie includes a mouthful paragraph in which the narrator details all one hundred and twenty-three towns they travel through before they arrive in Tecate, California, just before the border of Mexico, where their van breaks down:

"Do you believe in God?" I asked my father.
"God has lots of potential," he said.
"When you pray," I asked him, "What do you pray about?"
"That's none of your business," he said.

We laughed. We waited for hours for somebody to pick us up.

What is an Indian? I lifted my father and carried him across every border. (238)
What is an Indian? We read this story aloud on the last day of our last class. I pose this question in the final minutes, but it no longer needs an answer.
Chapter 5: Towards an Active Utopia: Truth-making in Menchú, Stoll, and the Classroom

I would like to dream together with you. I would like to dream about the future because you know all of the statistics very well. You have evaluated them, you have analyzed them and I think you have tried to find the significance regarding what all of this uncertainty in the world we share is, and what it means. The most important thing is not only to have a passive hope. We cannot just say “oh, I have great hope in the future” as if this would be a utopia, a very distant utopia. (Menchú, "Human Rights")

So said Rigoberta Menchú to former Russian President Gorbachev and other world leaders during the keynote address at the 1995 State of the World Forum on Human Rights. In this passage Menchú appeals to ideals of fraternity, then subverts her appeals by challenging the powerful forces in the room to move beyond rhetoric.

Through her call to action, Menchú has compelled many teachers, such as me, to bring the genre of Latin American testimonial literature (“testimonio”), the politics of Guatemala, and the history of U.S. imperialism into our classrooms. She arms us with a sense of struggle and, through her example, a sense of hope.

Recently, anthropologist David Stoll challenged the authenticity of Menchú’s testimony, I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian Woman from Guatemala (IRM). Stoll claims that Menchú distorted her oral testimony for political purposes and attempts to illustrate these discrepancies in his book Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans (RMSPG). Also in 1998, Menchú published Crossing Borders (CB), an account that picks up where her oral testimony leaves off. She discusses her exile in Mexico, her work lobbying for human rights at the U.N., and the complexities of the Guatemalan peace process. Considered together along with I, Rigoberta Menchú, the books fashion an intriguing matrix of truth-making—interpretations and re-interpretations that shift based
on political circumstance and personal positioning. While the resulting debate over
authenticity may complicate the job of teaching Menchú’s testimony, it similarly
provides the nub for critical praxis engaging the complex positionings of Menchú and
Stoll, as well as the assumptions and biases we—the students and teachers—bring to the
table.

Testimony as Breakage of the Frame of Death

Testimony, by its very nature, is a transgression. It is a transgression against
accepted norms of social hierarchies, conventional modes of literary production, and
hegemonic constructions of knowledge. Testimony gives primacy to the subjective, to
storytelling, and the education of experience. At once personal and political, testimony
seeks to convey lived reality as perceived by those who do not have control over the
official manufacturing of recorded history. By voicing justice due the living and the dead,
testimony provides another interpretation for the unborn.

In Guatemala, where political resistance has so often been met with death and
repression, the witness takes serious risks. The elusive act of offering one’s story to the
world becomes an ultimate human act. The testifier leaps blindfolded into an unknown
abyss of foreign culture and foreign scrutiny, and again risks their life—blindfolded—
with an outstretched hand.

Theories of testimonial literature tend to focus on the politics of production,
identity as constructed through representation, and testimony as activism on the part of
the witness and/or interlocutor. Since testimonials often depict a context of colonial
repression and resistance, the tension between precolonial cultures and colonial violence can be explicit, as in IRM. In testimony, the witness strives to convey and preserve the lifeways of a culture while documenting unspeakable violence committed against it. One of the ironies of testimony is that the witness, who is frequently illiterate in the dominant colonial language, must relay her/his story to a colonial language speaker—usually an anthropologist or journalist who tape records and transcribes the account (Beverley). Without the relative authorial control offered by conventional biography, testimony manifests as a postcolonial discourse shared by two strangers with unequal access to power. This dialectical process—replete with questions, responses and tensions—may not be reflected in the end product. In the case of IRM, interlocutor Elisabeth Burgos-Debray edits and organizes Menchú’s words, rendering her own participation as invisible, save for her introduction (Menchú, IRM ix). Therefore, there is a question as to who has authored the final product. Has Burgos-Debray usurped Menchú’s power? I agree with Foucauldian theorists who believe that power, resistance, and agency are dynamic and run both ways.

By telling her testimony to Burgos-Debray, Menchú endeavors to construct her truth as something tangible for outsiders. Before a tape-recorder, she negotiates what she believes is most urgent—opposing a genocide whose recent victims included her mother, father, two brothers, a sister in law, and members of her community. At the time she tells her testimony, Menchú does not know if two younger sisters and another brother are also dead. (They survive.) Therefore, the “truth” Menchú depicts is real and immediate, wrapped in the reality of a country at war, manifest in mass graves and memory.
Given this urgency, the contradictions that emerge reflect the stops and starts of a living negotiation of chaos. The testifier not only confronts the weight of her/his own experience, and that of her/his community, but the weight of history—a history of repression. Menchú’s testimony reflects what Giroux calls a “political position in history” that “is not a linear succession of events but a lived discourse in the contradictory and fractured constructions of time and space” (Border Crossings 213).

Given these fractures, can collective struggle be embodied within a witness’s subjectivity? How can the witness even begin to convey the enormity of the atrocities committed? Representations can never be reproductions of experience, only a shifting simulation. Because of this subjectivity, it is important to remember that when Menchú gives her testimony to Burgos-Debray, the massacres of the indigenous people of Guatemala are being intensified, are horrific, and have to stop. The shock of her experiences, and the task of attempting to convey them, must have been daunting.

While bearing witness to the outsider interlocutor, who—as in the case of Burgos-Debray—may be in a position to rally international support, the witness balances multiple identities and roles. The witness is a protagonist, victim, storyteller, and agent for change. Given these shifts and the vital importance of educating the public, Menchú’s testimony must bridge her cultural orientation with that of the interlocutor’s.

Through self-representation and cultural translation, identity is reconstructed and the testifier reaches for life, marking a decision to survive. The survivor feels “an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one’s story... . One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life” (Felman and Laub 78). Therefore,
Menchú does not testify to an empirical version of events, but to "the affirmation of survival and breakage of the frame of death" (Felman and Laub 62). The testimony she shares with Burgos-Debray delineates a rebirth.

Similarly, testimony serves as an effort to thwart future death by disseminating information in a human and immediate way. Giroux notes that narrative stories "keep alive communities of resistance while indicting the collective destruction that mobilizes racism, sexism, and other forms of domination" (Border Crossings 131). Therefore, a book like IRM serves to "rupture a politics of historical silence and theoretical erasure that serves to repress and marginalize"(125). As such, Menchú's testimony is a form of activism.

The activist nature of testimony reflects the process that Paulo Freire calls "conscientization," the process of thinking critically about identity and agency in relation to one's political circumstance. To bear witness is to transform reflection into action (Freire 111). Subjects/speakers come to feel "like masters of their own thinking by discussing their thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades" (Freire 105). When conscientization occurs, testimonio denotes a resolve to take on the psychological-historical contexts of social stratification, economic alienation, and domination that have marked the physical and mental landscapes of the oppressed. By not letting atrocities dissipate into silence, Menchú is an agent of change.

Through self-authorship, Menchú ventures to represent the struggles and realities that shape her perceptions, her truths (Thorn). "Truth" in this sense—truth through
conscientization—is living a process. By redefining her relationship to her oppressors, Menchú changes the possibilities of her world. She ceases to simply internalize oppression and begins to internalize—and externalize—her conscious resistance. However, the subjectivity of Menchú’s testimony has always been complicated by the suggestion within IRM that her experience is representative of Mayan experience:

This is my testimony. I did not learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone. I’d like to stress that it’s not only my life, it’s also the testimony of my people. It’s hard to remember everything that’s happened to me in my life since there have been many bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: my story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My experience is the reality of a whole people. (1)

When Menchú says, “my story is the story of all poor Guatemalans,” she points to the mediation of her conscientization through her relationship to her community. She does not view her transgressions as autonomous, nor as serving her individual life-purpose. The community always figures back in, or Menchú connects herself back to the community.

By asserting the communal nature of her testimony, Menchú frames it as a political act serving the functions of bearing witness, speaking her people’s history, and making their claim on the world. In this sense, Stoll’s book glosses over what is most significant about testimonio as a genre: its function as a response to over five hundred years of colonial repression of the original people of the Americas. The hegemony and hybridity of the ladino-mestizo-indigenous social structure creates not only a repressive hierarchy, but considerable confusion about identity—a sweeping rejection of ladino and mestizo indigenous ancestry. Fed by a colonial discourse of racism, masses of the
indigenous and poor in Latin America are denied political forums and institutional means of creating them. Therefore, as a transgression, testimonio finds a crack in the machine of colonialism and slips through to expose its workings. The importance of this context can not be stressed enough in any discussion of Menchú’s testimony.

Contestations and a Crisis of Truth

While Menchú’s testimony seeks to extract the substance of inconceivable historic events in a conceivable way, Stoll’s book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* seeks empirical evidence to support or refute Menchú’s claims. These are two very different kinds of truth-making. Their respective methods—the oral narrative and the scholarly investigation—may reflect their respective training and the relative immediacy of their goals. Still, both Menchú and Stoll piece together and negotiate their truths.

I would like to recognize the usefulness of Stoll’s version of truth-making for classroom purposes; the contrast between Menchú and Stoll’s truth-makings serve as a catalyst for important discussions about ways of constructing knowledge.

Stoll’s book serves as a critique of the academic left, and is therefore a provocative entry-point for reflection about ideology and author-intent. His account is a fascinating (and in turn infuriating) read. Ten years of fieldwork in Guatemala makes for a book rich with contextual information: Stoll historicizes guerrilla warfare and the shifting alliances and goals of peasant and student organizations. He provides alternate readings of Menchú’s experiences, complicating our easy empathy with her. Most compelling are the many other voices Stoll offers us. Through highlights from interviews,
we encounter people from Menchú’s village El Chimel, brother Nicolas, a follow-up with editor Burgos-Debray, and Ambassador Maxim Cujal who survives the army-induced Spanish embassy fire in which the protesters who seize the building meet a brutal death. Menchú’s father is among the martyrs.

The inclusion of new perspectives make contributions to our understanding of the turmoil and butchery that has shaped Guatemala since a U.S. supported coup in the 1950s. However, Stoll’s conversations with Menchú’s family and former neighbors, as well as officials and activists, would be more productive if presented as examples of testimonio, not as fragments pieced together for the purpose of discrediting IRM.

Stoll’s argument is three-fold: First, he challenges the postmodern notion that views “truth” as subjective, and, through a laundry list of discrepancies, aims at exposing Menchú’s truths as false. Second, he frets that teachers treat IRM as a stable, simplistic, and de-contextualized account. Most significantly, Stoll argues that in fetishizing Menchú we are not supporting the cause of “all poor Guatemalans,” but the cause of Marxist-indoctrinated guerillas. Stoll even goes so far as to assert that the Nobel Peace Prizewinner’s fame may have encouraged armed rebels in the Guatemalan highlands, therefore, prolonging “an unpopular war” (278).

The ironic title Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans, lifted from the testimony’s opening paragraph, implies that Menchú cannot possibly know the story of “all” poor Guatemalans. By taking Menchú’s statement “my experience is the reality of a whole people” (IRM 1) super-literally, Stoll rejects Menchú’s reliability. He selects versions of events that emphasize any dissimilarity between Menchú and other
“poor Guatemalans.” He contests family events, motives, and the means by which members of Menchú’s family are murdered. He challenges the chronology of her testimony and the relative poverty of her family. By splitting hairs, Stoll encourages the dichotomous notion that there can be only one “truth”: his findings or Menchú’s testimony.

Stoll seizes upon rumors that Menchú attended an undetermined number of years of elementary school at a convent. In a chapter devoted to fragmented interviews with Menchú’s alleged schoolmates, Stoll argues that while IRM “makes a few references to living in a convent and being taught by nuns” these references “are overshadowed by the repeated claim that she never went to school and learned to speak Spanish only recently” (159). Stoll resists Menchú’s ambiguity with regards to her schooling, cutting and pasting interviews in an attempt to discredit her.

RMSPG tends to break down as condemnations—and conflations—of Menchú and Marxism. Stoll feels that the inspiration Menchú begets is uninformed and that her testimonio is taught void of context and analytic engagement. By referring to Menchú as a celebrity and “the cult hero herself,” Stoll (275) suggests that academia has received Menchú with zombie-like idolization. However, I have not found this to be the case, when discussing Menchú with other educators. Rather, IRM is employed as content for critical praxis, including contextual comparison and discourse analysis, as evidenced in essays collected in editors Carey-Webb and Benz’s recent reader, Teaching and Testimony: Rigoberta Menchú and the North American Classroom.
Stoll’s particular concern is that teachers who use Menchú in the classroom have bought into a romance about the Left in general and armed rebellion in particular (277). However, he does not explain the reasoning behind his conviction that teachers use IRM to “prove that the guerilla movement had deep popular roots and was an inevitable response to repression” or why we “want to defend the Latin American left’s history of armed struggle” (276). He assumes that teachers draw conclusions as simplistic as his.

Similarly, Stoll maintains that Marxist sympathizers indoctrinate Menchú and her now deceased family. Menchú in particular is painted as an alternately shrewd and naïve puppet of the Left. Stoll would have us believe that the post-testimonio popularity of Menchú buoyed guerilla warfare in Guatemala, resulting in increased army retaliation of peasant civilians. Therefore, Stoll effectively blames the political organizer for disappearances and massacres. At once he usurps power and agency from Menchú by insisting she was unduly influenced by Marxists, and grants her disproportionate power by blaming her fame for “prolonging the war” (Stoll 278).

The dogged construction of Menchú’s guilt is reflected on the book’s cover. Menchú stands hunkered, flanked by two men, arms crossed in front of her as if they are in handcuffs. Her face looks solemn, drawn, and bitter. Above her head is a poster that repeatedly says “Guatemala, Guatemala…” and around her neck is a pendent or medal. The inside flap of the cover tells us that the photograph is of “Rigoberta Menchú at a protest over the murder of Bishop Juan Geradi, head of the Catholic truth commission.” Therefore, we are at once beholding an image of Menchú doing her work as a human rights advocate, and an image meant to simulate Menchú being arrested. In the latter
reading, the friends or body guards that are escorting her through crowds turn into policemen, the pendant becomes a symbol of the Nobel Peace Prize, the prize Stoll would have us think was awarded to an imposter.

Indeed Stoll suggests that Menchú was awarded her prize merely because she gave her oral testimony to an anthropologist. Menchú’s book Crossing Borders, however, depicts a story Stoll opts not to tell: Menchú’s pre-Nobel political service with the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples and the Unitary Representation of the Guatemalan Opposition (RUOG) at the United Nations. For years she fought for representation of Guatemalan Indians, and Indians throughout the Americas:

We looked like oddballs and were treated as such. Some officials were offhanded and rather suspicious, as if we were making things up. I think they were embarrassed for us... Others were curious to find out what we had come to the UN for. Non-indigenous friends were far and few between in those days. For many people we were insignificant, though for others we were important. People with similar causes and similar sensitivities welcomed us... (CB124)

Menchú’s lobbying efforts led the U.N. to formally recognize indigenous peoples in the Americas for the first time. Years of relentless campaigning for indigenous rights at U.N. assemblies brought international attention to a country whose majority was underrepresented. For these reasons Adolfo Perez Esquivel, the 1980 winner, presented Menchú’s candidacy at the Nobel Institute in Norway (CB 3). Even if Stoll is correct that the Quincentenary played into the decision, it is just and appropriate that the U.N. finally recognized an indigenous person’s accomplishments and the history of colonization and resistance in the Americas. That Menchú’s potent lobbying work made her a deserving candidate seems obvious. It is disingenuous to frame her as deceptive when what Menchú
is actually "guilty" of challenging hegemonic structures and trespassing rigid Western constructions of truth.

**Truth-making As Situated Representation**

At stake in the Menchú/Stoll truth-making debate are situated means of knowing and experiencing the world. Stoll's desire for the employment of empiricism is in conflict with the performative subjectivity of oral testimony.

Despite considerable scholarship on the subjective and communal nature of testimonio, Stoll asserts that they must be "reliable sources of information and representative voices for entire social classes" (12). Through this statement Stoll takes Menchú's claim of shared experience amongst "all poor Guatemalans" to an impossible extreme. His assertion begs the questions: According to who is any given testimonial "reliable" and "representative"? Through what means are witnesses to measure and quantify the perspectives of entire classes?

By bearing witness, Menchú takes on the responsibility of bringing international attention to the truth of ongoing massacres. Given the moral charge upon her, Stoll suggests that to give injustice a face, she combines her experience with the experiences of other Guatemalans *(IRM 283)*. From Stoll, this reasonable suggestion becomes weighted with the Western ideal of Truth as singular and static.

Oddly, after putting an impossible burden of proof on the testifier, Stoll proceeds to contradict Menchú’s testimony through the stories and anecdotes of other Guatemalans, as if these testaments would not be as subjective as Menchú’s. He samples
the stories of villagers who are opposed to armed struggle and who aren’t impressed with Menchú. Much like a prosecutor, Stoll carefully selects witnesses to defame his subject.

Therefore, while Stoll does make a case that Menchú is not an actual prototype for “all poor Guatemalans,” he fails to undermine her testimony that speaks to the historic experiences of many. As Stoll says himself, “There is no doubt about the most important points: that a dictatorship massacred thousands of indigenous peasants, that victims included half of Menchú’s family, that she fled to Mexico to save her life, and that she joined a revolutionary movement to liberate her country” (Stoll viii).

Finally, just as Stoll challenges Menchú’s motives and versions of events, his vision and methodology are subject to scrutiny. Why, despite ten years of field work in Guatemala, does he listen to a mere two of the eighteen hours of recorded testimony that Menchú gives Burgos-Debray? Stoll attributes his negligence to “bad planning” (188). Does he, as he accuses Menchú, construct an argument that conforms to his goals? Is his truth equally subjective? As sure as Menchú makes content choices, and Burgos-Debray makes editorial choices, Stoll selects a little bit of this and a little bit of that to reflect his positioning, his version of the truth.

For the classroom, Menchú’s and Stoll’s respective truth-making, raise profound questions about the different kinds of ways we, as people, know things, and struggle for representation of our knowledge.
Pedagogy: The Critical Encounter

As IRM asks us to imagine the substance, process, and manifestations of Menchú's conscientization, it has the potential to deepen our own—how we critically see our world, ourselves, and our interconnections with other people. Critical engagement with testimonial literature has the potential to illuminate our historical, economic, and cultural implications in each other's lives. Similarly, considering CB and RMSPG along with IRM complicates our assumptions about truth-making, creating a context for reflection about ideology, agency, and Eurocentric hegemony.

It is relevant for our students to consider that the United States, through a rhetoric of patriotism, reproduces the ideology that its residents are culturally superior and more "advanced" than the rest of the continent and the rest of the world. The assumption of domination serves to alienate us from the realities of our actual interconnections with others. Without engaging a critical praxis in the classroom, the Stoll contestations further alienate us, and confirm hegemonic paranoia about the danger of difference. However, a self-reflexive reading of IRM, offset by the critical context of RMSPG and the manifest conscientization depicted in CB, reminds us that these interconnections are metaphysical and ethical, apparent both in language and material reality; they are always in flux. To reveal them, I suggest three stages useful for a critical classroom encounter with Menchú: empathy, reflection/reflexivity, and action/activism.

Some students will be encountering Central America and indigenous issues for the first time. As several contributors in Carey-Webb and Benz's Teaching and Testimony suggest, supplemental materials such as photographs, maps, texts, and
artifacts engage the senses and provide useful openings for discussion. However, since geographical distance and the cultural decontextualization of artifacts augment the limits of these materials, Menchú’s own words offer a powerful threshold to empathy.

Through discussion, reflection papers, and questioning, students engage in a dialogical relationship with the text. They listen to Menchú’s voice and respond with their own confusion, frustration, and emotion. Through this encounter we strive to understand “how fragile identity is as it moves into the borderlands crisscrossed with a variety of languages, experiences, voices..." (Giroux, Border Crossings 175).

As students encounter Menchú’s contested representation of a historical moment, they glimpse the way one person makes truth in urgent conditions. Students engage the implications of the events conveyed in testimony, and the different ways these events have been interpreted and recorded.

It seems to me that this stage of empathy is necessary in developing a critical consciousness, even if it alone is not enough. In Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History, Felman and Laub suggests that the teacher, while reading testimony with students, helps them contextualize their own responses. By accessing their feelings of confusion and remorse the teacher takes the role of witness to the students’ responses:

I lived the crisis with them, testified to it and made them testify to it. My own testimony to the class, which echoed their reactions, returning to them the expressions of their shock, their trauma and their disarray, bore witness nonetheless to the important fact that their experience, incoherent though it seemed, made sense, and that it mattered. My testimony was thus both an echo and a return of significance, both a repetition and an affirmation of the double fact that their response was meaningful, and that it counted. (Felman and Laub 55)
Therefore, students are encouraged to internalize the text and their experiences with it. No matter the form they take, students’ experiences are affirmed by the teacher’s narration. They encounter and explore their own ideological boundaries and resistances. This too can be narrated by the teacher, noting moments of struggle and conflict—engaging students’ experiences while never insisting on a party line. Through Felman’s “return of significance,” many students will internalize the atrocities, and can begin to connect their own world with the subjectivities of Menchú’s “truth.”

This internalization serves as a catalyst to move past empathy and into a mode of critical reflection. Megan Boler argues that identification and emotional response do not necessarily create a bridge to action/activism, as these rejoinders are self-satisfying and do not challenge one’s worldview. The reader’s actual historic positioning and economic interconnections remain on the periphery of the text. For Boler, passive empathy lets us off the hook and “we are free to move on to next consumption” (164).

To move past a position of empathy and towards reflection and reflexivity, we must question our own worldviews and positioning in relation to the narrative. In what ways have our perceptions of Menchú’s experience been constructed by our ideological orientations? Do we exoticize or objectify Menchú? Does her testimony implicate our own hegemonic impulses? In what ways might it challenge our political complacency?

By bringing CB and RMSPG into the discussion, our responses are complicated as we struggle with the powers of discourse: Menchú’s, Stoll’s, and ours within the classroom. Can we get inside and outside of these discourses so as to critique our own
politics? The most difficult part of moving past empathy is self-reflexivity and ideational critique.

It is in the spirit of Freirian conscientization (the dialectic between reflection and action) that we bear witness to the struggle of others and figure in our historical, economic, and ideological positionings across the borders of that struggle. We have an opportunity to help students understand that the “relationship of history and the politics of difference is often informed by a legacy of colonialism that must be called into question so as to make visible the exclusions and the repressions that allow specific forms of privilege to remain unacknowledged” (Giroux, Border Crossings 27). Through such self-reflexivity we have an opportunity to move past the “add spice and stir” approach to multicultural education—the objectification or exoticization of difference. Objectification, after all, allows us to keep difference at arm’s length.

Herein, Giroux’s concept of border pedagogy becomes useful as it “makes visible the historically and socially constructed strengths and limitations of these places and borders we inherit and that frame our discourse and social relations” (Giroux, Border Crossings 28).

Through a multi-disciplinary approach, border pedagogy aims to understand the production of meaning, the locations and resistances of power, helping us move past undemocratic ideologies.

For Giroux, border pedagogy entails “challenging, remapping, and renegotiating those boundaries of knowledge that claim the status of master narratives, fixed identities, and an objective representation of reality” (Border Crossings 20).
How can self-reflexivity turn into action? Border pedagogy reaches its height as compassion becomes power, as the self and the other critically examine their relations and, in the interest of mutual justice and mutual respect for difference, feel a responsibility to defy the status quo. The border crosser detests exploitation and commits to global and local democracy as the sharing of power. The most critical juncture for students and teachers who have encountered Menchú’s testimony, and reflected upon it, comes in the form of transformation and action. After all, conscientization happens in the borderlands—in the fissures of contrasting realities and situated truths. As Stoll’s book demonstrates, the process of telling and reading testimony is full of pratfalls and contradictions, since testimony contends with the very subjectivity that defines it.

Menchú humanizes our praxis, Stoll complicates it, and it is our job to engage substantive discussions about the tensions.

Passive Utopia and Active Hope

I am back at the State of the World Forum with Rigoberta Menchú, Gorbachev, and rows of “mannequins.” I don’t know how seriously they’re listening to her here, but I’m going to listen, because I need to hear it from someone:

Menchú is dissuading me from empty bargaining for the future. She suggests the futility of being overwhelmed, the indulgence of paralysis. She shuns lip service to passive hope “...as if this would be a utopia, a very distant utopia... . Rather,” she offers, “I would like to share with all of you the need that we all have to dream in a concrete way and in a very direct manner...” (Menchú, ”Human Rights”)
And actively make our truths.
Chapter 6: Disruptions and Indeterminations: The Juxtaposition of Codifiers in Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s Border Art

Welcome to the Temple of Confessions!
Are you spiritually empty, sexually lonely or politically confused? Two border saints from a pagan religion recently banned in the southwest, have found sanctuary here in the virtual barrio. Once you enter this site, be prepared to confess your fears, desires, fantasies and mythologies regarding Latino and indigenous cultures. Don’t be culeros!

The above salutation is the introduction to the Temple of Confessions website created by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes. The site includes several pages of leading and sardonic questions about identity, representation, perception of the other, and nationalism. Readers are encouraged to send in their on-line responses or post them on the site as graffiti. Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes then incorporate the answers into performance characters, scenarios and skits. The purpose of the interactive site is to engage readers in a dialog about constructions of identity and the exotization of the Other, representation within popular culture, and subversion of stereotypes. The artists invite their audience and readers to deconstruct and indulge in their assumptions with humor and audacity. A dialectic space is explored, transgressing the boundaries of dominant geographical and ideological nations.

Border Art and Artists

Gómez-Peña, along with his performance colleagues Roberto Sifuentes and Coco Fusco, see neither the “dominant” nor “colonial” cultures as static. Instead these formerly monolithic categories live and breathe and influence each other, all the while interacting with diverse influences that are not easily gauged on the ethnographer’s map.
artists not only return the ethnographic gaze—taking up issues of point-of-view and of agency—but they appropriate and manipulate imposed and ironic signifiers. Underlying their work is the premise that while our conceptions of culture shift, so do our signifiers. Border artists challenge and appropriate signs and codes, rejecting deterministic notions of nationalism, culture, and power.

Through experimentation with transcultural forms, established notions of genre morph into new means of expression and critique. The hybridity of border cultures are reflected in the hybridity of border art. The word “border” in this sense works in three ways: Firstly, it is a referent to the literal borders between geographic locations. Secondly, it denotes the exploration of content concerning border themes. Finally, this content is realized through unestablished border art forms. The border artist mixes technological and performance mediums, often interweaving poetry, essay, and testimony. Western constructions of chronological or objective narrative are relinquished in favor of juxtaposition of the subjectivities that form culturally constructed identities and fragmented perspectives. Through the construction of such counter-discourse, border artists critique the notion of nation. Their art serves as zones of contact within different cultural perceptions and experiences (Pratt). As such, border art is inherently an activist art in that its very existence is a mode of resistance, both symbolic resistance (expressed through content) and literal resistance (expressed through form). These artists inhabit “a border zone crisscrossed by a plurality of languages and cultures” (Rosaldo 163).
Juxtaposing the Codifiers of Identity


These are just some of Gómez-Peña’s shifting performance identities, in which he fuses and juxtaposes codes and symbols, thereby inverting their meanings. Azade Seyhan describes Gómez-Peña’s play with identity:

[He is a] Mexican who, for the most part, lives and writes in America but is not (yet) a Chicano, maintains that living the history of border crossings, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization dismantles the core of monolithic national or ethnic identities. He sees himself as a Latin American, a Mexican, and a Mexican in the process of Chicanoization. In America, he does not have a grasp of Chicano slang; in Mexico his speech betrays patterns of pocho idiom; in Spain, he is called Sudaca; and in Germany he is mistaken for a Turk. (102)

Therefore, identity shifts in relation to context and perception; it is inseparable from place.

As a “border crosser,” Gómez-Peña individual/collective identity is not stable, but dynamic and shifting. Through his juxtaposition of codifiers Gómez-Peña resists the constraints of nationalism and essentialism. He defines his role as a performance artist in intersubjective understandings and “in terms of context-specific hermeneutic practice” (Seyhan 5).

Signifiers of these contextual relations indeed become the medium for Gómez-Peña’s art. Tangible cultural metaphors are contrasted with seemingly unrelated images from other cross-cultural contexts. Texts and contexts include, but are not limited to the junctures and collisions of: Catholicism, sexual identity, superstition, politics, and cultural manifestations like telenovelas. Language itself is a medium, especially as it takes on contextual hybrid forms that challenge and subvert colonial structures.
Gómez-Peña is especially interested in subverting and “infecting” English structures with Spanish and Spanglish, urging us to voyage into broader linguistic spectrums, inviting hybrid perspectives and possibilities. As Seyhan writes, “Wordplay and humor free all idioms from being earthbound and transport them to the realm of infinite expressibility,” as the cultural juxtapositions and spaces in between are limitless (110). It is in these spaces that Gómez-Peña experiments with dialectical forms and the phonetic structures of indigenous languages. His flight of language combined with parody and irony opens up all kinds of levels for creating new meaning, “rewriting or recasting with comic liberatory effect. Its object is another text, convention, code, or, in the broadest spectrum, discursive and nondiscursive practices” (Seyhan 110). Gómez-Peña himself describes this artistic transformation as “a level of absolute Otherness, the ultimate margin” (“Bilingualism” 152).

However, it is at this margin that Gómez-Peña places himself “in kinship with nonwhite English-speaking writers from India and the West Indies, Native Americans, and Chicanos,” who also imbue English texts with their own fusions, bi-cultural metaphors, idioms, syntax, grammar and cross-cultural allusions (“Bilingualism” 157).

Public Interventions, Reverse Ethnography, and Living Dioramas

The border as metaphor compels Guillermo Gómez-Peña to take his art out of comfortable spaces and into the less comfortable public domain. Performance in public spaces removes the elitism associated with conventional theater, transforming it into open-ended democratic dialog about border identities. Indeed, while traditional spaces are
utilized for certain performances, these artists “experiment” by interacting with an unsuspecting audience through “public interventions,” “reverse ethnography,” and “living dioramas.”

“Public interventions” involve the use of language, costumes and props. The performers situate themselves in a public spot and exaggerate cultural signifiers. An especially notorious public intervention was the “Cruci-fiction project” in which Gómez-Peña tied himself to a cross and displayed himself on a public beach, protesting anti-immigration legislation in California. As the day went on Gómez-Peña endured many insults, and because of dehydration and the pressure on his lungs, his health was in serious jeopardy. It was many hours before strangers helped him down.

Through “reverse ethnography” Gómez-Peña undermines the ethnocentric gaze. Coco Fusco describes the process as turning the gaze onto Anglo culture during performances, making Anglo reality seem strange. In one project, Fusco and Gómez-Peña worked together in a series of “cage performances” in museums, meant to undermine the spectacle of “Otherness.” Within the confines of a golden cage both wore exaggerated Amerindian attire and spoke in a nonsensical “tongues” meant to invoke Nahuatl. The “guards” informed spectators that the man and woman were examples of a tribe that had managed to remain undetected over five hundred years of colonization. When audiences learned that they were artists, many expressed disappointment (Fusco 48).

The cage became a blank screen in which audiences projected their fantasies of whom and what we are. As we assumed the stereotypical role of domesticated savage, many audience members felt entitled to assume the role of colonizer, only to find themselves uncomfortable with the implications of the game.... The central position of the white spectator, the object of these events as a confirmation of their position as global
consumers of exotic cultures, and the stress of authenticity as an aesthetic value, all remain fundamental to the spectacle of Otherness many continue to enjoy. (Fusco 47)

Such living dioramas involve live performers executing a cultural exaggeration in a bounded spot, mocking the images or discourses through which we compartmentalize others, or calling attention to injustice and culturally constructed perspectives. One example involves Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes standing in a calculated spot within the Chiapas jungle, a spot where tourists flock to experience the rainforest or “authentic” Mayan culture. To accentuate the incongruity between tourists and the environment and those living within it, the artists take on the personas of “eco-tourists.” Dressed in elaborate rain gear, they feign self-righteous horror at the cut stump of a tree. Adjusting themselves into different positions, passing tourists and local people will have to consider the links between their own reality and this living representation.

**Disrupting Cultural Reproduction**

Before I begin to discuss the concept of cultural reproduction, I would like you to consider the following quotes:

Put a stop to immigration! We have enough colored people. Require everyone to speak the native language, and in this country it’s English!! I’m not prejudiced. Don’t get me wrong. I hate everybody equally. If you don’t want to live here, you must adopt our way of life, or get the fuck out!

* * *

I would like for him (the Mexican) to rip my clothes off with a Machete, so I can bathe in chile sauce, in order for him to wrap me in a warm tortilla, so at the end he can have me with a shot of tequila.
These quotes are amongst a selection of “Internet confessions” that derive from Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes’ “Temple of Confessions” website. The first response was to the question, “Do you think that immigrants are contributing to America’s downfall?” The second responds to the following scenario: “If you had a gang member covered with tattoos, a Native American in full regalia, and a romantic over-sexualized Mexican macho dressed as a post-modern Zorro alone in a gallery, what wild fantasies would you have them reenact?” (Dangerous Border Crossers 59)

Obviously these questions are satirical and designed to elicit certain types of answers. For me, what is significant about the questions is their insistence that we look at the relationship between self and other. I am interested in how the first response reveals a common ideology of white supremacy that has long held sway in the United States (and seems to have has resurgence during the second Bush administration). The invocation of English as the “native” language reproduces a learned Eurocentric point-of-view. The pseudo-egalitarian statement “I hate everybody equally” attempts to gloss over the writer’s blatantly ethnocentric stance. The sentiments are a jargony reproduction of racist ideology—inculcated through discourse without any sign of probing into historical relations of power.

In contrast, the second response, while brimming with stereotypes, plays the game of “cultural transvestitism” (Dangerous Border Crossers ). It offers an ironic send-up of culturally constructed identities. The respondent recognizes the Internet challenge as satirical by amplifying the absurdity of essentialist discourse. The ludicrousness is expressed through the exaggeration of cultural signifiers such as machetes, chile sauce,
tortillas, and tequila. In this way the reproduction of stereotypes are ruptured, causing a breakage in the linearity of colonial discourse.

As indicated above, cultural reproduction is achieved through ideology manifested in discourse. While the second quote intentionally heightens the absurdities of over-determined identities so as to diffuse them, the first response is a clear example of cultural reproduction—phrases and ideas expressed are inculcated perceptions, pervasive within American cultural milieu. They are indoctrinated and mimicked. Gómez-Peña’s interactive border texts heighten awareness of the reproduction of culture through institutions and discourse, asking us to consider that we unconsciously repeat and enact what we have seen and experienced, too often without critical thought.

Often with or without our conscious consent, our reproduction of culture has direct implications on the power structures within our given society, both perpetuating and altering them. Those in power benefit from the status quo and have material and cultural capital invested in its reproduction. Franz Fanon and W.E.B. Dubois developed the term “double-consciousness,” holding that the marginalized class sees themselves through the eyes of the dominant group. They develop self-loathing doubt, and—like a self-fulfilling prophecy—reenact their class positions.

Cultural reproduction involves a struggle for cultural capital—indicators of legitimacy that are not physically manifested in material goods. Types of cultural capital include formal education, access to elite institutions or clubs, exposure to prestigious arts or languages, or associations with people in power. Given examples of cultural capital develop through the cultural interpretation of codes that are unique to a given place and
time. Despite the arbitrary nature of cultural capital, its power reinforces the reproduction of privileges and oppressions within a society. Because cultural capital is tied to the formal or unconscious interpretation of cultural codes and their adaptation, people often feel justified in their privileges. In this way aesthetic and political judgments are reproduced, creating a culturally constructed hierarchy, at least until they are resisted, exploded, or imploded.

Artists like Gómez-Peña show us that ideological nation-spaces, and their accompanying institutions and discourses, can indeed change over time—that there is fluidity between all peoples, their production and constructions. He points out that no deterministic or monolithic view of Mexico (especially when applied to border towns like Tijuana) have relevancy, that their constructs of identity are “involuntary postmodernism” (a phrase he uses ironically and often). Gómez-Peña explains that crossing the border from Mexico into the United States involves, in a matter of seconds, a movement from “Catholicism to Protestantism, from the past to the future, from Spanish to English, from pre-Columbian to high tech, from hedonism to Puritanism” (Warrior for Gringostroika 49).

Borderlands of Self: The Pedagogical Encounter

The fertile complexities of works of art and literature, that are or seem “other” than “oneself,” that dialogue about the borderlands of “self” vis-à-vis “other,” and the power relationships inherent in cultural/social/geopolitical/ differences, foster an awareness of empathy, and conscientization. I have found that the use of a Gómez-Peña
book or other performance text in the classroom (video, internet or actual performance) challenges students and teachers to cross linguistic borders that will decenter our voices; cultural borders which will decenter our beliefs and practices; and physical borders which will decenter our senses.

This realization of dialogue between cultural "others" is often the impetus of "real tasks, such as learning the languages, literatures, histories, and political systems of others" (Seyhan 7). In a discussion about the transnational dimension of bilingual memoirs, performance, and reflexive "auto-ethnographies," Seyhan holds that Gómez-Peña makes clear the importance of learning other languages, histories, and cultural idioms" and that such efforts are the tools for solidarity amongst groups (96). In his own words Gómez-Peña encourages travel "south and east, with frequency and humility, not as cultural tourists but as civilian ambassadors" (Warrior for Gringostroika 48).

By advocating a genuine engagement with the concrete forms of expression of other cultures, Gómez-Peña counters a hermeneutic approach where neither the anatomy nor the economy of a rhetoric of otherness has changed much since romanticism. As cultures collide, unite, and are reconciled in real and virtual space in unprecedented ways, postcolonial, migrant, and border-crossing theorists and artists fine-tune received critical traditions in order to safeguard historical and cultural specificities. (Seyhan 7)

I remind my students, that border crossing does not need to happen only in an overt context such as the US/Mexican border, but can happen within a city, a neighborhood, a block, or while moving from one conversation to another—or even while moving from one aspect of identity to another. Any coming together of two or more frames of reference constitutes the creative possibility of cultural collision.
I introduce students to Gómez-Peña, and his challenge of cultural, and physical border crossing, by presenting them with a survey he supplies at the back of his book *The New World Border*. The questions are as follows:

*Where exactly is the U.S. located?*
*In which world (or worlds) are YOU located?*
*Has your community been left out of the above categories?*
*For which world does your art speak?*
*Are you experiencing an identity crisis?*

Recently I submitted the questions to a group of twenty-five English-2 students at a junior college of the commercial arts called The Art Institute of Los Angeles. The students had not yet been introduced to Guillermo Gómez-Peña or explicitly to border theory. Below I summarize their responses to Gómez-Peña’s survey.

To question 1—"Where exactly is the U.S. located?" Although this question could be interpreted ironically or ideologically, the vast majority of the students responded through literal geographical discourse, placing the U.S. in the Northern hemisphere, south of Canada, north of Mexico, between the Pacific and the Atlantic, and so forth. However, a few challenged these bounded notions, U.S. hegemony and even the U.S. itself. Here are some of their responses:

*The U.S... located in a blue little planet...*
*According to the U.S., the U.S. is in the center of the Universe.*
*[The U.S. is located] in our minds. Because who are we to say this land is my land?*
*It’s located in the center of the world.*
*In us. We are located inside our outer shell.*
*N 18C4, P4317.*
The second question—"In which world (or worlds) are YOU located?"—produced more varied responses, embracing the interpretive challenge of the question. Here is a sampling:

* In a world of oppression
* I believe we are all in two worlds... a physical world, which we all walk through, and a world of mind where we can easily lose ourselves.
* I think this one we're on right now; but sometimes I feel I'm alone on another, all by myself.
* The world I've created through my beliefs.
* At times between the English and Spanish.
* I'm located in the world of cruelty.
* A piece of me is hopefully in all worlds.
* I am located in EARTH.
* Earth, southern California, art world, poverty world, Los Angeles world.
* Sometimes I just don't know. Planet Earth most of the time. LA LA land the rest.
* My body sits in California with CA ideals and culture. My ancestors create my other world, and my mind transcends through all my hobbies and understanding.
* I'm located in a world of my own, but forced to live in the one created by the people.
* 3rd planet from the sun.
* I live day by day.

In response to the third question—"Has your community been left out of the above categories?"—several students responded simply that no, their community has not been left out. One student responded more emphatically with "No, not at all." Two respondents said, "No, I don't think so;" one said, "at times it can be;" another replied, "sometimes;" another, "maybe" and observed that their community was not left out, even though it was the minority. Only one student said, "Yes," followed by (ironically), "I'm trying my best."
The yes or no responses raise the question of what particular community or communities the respondents saw themselves linked to, or how they were defining the word. Others questioned the definition of community:

- What is a community? "I" am left out of a lot of categories.
- Community is non-existent.

Still others refused to be limited to a narrow linkage to one community:

- No, I’m a part of all worlds.
- My community is a part of each.
- I don’t think so… They haven’t really been able to categorize us… we are too individual for that.

And finally, “Our communities have not been left out, they are a great example of what is going on!”

The fourth question—”For which world does your art speak?”—provoked philosophical responses that showed comfort with the figurative nature of the sentence. Several students responded with “my own world.” Here are some of the other responses:

- My world is created with art, art is a way to create a world and play God.
- I think my art reflects what exists in my mind-world.
- As many [worlds] as possible.
- My art speaks for the world in my head.
- For those who want to listen.
- My art speaks to the world of creation.
- All worlds…For all who see it, it will speak.
- My art speaks sincerely about anger.
- My art speaks of all worlds from the one world. I collect many different ideas from different types of people, from different types of worlds that they created.
- The world in my mind, the world I am alone on.
- The above world as seen through my eyes.
- My art speaks to the world of craziness.
- Mostly the real world. Sometimes it can be abstract.
Much of the class had one word responses to the question about identity crisis. Six respondents said “no” including one emphatic *NO!* One said *yes.* One said, “I don’t think so.” Others pondered the philosophical and shifting nature of identity. Others considered the social reality of code-switching.

* Sure...I think we all experience an identity crisis... I don’t think any of us know who we really are and how small and irrelevant we truly are.
* We all do, we are never the same person because the world is ever-changing and so are we. So yes, I am.
* Yes, I don’t know what society wants me to be.
* Sure. Schizophrenia lives in everyone. Everybody has at least two sides. One professional, one casual. Some have more and few are like me.
* I contradict myself, sometimes I don’t.
* Not anymore.
* Hell no, but this is because I like to make my mind go places, so I won’t have one.

After collecting and reading the survey, I anonymously shared the answers with the class and opened the room for their reactions and questions. Quickly discussion shifted to a multinational dialog where students lay claim to their various identities: ethnic, cultural, and individual, debating and negotiating their relationships. Through conversation, students began to see themselves both as citizens of the world and as global border-crossing citizens. I asked students if, due to globalization, these multiple identities were in hegemonic conflict. Opinions varied, but what was really exciting was that by implicating themselves in the negotiations and juxtapositions of cultural spaces, students quickly obtained a keener understanding and investment in the shifting questions of “self” and “other.”
After discussing the survey, I exposed students to the readings and performance texts from Gómez-Peña and found they were much more receptive and prepared after a brief border crossing themselves. The survey helped students to move “inside and outside” of the texts, as more than spectators, questioning the relations of culture and cultural codes that help construct the ways we read ourselves and our world.

Through the juxtaposition of codifiers, Gómez-Peña’s border art aims to disrupt monolithic notions while generating a binational dialogue and new cultural spaces. As Gómez-Peña demonstrates in his work, border crossings are a contemporary and increasingly universal experience, full of rupture and disjuncture. His writing and performance texts help students gain awareness of these spaces and some choose to lay claim to their ambiguity, adapting the concept of “borderlands” as a place of ambiguity and possibility, where identity is neither determined or determining, but a site of resistance and transformation.
PART III: COURSES THAT EXPLORE BORDER SPACES

In this section I provide an overview and analysis of three courses that were designed for students to explore border spaces: Contemporary American Indian Literature course, Critical Thinking with teacher Jennie Wadsworth, and The Arts in Society. In the first section, “Straddling the Institution: American Indian Literature and Critical Thinking,” I contextualize these two courses within the school where they are taught, while demonstrating how they both fulfill and subvert expectations in a for-profit career-oriented college environment. I focus on how the courses are taught with the aim of critical border pedagogy by addressing prior constructions of knowledge and challenging them with counter-discourse and alternate perspectives.

In the chapter “Public Voices, Public Space: The Arts in Society” I offer an in-depth look at my course, The Arts in Society, which aims to address strategies for dialectic conscientization through activist and conceptual art, as well as the relationship between art and democracy.
Chapter 7: Straddling the Institution: American Indian Literature and Critical Thinking

The Institutional Context

The courses explored in this section are taught at The Art Institute California–Los Angeles, a for-profit educational institution awarding associate and bachelors degrees in the commercial arts, including Media Arts and Animation, Graphic Design, Video Production, Multimedia (Internet), Interior Design and Culinary Arts. At the time of this writing the school has 1664 students. Students must fulfill seven General Education courses, including a required College English course. The three courses discussed in this and the following chapter are all electives.

The school is part of a system of schools owned by Education Management Corporation and is publicly traded. Having worked for both the Los Angeles and Philadelphia branches and having served on several “system-wide” committees, I can say that there has always been a tendency towards a “vocational” mentality on the part of the corporation, and traditionally the General Education courses have been designed as classic examples of “banking education.” Within the company and school culture, there is a natural tension about being both a for-profit publicly traded company and an educational institution. This dichotomy manifests through efforts to pack classes, focus on generic “standards” and, as a career-school, a push to train students for “entry-level employment” even if that sometimes results in “dumbing down” the curriculum. At the same time, there will be system-wide initiatives for “excellence” without critically examining the problems inherent in the institutionalization of banking education.
Fortunately, at the Los Angeles branch we have an administration that supports the resistance of the banking model, and understands that creating employable students in the commercial arts and running a successful “business” does not have to be at odds with meaningful, challenging, and dynamic classroom learning. In a collaborative effort we have created a General Education department that works to defy the banking model and, as a result, have little of the students distaste for “general” classes that other schools in the system do. The Los Angeles branch actually created the following mission statement and has been sharing them with the other “regional” schools in the system.

Mission Statement

The General Education Department at The Art Institute of California–Los Angeles aims to provide the students with rich and diverse process-based learning experiences, which will deepen their critical thinking skills and creativity during their years with the college, and beyond.

Our overall curriculum, which includes electives in numerous areas, emphasizes the critical, social, and creative imagination that we believe accompanies each student to the classroom. While drawing on students’ perspectives and experiences, we expose them to wide-ranging cultural, social, historical, and political contexts, often making connections across traditional academic disciplines. Since we believe our students will take an active lead in shaping the culture and politics of the future, we make every effort to expose them to multiple perspectives, different modes and mediums of expression, and democratic processes. All the while our program emphasizes depth as well as breadth, pushing students to take on new and challenging contents with increased rigor and curiosity.

Our pedagogical approaches stress diversity, respect, fairness, and a love of learning. We believe that students from all backgrounds bring a multitude of skills, experience, and types of intelligence to the table. In an effort to reach each student, our classes facilitate active learning through numerous sensory approaches, including student-led teaching and presentations, large and small group discussions, the development of analytic and creative questioning techniques, collaborative hands-on projects, research skills utilizing alternative as well as mainstream sources, the integration of different visual mediums and technologies as modes of expression, and process writing and reading, further facilitated by our
Writing Center. We aim for students to become self-aware about different learning processes and of models for probing and rigorous, yet respectful, discussion and exploration.

Ultimately, we believe a meaningful education in the letters, arts, and sciences will directly infuse the knowledges gained in the students’ major. We believe the studies in our program lead to an ability to make connections between diverse ideas and contexts, advanced problem solving skills, innovation, cultural enrichment, and ultimately meaningful and satisfying employment in the students’ chosen major. Our hope is that the concepts, skills and habits of minds learned in our classrooms, will lead to a future where students increasingly challenge themselves creatively and intellectually, collaborate with individuals from different backgrounds, effectively communicate complex ideas, understand their work in a historical continuum and global context and, most importantly, feel empowered to live a life of passion nurturing work they love.

Therefore, although we still have the institutional restraints of course times, class size, accreditation issues, system-wide course titles, institutional outcomes, and the occasional “initiative” from Educational Management, we also have engendered an environment with considerable academic freedom and, I have found, fruitful for experimenting with border pedagogy. The fact that we are located in a diverse city with proximity to the border of Mexico allows us relevant contexts that go beyond institutional restraints.

I particularly enjoy the student body at AICLA. The students come from just about every imaginable background and ethnicity, with the majority of the students being college-aged. The Art Institute Franchise tends to attract bright students with an artistic talent or interest, who are often labeled too “academically under-prepared” to attend traditional colleges or universities. Rather, students often enroll in our school to avoid traditional academics and standardized entry requirements.
Overwhelmingly, our students enter interested in technology with a resistance to "general" classes, and are not active or experienced readers. During each literature class that I teach, several students claim to be reading their first novel cover to cover. Therefore, one of the joys of working at AICLA is introducing students to the experience of reading, as well as drawing out and affirming their considerable intellectual abilities.

I shall now discuss, within the context of the institution, the courses Contemporary American Indian Literature and Critical Thinking. The shared objective of these two courses is to provide forums and devise techniques to explore, along with the students, ideas related to social inequities, tensions and justice, including democratic-practice-as reflexive critical thought, political engagement and free-expression through the arts. The praxis of border pedagogy in these courses allows students and teachers to (begin to) bridge the varying gulfs that divide geopolitical and conceptual borders.

Since the course Contemporary American Indian Literature is one I developed myself (a sub-heading under the institutional heading "Genre Fiction"), I shall draw on the theories I used developing the course, my assignments and responses from students. My conclusions about Critical Thinking, taught by instructor Jennie Wadsworth, are drawn from several class observations, access to Jennie’s materials, and an interview with Jennie about the course.

After discussing the respective courses' analytical frameworks, assignments and goals, I will include sections on "What Happens in This Class." My conclusions are not based on studies, but impressions and generalizations informed by years of participatory
Contemporary American Indian Literature

I shall open my discussion of courses designed with border pedagogy in mind with my course, Contemporary American Indian Literature. My goals for this course go further than facilitating a survey of contemporary Native writers. Instead I aim for students to re-evaluate their notions if geography, history, identity, and self and other, specifically with regards to the ongoing colonial processes in America. My strategies are designed for us to discover shifting patterns of negotiation and resistance both within texts by Native writers and within ourselves – to challenge perceptions and knowledge bases about the role of Indian people in America’s past, present and future.

Analytical Framework for Contemporary American Indian Literature

I can best describe the pedagogic framework I try to use as an analytical post-colonial lens combined with a self-reflexive position. Pedagogically, I aim for students to read “the world” as well as “the word” (Freire and Macedo). Personally, I must consistently critique my role as a primarily Anglo instructor and not unconsciously recolonize the literature with outsider interpretations of culture.

First, a brief note about post-colonial literatures. Generally the term “post-colonial literature” applies to writers from countries where the colonial or imperial powers have had to relinquish control, or where the colonial period has ended, and a
period of social, personal, political and identity struggle ensures. However, given the reality of Indian Reservations, the ongoing role of the BIA, and continuing land disputes, it could be argued that Indian people are still struggling within the colonial period. However, even though contemporary American Indian literature is written during some degree of ongoing colonialism it has, as Krupat suggests, "the look of postcolonial fiction, [it] performs ideological work that parallels that of postcolonial fiction elsewhere" (32). Like the postcolonial literature of the Caribbean or India, American Indian literatures are concerned with themes of language-loss, diaspora, resistance, hybridity, and self-determination for the future.

In general, postcolonial fictional texts and analysis offer a powerful tool in understanding turbulent global culture in a new millennium of neo-liberalism. This meaningfully applies to the texts of indigenous writers in our own postcolonial—or ongoing colonial—context, who often frame the larger American culture in terms of turbulent colonization and globalization. In a classroom, through a critical postcolonial approach, we are able to explore the many dimensions of Native writing, while critiquing the constructed boundaries of larger systems and our own roles as we unconsciously participate or consciously transform hegemonic relations.

Although novels and stories are the core texts, the course is taught from a multidisciplinary perspective, including readings from the disciplines of history (primarily drawn from Native perspectives), education, and the social sciences. My analytical framework was formed by my studies in postcolonial literature and cultural studies, and perhaps most significantly, through the perspectives shared with me while
studying at The American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI) at The University of Arizona in 1999. AILDI's goal is to help "incorporate Indigenous linguistic and cultural knowledge in school curricula," preparing Native teachers and parents to "become researchers, practitioners, bilingual/bicultural curriculum specialists, and effective language teachers" (AILDI). The fact that I was not a Native teacher, but still allowed to participate in the program, created a powerful immersion experience for me, deepening my understandings, or at least appreciation, of the diverse voices and experiences of American Indians, and my own unconscious role in the colonial process. The experience helped me clarify that my interest in American Indian literature, and small amount of Cherokee heritage, did not entitle me to claim expertise or any bounded knowledge of diverse Indian perspective. I came to recognize that I could best serves as an outsider with a commitment to social justice, a interest in stories that needed to be told, and a belief that histories and stories of multiple perspectives were in the interest of all of our citizenship.

Most of the other AILDI students approached me and the other non-Indian participants with a mixed degree of acceptance (or tolerance) and suspicion. While the suspicion lessened over time, it was important for me to see the manifestation of cultural pride and self-determination possessed by these Native educators, and to come to have some understanding of their boundaries. The experience led me to feel a sense of responsibility for the ongoing hegemonic colonial structures that all immigrants to the United States have experienced. And, of course, Native people aren't immigrants at all.
Therefore, the idea of border pedagogy and border theory is complicated through this course in interesting ways. From the outset, the subject begets the issue of self-determination within native cultures and conversations about Indian resistance of European-American world-views. Sometimes the process of self-determination involves the conscious choice of Native groups or individuals to keep geographical, cultural, and linguistic borders closed. This is because the hybrid global influences within their cultural lives denote a slow death to the beliefs, traditions and knowledges that many have fought hard to maintain while under the ongoing subjugation of intrusive colonizing forces. Therefore, with Contemporary American Indian Literature, a new question about borders emerge—that sometimes one must respect cultural borders as part of the process of self-determination and decolonization. Although most of this dissertation has focused on border pedagogy has a process of crossing, participating in AILDI and teaching Contemporary American Indian Literature, suggests that the crossing of borders, and the way they are crossed, are contextual and reflexive, sometimes resulting in certain borders remaining, respectfully, closed.

As a "white" person with only a small amount of Indian heritage, it is important I define my relationship to the subject matter and literature with my students, so as not to re-colonize it. As Duane Champagne asserts in the essay "American Indian Studies is for Everyone," "as guests, scholars must respect community rules and desires to protect certain information from public view... Scholars, Indian and non-Indian alike, must respect such wishes" (183). Or, as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn writes, "how the Indian narrative is told, how it is nourished, who tells it, who nourishes it and the consequences
of its telling are among the most fascinating – and, at the same time, chilling stories of our time” (111). Therefore, an important challenge in teaching and participating in the class is to let Native stories and perspectives be the basis for learning—not an outsider’s interpretation of culture, a need to understand or totalize it, or even a need to identify with it. However, our own role in what stories are listened to, how we choose to listen, and what we choose to do with these new perspectives and stories are very important indeed, and this is how we can be agents. Furthermore, we can be agents by problematizing mainstream understandings of indigenous and colonial relations; we can nourish a sensibility of reflexivity about the past in this country, its impact on the present, and ways the past, present and future inter-relate.

Course Assignments and Goals for Contemporary American Indian Literature

By exploring contemporary Native texts, such as Louise Erdrich’s Tracks, N. Scott Momaday’s House Made of Dawn, Sherman Alexie’s Toughest Indian in the World, collected poems by Simon Ortiz, Joy Harjo and Laura Tohe, and essays by Vine Deloria Jr., Leslie Marmon Silko, and Tsianina Lomawaima, we are examining how storytelling recovers and revitalizes broken histories, linguistic and otherwise—reinventing and repossessing in the process. We are exploring hybrid identities and interconnections between cultures, as well as humanizing as demystifying “the Other.”

One concrete goal I have for the course is to critique the “ethnographic gaze” in which the dominant classes marvel at the “culture” of objectified “others.” Through the lens of this gaze Western literature is compared to the literature of “the developing
world.” The art created by socially constructed “Others” is seen as simple in form and theme, essential (concentrated) and “primitive”—interpretations that emphasize the self/other dichotomy. Through the “ethnographic gaze” non-Western artists can be safely admired without reflexive historical and cultural consideration. Romantization and essentialism are effective approaches for the nation-state’s consumption and oversimplification of the literature and art of colonial “Others.”

People in metropolitan centers classify themselves as civilized, in contrast with Indians and cultural minorities, who are cultural not “rational.” To the ethnographic gaze, “civilized” people appear too transparent for study; they seem just like “us”—materialistic, greedy, and prejudiced. Because “their” worlds are so down-to-earth and practical, “our” commonsense categories apparently suffice for making sense of their lives. (Rosaldo 199)

Through the ethnographic gaze, cultural and literary texts become signifiers of the hegemony implicit in nationalism. Therefore, an important goal is to turn the gaze onto ourselves with regard to history and current power-relationships. Therefore, in addition to the degree to which the literature naturally opens up these questions, the course includes outside content with regards to colonial relations. We learn about major figures such as Sitting Bull and Chief Joseph, the battle of the “Greasy Grass” (more commonly known as “Custer’s Last Stand”), the massacre at Wounded Knee, the origins of the distorted “Old West” story fashioned in the Buffalo Bill show, the impact of government boarding schools, the structure of the BIA, the American Indian Movement, and the ongoing efforts to release Leonard Peltier from prison. What is important for students’ border crossing is that they do not learn these topics through top-down lectures from me, but through their own research, resulting in each student “teaching the class.” As
individual students execute their interactive lesson plans, I function as a question-asker and student problem-poser, only when necessary, urging self-reflexivity and analysis of my own self-positioning as an Anglo teaching a course on American Indian Literatures.

Through the course, each student "teaches" the class on one of the subjects above or on one of the authors we are reading. Each student also develops questions to pose to the class as discussion leaders for our readings. In all cases, I push students-as-teachers to research texts written by Indian people, so as not to reproduce hegemonic history-making. Through this process students make their own knowledge by dialoging with Native perspectives, challenging their assumptions with new voices and contexts.

Writing assignments include the following:

1) An essay called, "Who am I in the Era of Globalism and Postcolonialism?" in which students situate themselves both historically and personally. This is the first assignment, so they can see the ways we are all in some ways implicated in historical processes.

2) An essay on one of the literary texts, focusing on a postcolonial themes such as language loss, resistance, hybridity, decolonization and identity politics. Often these themes are most apparent to students after reading Tracks or The Toughest Indian in the World.

3) A short story that encourages students to experiment with the writing strategies and themes of one of the writers. This assignment is meant to provoke the moral imagination and to make connections between cultures, as the story does not have to be about Indian characters. I urge students to explore postcolonial themes from a first-person, cultural and often dynamic and ambiguous perspective, emphasizing themes of hybridity, ambivalence, testimonio, diaspora, solidarity and difference.
What Happens in Contemporary American Indian Literature

Of course, much of what is known about the colonization of the Americas and its impact on indigenous people is generated by non-Indians. Shockingly, I find many students believe Indian people no longer exist or no longer thrive, so part of the goal of the class is to erase that invisibility by experiencing Native perspectives ranging from Vine Deloria Jr. to Laura Tohe to Sherman Alexie—both their individual and cultural specificities and human universalities.

Narratives that fill in spaces which counter what we have commonly learned in school, surprise and confuse my students. Often there is a healthy period of suspicion as old master narratives begin to crumble and students and teachers question why certain narratives, such as the more obvious celebrations of Columbus and Thanksgiving, pervade our national discourse. In the case of Contemporary American Indian literature, these also signify a glossed over and under-discussed ongoing cultural and physical genocide. Border praxis asks us to locate what perspectives have been silenced and watered down.

The body of literature itself suggests a world of struggle, multiplicity, ambivalence and resistance, not consensus and coherence. Characters, such as in Erdrich's book Tracks, struggle between various codes and tropes: traditional culture, empire, and Catholicism. Erdrich’s book is necessarily dialogic between the two narrators, Nanapush and Pauline, who are allegorical for the tensions produced by these struggles. Sometimes the irreverent but relatively traditional Nanapush’s language is bilingual and even Pauline, who so deeply internalizes the colonial culture, continually
returns to indigenous tropes, even as she consciously tries to reject them and "kill" the Indian part of herself.

Students struggle to understand the literature as being interlingual and intercultural – forming an imaginative synthesis of dialogic and co-existing languages and cultures. However, as Seyhan suggests, this is an important struggle:

Modern narratives of migrancy, exile, and displacement have generated new epistemologies of bilingualism, language change, and translation. [There is] enormous potential of this supplement of imaginative knowledge in the classroom. To access the many forms of knowledge produced by modern diasporic voices, we need to approach their cultural productions not as token representations of a ghettoized aesthetics, but as complex signifying systems that demand for their comprehension a cultivated sense of cultural history and an understanding of theories of representation. In the interlinked spaces of language, memory, and imagination, these voices reclaim cultural heritages whose emotional and intellectual force had been suppressed by a mono-cultural parochialism that masqueraded as successful acculturation. (20)

Although difficult and sometimes emotional (a few students have proclaimed the Native people should "get over it"), most students are able to see, by the end of the class, Indian people as diverse and dynamic, as a ongoing powerful collective infused with individual voices to be woven into our own personal sense of history-making. They are also struck by the strong sense of community in many tribal texts. Floyd Red Crow, a American Indian Movement activist and actor, who has come to my class, emphasizes that "we are all related." Through problem-posing, students also engage their own unconscious complicity in the erasure of Indian people in our collective consciousness. Interestingly, many Latino students develop a new awareness of their own indigenous roots, which many never previously considered. This realization by Mexican, Central and South American young people is significant for building solidarity with Native
groups in support of self-determination, land rights, and revision of the media and marketing of American Indian cultures. Since most of our students at The Art Institute will go on to careers as media-makers, my hope is that they will leave the class with a more complex understanding of who they are and of the ruptures, boundaries, and shifting dynamics that shape what America was and what it can be. I hope they diversify previously monolithic representations.

American Indian literature is a testament to 500 years of resistance to European colonization, genocide and continued marginalization. Border Pedagogy stands as a process allowing for the reflexivity of all Americans about our current post-colonial, even colonial, condition and the agency and sovereignty of Native peoples. Prior to the construction of fences across the Americas, and the demarked borders between land owners, towns, counties, states and federal jurisdictions, Indian people experienced land as a continuum. My hope is that border pedagogy helps students restore a sense of the continents’ wholeness, while urging us to engage the issues of respect and sovereignty that come with border crossing, and coming to understand that sometimes, we can not cross.

Critical Thinking

The preceding pages have explored the pedagogical aim of working with students to transform into critical and creative active citizens while overcoming a defused sense of individual agency constructed in over-determined notions of history and representation. A major theme has been how our institutionalized and compartmentalized society
(Whitman’s “philosophies, religions” and “lecture rooms”) serve to construct docile and defused adults:

I suspect that many people who have had their education in the same period as I, will recognize the sense of personal defeat I have in mind. We learn to tolerate, like a low flame on the fire or a low fever in the body, a reasonable temperature of admitted cynicism. We learn to feel that it is not intolerable to “be” self compromised if one is open and amusing in the discussion of the matter; or that cynicism charmingly admitted to and interestingly described, in some sense cancels itself out. It is not corrupt so long as a person is perceptive and articulate concerning his corruption. At this point, as we know, the world becomes a distant and quite bearable designation, one scarcely having to do with our own being any longer. (Kozol, The Night is Dark175)

The location of political apathy and cynicism can be, at least partly, traced to the indoctrinating and compartmentalizing effects of our schooling. However, as students themselves are quick to point out, other institutions work in tandem with our education system. Advertising distracts us from real issues and problems, while the media offers us “mindless shows that socialize the viewer to become a passive consumer” (Chomsky 25). Increasingly, at the time of this writing, much of the news has become a propaganda machine for the war and occupation efforts of the current Bush administration. Coverage of dissent is rarely found in the mainstream media, offered occasionally in sound bites, or spectacularly reviled on shows like FOX’s “The O’Reilly Factor” or “Hannity and Colmes,” or MSNBC’s “Scarborough Country.”

In this vein, Chomsky suggests that we have only an illusion of a democratic framework; that participation is kept at a minimum though distraction and control of public participation: “In our democracy, every so often, the members of the ‘bewildered herd,’ are allowed to participate in endorsing a leader through what is called ‘election.’
But once they endorse one or another member of the specialized class, they have to retreat and become once again spectators" (23). The instruments of the State that does "public relations" serve ultimately to cripple democracy by providing an illusion while not genuinely engaging the public or facilitating a structure for true shared power through a diversity of voices.

However, as teachers who have an impact on students we must believe and model that the public does have the potential to transform these communication methods and gain more agency in a more genuinely democratic process, and to indeed help make it genuinely democratic. For us as teachers, the question then becomes: How then can we help students resist being part of the manipulated "bewildered herd" and facilitate a zone of active moral/social/political empowerment? How do we help move students to assume "the ability and the right to name and thus to name and own the future?" (McGowan 91)

These are the questions that propelled teacher Jennie Wadsworth to design a class to help students cross ideological boundaries and inculcated notions of history. Instead, he class is designed to engage students in democratic practice.

Analytical Framework for Critical Thinking

Here is Jennie's stated framework for her section of Critical Thinking, as described in her syllabus:

History tends to be told from the perspective of the winners, the rich and powerful of any given society; this shaping of the past usually simplifies conflicts and glorifies leaders. In this course we will look at events, people, and movements in 20th century U.S. history from multiple perspectives and ask critical questions: how our history should be written, whose stories should be told, and whose perspectives are left out.
Students will engage in activities that put them beyond the role of passive receiver of information and into decision makers, ones who analyze information and synthesize their own perspectives on U.S. history. As a base text we will use Howard Zinn's *The Twentieth Century: A People's History* to launch into our journeys of the United States' multi-layered past and use our developing critical thinking skills to evaluate our present and prepare for our future.

At AICLA and other institutions I have seen instructors and administrators interpret Critical Thinking courses as venues to teach formal "logic" or formulaic patriarchal problem-solving. I would argue that these "logic" courses about "objectivity" don't go far enough in helping students become reflexive, much less penetrate the master-narratives that structure society. Instead, Jennie Wadsworth's approach is to challenge socially constructed master narratives, to deconstruct assumptive perspectives, and encourage students to enter in to history-making.

In an interview Jennie explained her analytical framework for the class:

> The plan is to teach students to question what they read and hear, to challenge assumptions, to analyze language. I start with lessons on passive voice and word choice... move to idea of hero-making and how people are represented in history... and then focus on events (wars, economic crises, scandals) as a way of seeing history from many perspectives. We end by analyzing current events, using our understanding of history to analyze the present.

The focus on deconstructing the passive voice urges students to see that they are not outside of history, but inside of it, making it—that history is a dynamic of multiple layers and perspectives. It can't be sufficiently nut-shelled in text books, but occurs in the tensions of conflicting and overlapping sources of memory and experience.

Jennie's hopes to facilitate democratic practice by:

1) engaging students in both history and current events because through the course they explore frameworks of knowledge to apply to these
subjects; 2) with their constructed understanding of the ways governments make decisions, the way citizens in the past have participated, they will have a stronger sense of their ability to enact change on their worlds and 3) with their exposure to critical perspectives on the government, big business, and the corporate media they will be motivated to make their voices heard. (Wadsworth, Interview)

In this way students transgress borders of thought, moving from passive acceptance or rejection of the information they receive to becoming active questioners. Jennie explains, “I want them to redefine their role from consumers of education and information to participants and agents of change. I want to facilitate a movement from leaning back to reaching forward and grabbing.”

Jennie’s framework draws on the theories of Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, but just as importantly, her own process of conscientization:

I am motivated by my own ignorance and my own experiences in history class, feeling totally disconnected to the subject. It wasn't until I had a sense of myself as an agent with the power to enact change on my community/country that I came up with the idea of critically looking at versions of history. I had to first develop a critical perspective on capitalism and patriarchy to feel I could participate effectively. (Wadsworth)

A formative analytical goal of the class is to decenter previous assumptions about sanctioned monolithic notions of “objectivity” or “truth” that students are likely to have been indoctrinated to accept through media and learning institutions. This is often challenging as the assumptions are shared by millions. However, during my visits to Jennie’s class, I found that implicit in the Critical Thinking course is the question: How can objectivity be possible when so much of culture and history is in the borderlands, when our subject-positions are always changing? Exploring multiple perspectives of culture and history will reveal that neither culture nor history is coherent or homogenous.
By urging multiplicity and a cross-cultural focus, Jennie is inviting her critical thinkers to develop a more dimensional approach than the social science fields have commonly accepted. The emphasis on knowledge about history shifts from a hegemonic series of accounts about military and political victories to an account of the "intersubjective relations" that inevitably come into play, providing a fuller and more complex picture" (McGowan 91).

**Assignments and Goals for Critical Thinking**

Early in the class students are supplied with examples of historical materials from multiple perspectives in an effort to explore power relations and issues of class at the structural and systemic levels. The bulk of the class is then structured around Jennie’s students reading and discussing the complete text of Zinn’s *The Twentieth Century: A People’s History*. Throughout the duration of the course, students are asked to develop and pose their own critical questions about tensions and ideological borders in divergent perspectives of history, to which they’ve been exposed. This questioning occurs both in class and during on-line forums to extend beyond the boundaries of the classroom. The two major assignments, as indicated on Jennie’s syllabus are as follows:

1) A New Chapter in History: Applying your critical thinking skills, you will choose a topic in 20th century U.S. history to learn about and write about. Your big creative decision will be to choose how this story should be told in an interesting and informative way that reflects your sense of what is important in history. 5 pages with documented sources and a works cited page. You may write about the same topic that you will be teaching the class or a different one.

2) History Manifesto: In this last assignment, you will make a case for how you think U.S. history should be written. You will describe your
personal experience with U.S. history as a student, your experience with
the United States as a citizen or visitor, and your argument for what
perspective you took in your U.S. history chapter. 3 pages with any
outside sources documented.

Both the “Chapter in History” and “History Manifesto” are activities to help students
cross from passive to active learners – agents who are not outside of the process of
history-making, but are engaged in its process.

What Happens in Critical Thinking Class

Jennie Wadsworth models the type of interaction that is vitally important to a
democracy. She never claims that a given perspective is the right or absolute one, but
pushes students toward critical interpretation. More than once I have seen Jennie share
her own perspective, but it is always framed as being just that, a perspective, which is
informed by given specific events, and personal experiences, which she also shares. She
is conscious of her potential role as an education “banker” and resists it. Through sharing
her own conscientization as narrative, Jennie is not only urging students to voice their
own perspectives, but contextualize their thinking in new contexts as well as already
lived experience. Students can begin to not only voice views, but question their origins.

I have seen the class be truly transformative to students, as they find their voices
and sense of agency. Jennie also has found the class to be personally transformative,
explaining in our interview: “I am much more aware now about how political teaching is
and how the classroom has the potential to change lives. I now understand how crucial it
is to put all of our teaching decisions both method and content into a context and tell our
students what we are doing and why.”
Engaged in the process of critical history-making, Jennie’s Critical Thinking students are awake. The tide of apathy transforms into a space of possibility:

I am alive right now. I see the world around me. I see much the world around me. I see much that is unjust and evil. I have the power to change it. (Kozol, The Night is Dark 115)

Conclusion

In both Contemporary American Indian Literature and Critical Thinking, students engage in contrapuntal reading (Said), to uncover political and cultural assumptions of imperialism in canonized American and European texts. Instead, both Jennie and myself urge students – and push ourselves – to broaden our individual and collective sense of inquiry and notions of geographical/ideological borders through encounters with counter discourse. Through contact with counter-discourse, we hope to challenge colonial and nationalistic assumptions through the juxtaposition of voices powerful testimony and hegemonic resistance.
Two years ago, I sat with my colleague Jennie Wadsworth in the lunchroom discussing the issue of helping students feel politically empowered. At that time, my colleague and I were in the “now what?” phase of our teaching careers. We both felt we were successful at helping students identify social problems and analytic questions, and even felt confident in our ability to help them feel inspired for given moments in time. However, what we did not feel fully equipped to do was create a context to help students reach the next stage—the stage of conscientization, where they had tools to take action on their beliefs and facilitate an ongoing relationship between reflection and action. Too often when faced with questions of “What are solutions?” or “What can we do?” my colleague and I not only lacked answers but even the tools for exploration. Therefore, no matter how satisfying or successful our classes may have seemed on the surface, we were hitting a wall.

We too did not always know how to take action beyond our role as teachers and beyond rote actions like writing to Congressional representatives. Bottom line, we needed to expand our own notions of possibility. As a result, my colleague, Jennie Wadsworth, created her Critical Thinking course, discussed above, and I created the course, The Arts in Society, since I always believed in the transformative nature of art. Although The Art Institute is an art school, it focuses on the commercial art and there were no classes on activist art or that overtly looked at the relationships between art, democracy and engaged citizenship. Therefore, my intent was that this course would not focus on a passive artistic appreciation, but address ways the arts can consciously and
actively interject dialog into the public arena. The formal description of the course is as
follows:

**The Arts in Society** examines the ways the arts (including fine arts, theater, dance, music, digital media, and experimental performance) influence and are influenced by the values and institutions that shape contemporary society. We will consider the cultural, political, and economic boundaries of the arts as a social force. Students will study the ways individual artists challenge the conventional boundaries of art and how artists interact with government, foundations, and grassroots organizations. Students will also explore how the practice of creating and sharing art can help to enact social change.

From its inception, the course The Arts in Society was implicitly concerned with citizenship, identity politics, the multiplicity of perspectives and communicative forms. I began to draw on my interest in conceptual and activist art and consider the value to its pedagogical content. After all, conceptual and activist art crossed interdisciplinary boundaries and at least attempted to be free from traditional institutionalized restraints, encouraging border crossing. As my thoughts on the course evolved, I was able to identify my true goal as being the creation of a context for students to learn the skills necessary to cross borders in the public sphere using the activist arts.

The public sphere is a site for discourse, a site that can be transformed into an alternative nation-space, a space of possibility and multiplicity. Such discourse is framed in the classroom as "democratic practice," breaking old institutional frameworks to allow new voices and hybrid perspectives. The public sphere has several analytic components: "the state, the official economy of paid employment, and arenas of public discourse" (Fraser 75). All three of these components will be important as I discuss the course and its pedagogical underpinnings.
Although we are protected by the first amendment, a combination of the state and private industry govern many of the arenas of the public sphere, where we can and cannot voice our perspectives, engage new discussions and challenge our public policy. Mediums like newspapers are commercial and ideological ventures. Additionally, the state has limited funding for the arts via grants and school or community-based outreach initiatives. State funding is subject to political mores, trends, and decency clauses. Most art is funded via the private sector through traditional foundations, private galleries, and of course the vast worlds of commercial art, ranging from popular music to advertising.

As I have explained above, The Art Institute is a for-profit college that offers associate and bachelor degrees, focusing on the economy of paid employment. With the course The Arts in Society, it is my hope to bridge the boundaries of the public sphere as controlled and defined by both the state and the economy of paid employment, by introducing students to new arenas of public discourse through the conceptual and activist arts. We try to bridge and examine analytic categories by studying the interconnected roles of the state and the economy in the production of public discourse in the forms of public, performance, conceptual, and activist arts.

Before discussing the course as such, I will frame its analytical underpinnings:

a) the town square as public sphere;

b) the dialogic relationship between the state, private industry and the arts;

c) students as border crossers engaged in democratic practice.
The New Town Square as Public Sphere

The public is not a monolithic thing as it is made up of many individuals and groups, and their own unique experiences and perspectives. Therefore, the concept of "the public" must necessarily suggest that there is a plurality of experiences, "thereby allowing for internal differences and antagonisms" (Becker, "The Education of the Young Artist," 87). More than one "group" of people will make up any one public, and as we have seen in the section on Gómez-Peña, any group has multiple influences and originations. Therefore, memberships may partially overlap. In "The Education of the Young Artist," Becker argues that this, in turn, "makes intercultural communication conceivable in principle" (87) and, due to the creativity of diversity, "a multiplicity of publics is preferable to a single public sphere..." (93).

However, despite the possibilities inherent in a diverse and dynamic public, we have been inculcated throughout modern Western civilization, that discursive interaction in the public sphere "was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality..." (Fraser 81). In other words, social stratification may impede effective communication in the public sphere. When basic institutional frameworks such as public schools generate profoundly unequal social groups in terms of economic possibilities and political inequity, we must ask how art can serve as an equalizer or tool for democratic participation.

For example, historically, a certain education makes one inclined to discuss art as curated in a museum and a certain economic status is necessary to go to a play in a theater—and both are often necessary to attend and appreciate the opera. At the same
time other music and art forms rely on vernaculars or culture-bound styles to affirm
authenticity, such as dialect in jazz or modern hip-hop, or designs in Hopi pottery.
Drawing on Habermas, Fraser points out that, “the bourgeois conception of the public
sphere was premised on a social order in which the state was sharply differentiated” from
the “privatized market economy.” Therefore, communication via the arts gave way to
“public relations, mass-mediated staged displays, and the manufacture and manipulation
of public opinion” (77). Artistic agency was removed from the hands of the individual
citizens engaged in direct contact with the public sphere and placed in the realm of the
private sphere, increasingly so during our present era, given the imperial rise of
conglomerate corporations. Fraser describes economic and educational inequity, as well
as corporate control as “informal impediments to participatory parity that can persist even
after everyone is formally and legally licensed to participate” (81).

Therefore, given the increasingly pluralistic nature of the public combined with
the markers of status learned through our formal and informal educations, we find
ourselves without an equitable public sphere or the tools through which to communicate
with diverse publics. Therefore, given these realities I must echo Nancy Fraser who asks:
“What form of public life comes closest to approaching the ideal? What institutional
arrangements will best narrow the gap in participatory parity between dominant and
subordinate groups?” (83) After all from what better place to start such an exploration?

One way to achieve the ideal of public life is to resurrect the town square of days
gone by and to equip us with the tools to communicate with others of diverse
perspectives. But how can such an ideal become a reality today? I have come to believe
that one way to achieve this is through the conceptual and activist arts, which subvert the clean divisions between the public and the private, fine and commercial arts, and the worship of the individual art object. Through these mediums we can be versed in skills to help us see diverse cultural and social/economic backgrounds as tools for exploring the largest possible pool of ideas and perspectives. Of course to do this we would need to become not only bi-dialectical (and ideally multi-lingual), but, at the least, possess the learned skills necessary to interpret, empathize and critically engage the diverse perspectives presented in, most significantly for this section, diverse conceptual forms. These forms include the texts of daily life such as advertisements, billboards, cultural artifacts, political pamphlets and so forth.

As we try to reconfigure the town square, it is easy to think of the possibilities of the media and the Internet. Although the Internet and the media are useful tools, and have the potential to be even more useful than they typically are in bridging perspectives, the Internet is currently diffuse and driven by separate compartmentalized discourse-communities, while mainstream media is corporate owned and profit driven and the alternative media is ideologically driven—and tending to preach to the converted. Therefore, these mediums may need to be subverted and manipulated if they are to contain truly diverse and alternate points of view. One of the earliest examples of activist art’s intervention of the popular media came from performance artist Suzanne Lacy. Following the incessant media portrayal of women as passive victims of the Hillside Strangler, performance artist Suzanne Lacy staged a media event at City Hall in Los Angeles challenging these depictions:
On the morning of December 13, 1977, a funeral motorcade of twenty-two cars filled with women followed a hearse from the Woman's Building to City Hall, at which point nine seven-foot tall veiled women, their veils draped around their heads in the angular shapes of coffins, merged from the hearse and took up positions on the steps facing the street. Women in the motorcade filled in behind them and unfurled a banner that read, "In Memory of Our Sisters, Women Fight Back." Then, with City Hall behind them and the assembled local press in front, the first mourner walked to the microphone and said, "I am here for the ten women who have been raped and strangled between October 18 and November 29," after which she was echoed by a chorus of mourners who chanted, "In memory of our sisters, women fight back." In succession, each of the nine veiled women made statements that connected the Hillside Strangler murders with the larger social issues of violence against women, and each, in turn, was echoed by the chorus. (Kelley 241)

Therefore, Lacy effectively changed the course of the coverage and the surrounding debate. According to Jeff Kelley, Lacey's interventionist performance art had immediate effects on the Los Angeles community: ransom money (for the capture of the Hillside Strangler) was re-designated for self-defense classes for women, rape hotline numbers were listed in the Yellow Pages (after some initial resistance from the phone company), and several subsequent discussions were held between the artists and the representatives of the media about the media conventions being used to report sexually violent crimes. Moreover, images and information about "In Mourning and In Rage" were broadcast on primetime television across the state and appeared in national and international news accounts. (242)

By actively engaging in citizenship through media-interventionist performance art, Lacy was able to reframe women, and the debate about women, from one of passive reaction to active proaction. This is one of many media events staged by Lacy and others (Judy Chicago, The Guerilla Girls, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Coco Fusco) that share the intent to circumvent oppressive and incomplete media portrayals.

While elaborate interventions of the popular media, like Lacy's, have proven to be effective, the nucleus for public life are still our streets and highways, busy areas where
cross-sections of humanity pass, literally and physically. How, then, in an era of congested cities and sprawling suburbia, can we reclaim our public spaces and make them more democratic? I shall initially broach this question by quoting a sardonic passage from the “manifesto” of real-life vigilantes, Billboard Liberation Front, written by Jack Napier, as posted on his/their website:

In the beginning was the Ad. The Ad was brought to the consumer by the Advertiser. Desire, self worth, self-image, ambition, hope; all find their genesis in the Ad. Through the Ad and the intent of the Advertiser we form our ideas and learn the myths that make us into what we are as people. That this method of self definition displaced the earlier methods is beyond debate. It is now clear that the Ad holds the most esteemed position in our cosmology. (Napier)

While this sarcastic passage may read as cynical or even a bit depressing at first, the point is an important one. The ad does indeed define much of our public space and dominates much of the discourse within this space. Ads are the conduit to that mammoth propaganda machine of capitalism.

As Billboard Liberation Front (BLF) suggests:

the Ad defines our world, creating both the focus on the “image” and the culture of consumption that ultimately attract and inspire all individuals desirous of communicating to their fellow man in a profound fashion. It is clear that He who controls the Ad speaks with the voice of our Age (Napier).

BLF assures us that while the television can be turned off and even computers and radio can be avoided, and while it’s easy enough not to buy a newspaper, “none but the bedridden shut-in or the Thoreauian misanthrope” can avoid the Billboard. “Everyone knows the Billboard; the Billboard is in everyone’s mind” (Napier).
Many activist artists, like BLF, have chosen to reinterpret public space. While BLF shows the irony of the omnipresent billboard by “liberating it” (i.e., converting its message by changing the slogans), other artists have bought up billboard space to provoke dialog within specific communities, while others have adapted guerrilla approaches, by plastering posters and stickers on walls, buses and trains to engender site-specific civic debate, taking the public sphere back from advertisers.

Especially successful is a group of artists from San Diego, who identify as “border artists”—David Avalos, Louis Hock, and Elizabeth Sisco—who have challenged San Diego’s schizophrenic relationship to migrant workers through their “America’s Finest Tourist Plantation” campaign, juxtaposing images of workers in service positions with workers being arrested. Robert Pincus writes, “No other group of activist artists in The United States has succeeded so consistently with its projects in sparking public debate about social issues, both within the media arena and outside of it” (34).

Therefore, the town square emerges in, but is not limited to, the following zones and spaces: media interventions; street-level performance art; billboards, subway and bus advertising, stickers, and posters. In a society overrun by commerce, activist art challenges the status quo that corporate sales are the appropriate use of public space in a democracy, and aims to take the dialog back. Through these strategies, the town square repossessed, builds upon itself reinvigorated and modern site opened to public debate. As artist Louis Hock states,

Public art was once a village green with a statue on it. But the whole concept of community has changed radically. Politicos have become something that happens in newspapers and through television ads. The
community ground now is the media, telephones, commuter billboards, and such things. And our work is placed like a statue on it. (Pincus 31)

**The State, Private Industry, and the Arts**

When art causes a public furor it is often because the work conflates innovation in form with radicalness in content. A layperson may not easily understand the genre of installation or performance art. These have evolved out of other forms—sculpture, theater, and dance—liberating the artist from conceptual and physical constraints. But without having knowledge of the restrictions such categories and contentions of form placed on the artist, a more general audience might have little access to, or sympathy for the work (Becker, “The Education of the Young Artist” 104).

In this section, which like the previous one reflects course content, I look at the dialogic relationship between conceptual and activist artists, the state and private industry. Additionally, I will consider the issue of accessibility, and if these forms benefit dialog in the public sphere.

The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States does not overtly address the arts. However the right to “peaceably redress the government” does not name media, making the arts an effective and peaceable means to engage in public debate. Of course, the history of Western art shows a strong tie to wealth and commerce, often limiting painters, sculptors, and playwrights to themes and forms deemed appropriate by the ruling elite or paying public. Much has been written by art historians about how the subject matter of art responds to its times, often trying to please the elite, occasionally embedding subversive messages, and, on the even more rare occasion, breaking all the boundaries of our times. However, there is a long history of the gulf between state sanctions and unrestricted artistic expression, especially when critique of the government or society is involved. The question arises, has democratic practice through the arts
always been at odds with the state? Has there always been and will there always be a
“cavernous rift” (Becker 101)?

That has not always been the case in the United States. Despite a history of
banned books, blacklisting, and parental advisories, our politicians and policies have not
always been devoid of an awareness of how art from multiple perspectives could cross
the borders of monolithic notions of identity and create a town square. President Franklin
Delano Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) achieved an unprecedented
effort towards these ends—if only for a brief time. The goals of the program were to
employ out-of-work artists during the depression and, of great significance to us, “to
promote American art and culture and to give more Americans access to what President
Franklin Roosevelt described as an ‘abundant life’” (Natl. Archives and Records Adm.).
As a result, literally thousands of artists across disciplines were employed, many bringing
new art forms to poor and isolated communities and, perhaps for the first time, bringing
national attention to the importance and creativity of national folk arts. In addition,
people from all walks of life were encouraged to create crafts relative to their culture and
for the first time community folk arts were recognized as having inherent value, depicting
uniquely American voices and perspectives.

Of great significance were the transcriptions of hundreds of slave narratives.
Although the questions asked, ordering and commentary of the transcriptions
demonstrate the biases of the white people collecting the narratives, it is still of great
significance that the original words, perspectives and experiences of a vast array of
surviving ex-slaves were preserved. Because of such efforts by our own government,
horrors of the past were exposed and these voices that experienced the horrors were finally engaged in our collective effort to understand our own recent history. Although it was hardly unconditional, for a small period of time, we were inching towards a first amendment utopia never achieved in this country before, where borders of identity construction and representation were being aggressively addressed on a national level.

In addition to exploring the American character, celebrating the people and encouraging the useful arts, activist arts thrived during the era of the WPA. Many of the program directors recognized the activist arts as being connected to honest exploration and depiction of American life and culture, allowing for articulation of social tensions and critiques of policies to emerge as a tool for education, hence strengthening our democracy.

Of course, the first-amendment legroom ranged widely within the WPA’s arts disciplines. The posters and paintings creating for the Federal Arts division often (though certainly not always) served as propaganda for Roosevelt’s own programs. However, other programs such as Federal Theater, fully embraced their program’s democratic potential, creating what was, in effect, a tremendously diverse national theater. Many plays, such as The Cradle Will Rock (which centered on the formation of a union and the struggles of a prostitute), critiqued the government and represented alternate viewpoints, cultures and socio-economic realities. Hallie Flanagan, who was in a powerful and contentious position a mere twelve years after women got the vote, articulated the Theater Program’s democratic vision:

We live in a changing world: man is whispering through space, soaring to the stars in ships, flinging miles of steel and glass into the air. Shall the
theatre continue to huddle in the confines of a painted box seat? The movies, in their kaleidoscopic speed and juxtaposition of external objects and internal emotions are seeking to find visible and audible expression for the tempo and the psychology of our time. The stage too must experiment—with ideas, with the psychological relationship of men and women, with speech and rhythm forms, with dance and movement, with color and light—or it must and should become a museum product. In an age of terrific implications as to wealth and poverty, as to the function of government, as to peace and war, as to the relation of the artist to all these forces, the theatre must grow up. The theatre must become conscious of the implications of the changing social order, or the changing social older will ignore, and rightly, the implications of the theatre. (Flanagan, Arena 45)

The American theater under Flanagan became a beacon for democratic arts around the globe. Hahn writes,

The major critics of the time—theatre critics and thinkers from all over the world—hailed the Federal Theatre Project and Mrs. Flanagan as of monumental significance, not only to America but to the larger history of world theatre. The best playwrights here and abroad—Eliot, Shaw, O'Neill, Auden, Toller—rushed to have their works performed, for scarcely any remuneration, by the most important theatre of the day. Some of our greatest talents had their start with the Federal Theatre Project, and many of them arguably did their best work there. National theatres of Europe sent representatives to study the workings of a true theatre. Theatre became a daily subject of discussion and a true avenue for dialogue. Everyone who was anyone was sure that this was the making of an American national theatre, with Flanagan at its head. She was recognized to be not only the conceptualizer of a unique, indigenous, American national theatre, but was undoubtedly, for American theatre, the major unifying, and international force of her day. (206)

How splendid to think that the arts—no less arts funded and encouraged by our government—could cross the traditional boundaries of canonical theater constructed by and for the elites and earnestly endeavor to be a “major, unifying, international force?”

However, by the mid nineteen-thirties, the Congressional House Committee of Un-American Activities was going strong, and over the next several years shut the arts
programs down one by one, the theater program, led by the Flanagan being one of the first.

It seems that with the arts having been so vibrant and with an increasingly flourishing democracy, closing of the programs was necessary for conservatives in Congress to maintain the status quo and cement borders of socio-economic power, no matter how oppressive to the larger public. Closing the programs was a way to isolate people from the real perspectives and issues of their time, and from each other. What followed were some of the most conservative decades with very little cross-cultural communication and a great deal of suspicion of “the Other,” heightened by war and the demonized “threat” of Communism. The result was blacklisting and withdrawal of governmental support for art as democratic practice.

It was not until 1965, amongst the vibrant civil-rights movements, that a far smaller-scale version of the WPA was formed, known as the National Endowment of the Arts. With a reinvigorated democratic vision, the program aimed to encourage freedom of thought, inquiry, the imagination, and the fostering of talent. However, the relationship between the NEA and the democratic expression of its artists quickly developed a history of antagonisms. As with the WPA, the antagonists against the free expression of artists did not originate within the NEA employees, but via a conservative Congress, apparently deeply wary of open discussions on topics such as women’s rights, homosexuality, and religious disillusionment. The controversial performance art of the “NEA Four” (Karen Finley, Holly Hunter, Tim Miller, and John Fleck) and photographers Andre Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe, provoked the ire of right-wing politicians such as Jesse Helms and
Pat Buchanan, broadly labeling the art “pornographic” (famously without having seen it) and flagrantly overlooking the complexity of the themes and the serious nature of the work’s content. Although the artists were unanimously awarded grants via the peer review process, then chairman of the NEA John Frohnmayer overturned the under political pressure. When the artists sued in the district court, the Congress insisted the NEA retroactively add a “decency and respect standard” to their review process. While the federal court ruled in favor of the artists for first-amendment reasons, U.S. Senator Jesse Helms appealed—and again lost. Incredibly, the government officials, who overwhelmingly never saw any of the work, took the case to the Supreme Court, which ruled in the favor of the conservative Congress, not in favor of the artist’s case for free expression and the role of the federal government in encouraging democratic practice amongst engaged citizens.

Ultraconservative Senator Helms of North Carolina and others of his ilk, maintain that if such art must be created, it should not be sponsored by government funds, effectively implying that though the government considers itself a democracy, it should not do much to actually encourage critical engagement of its citizens. Although the NEA still exists, it no longer funds individual artists and the unique perspectives they can bring to the table. (Instead they only fund organizations and groups who offer more predictable outcomes.)

Similarly, art funding in schools is routinely the first program to be cut and is deemed “extracurricular” rather than essential. When art is taught, it tends to be as a conventional canon or skill-set mimicking that canon or, increasingly, commercial
technical arts on computers. Of the public schools that have substantive art programs, the arts are not (at least openly) approached as broad sets of tools for participatory democratic engagement. Like alternate readings of history, art for democratic practice is all too often still seen as inappropriately transgressive. Odd, as schools were designed to prepare us to be citizens, not subjects or automatons.

In the larger society, art in general is increasingly seen as falling under the private realm and activist or high-concept art is perceived as being especially elite, only for the avant-garde. Given the contexts in which conceptual or activist art is often “packaged,” Becker states, “... the audience has often believed that the artist was being unnecessarily obscure or confrontational; at the same time the artists felt misunderstood and unappreciated. The result has been mutual disappointment and hostility” (Becker, “The Education of the Young Artist,” 100). If we are to look towards the controversy surrounding the NEA Four as an example, it seems that for much of the public these artists have transgressed “inappropriate borders,” namely conceptual art as a means for political agency for under-represented groups. These artists provoke a degree of ire as they endeavor to do more than provide wonder, therapy and entertainment, the traditional acceptable aims of art. (This is not to belittle these outcomes, but rather to suggest they are too often seen as the “appropriate” and often solitary function of art.)

Therefore, our society is schizophrenically divided about democratic practice within a democracy, especially when it involves art that crosses boundaries. Where then does this leave those with non-commercial perspectives? Wouldn’t the fiscal
encouragement of diverse perspectives through creative means allow us to have increasingly more ideas to draw on to strengthen our democracy?

Certain recent events illustrate this schizophrenia and further illustrate these questions. In February 2003 as the Bush administration prepared for war/occupation in Iraq, First Lady Laura Bush was planning to host a White House celebration of the American poets Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and Langston Hughes. The event was to include readings of original poetry by prominent contemporary poets. However, upon learning that (in the tradition of Whitman, Dickinson, and Hughes) the poets actually intended to express themselves in their poems, addressing the injustices in their society—most specifically the President's impending “war”—Laura Bush cancelled the reading.

Although this White-House planned event was clearly intended to emphasize party-tricks, not democratic practice, and certainly not the crossing of the Bush administration's rigid ideological boundaries, Mrs. Bush inadvertently strengthened our democracy. Just as Frederick Douglass knew that being forbidden to read meant reading had power, the poets' voices grew more resounding at the impetus of their silencing. Instead of one small, intimate reading at the White House, hundreds of poetry readings occurred the day of the event: at least 150 readings in U.S. cities and in countries around the world.

The activist poets resisted government silencing and a politics of repression by creating a town square on line on the Internet: www.poetsagainstthewar.org. Over 5,000 poets, including the likes of Rita Dove, Adrienne Rich, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Diane DiPrima, Amiri Baraka and Seamus Heaney, wrote original poems to protest the violence
of war and its accompanying racism, ethnocentrism and suppression of civil liberties. I end this section with the border crossing and democratic practice of one of the contributors, Joshua Weitz:

_Golan Wine_
Three Arabs and I drank to the sunset behind Mt. Hermon. The wine was red and free of staves and our cups looked fuller in the tinted light. Without thinking, I wished them a peaceful Sabbath perhaps because I was drunk and my eyes glazed with the sight of these three dark men, like me, filling their stomachs with kosher wine. The oldest rose up and outstretched his arms in kind (hadn't my father told me to be wary of an Arab addressing his peers with his hands to the sky) and he answered my toast by saying, first, peace.

**Students as Borders Crossers Engaged in Democratic Practice**

In the sections above I discuss theoretical underpinnings of my Arts in Society class and much of the content, which includes explorations of first amendment rights, the history of the relationship between government and art, the cultural work of specific activist artists, techniques such as the subversion of billboard advertising space, and the importance of decentering notions of constructed “truths.” Throughout the class I try to engage students through the themes of border pedagogy discussed in Chapter III: “The Praxis of Border Pedagogy,” and utilize strategies such as dialogic engagement, problem-posting, and the narration of student border crossings as they encounter the study of activist artists and their art experiences. Throughout the class, students do not only explore the relationship between art and society, but function as cultural critics, calling society into account and engaging their democratic voices. This section offers theoretical
perspectives on how such crossings become possible and how students struggle to
overcome the “informal impediments to participatory parity that can persist even after
everyone is formally and legally licensed to participate” (Fraser 81).

Of strategizing creative acts, McGowan, author of *Democracy’s Children: Intellectuals and the Rise of Cultural Politics*, writes, “My action is an action because it
provokes a response, puts me into new relations with those who respond, as well as to
those things I have newly named” (91). McGowan proposes the vision of reimagining
academic processes “as transformative action upon and within the world” (91).
Therefore, the strategies of the students at this stage are to look toward the future and to
new ways they can engage their citizenship.

An important factor is to help students distinguish between propaganda and
intellectual questioning, exploration, and pursuit of social justice. It is useful for students
to self-consciously understand that all knowledge is contestable and that several truths
can sit side by side. Centered in such recognition, there is great pedagogical importance
in the artist and the critically engaged student/citizen to comment on the historical
moment with form as well as content. Skills such as cultural identity, voice, idiom and
style are encouraged for a reflexive awareness of the subjectivity of experience, and the
importance in embracing multiple subjectivities.

Through such, students in The Arts in Society are encouraged to turn the
propaganda machine on itself. As Jack Napier of Billboard Liberation Front tells us with
both sarcasm and profound democratic reason:

> Our ultimate goal is nothing short of a personal and singular Billboard for
each citizen...that glorious day for global communications when every
man, woman and child can scream or sing to the world in 100Pt. type from their very own rooftop.... Each time you change the Advertising message in your own mind, whether you climb up onto the board and physically change the original copy and graphics or not, each time you improve the message, you enter into the High Priesthood of Advertisers (1).

Therefore, through subversion of the ad, students explore concrete means to become active citizens as opposed to passive consumers, no longer part of the “mindless herd.”

Essential to subverting oppressive cultural norms, students need to become conscious of negotiating given institutions and the tensions around them. As Nancy Fraser points out, public spheres are “not spaces of zero-degree culture, equally hospitable to any possible form of public expression. Rather they consist in culturally specific institutions... . These institutions may be understood as culturally specific rhetorical lenses that filter and alter the utterances that they frame” (86).

Initially such concepts are highly challenging to students who have been brought up with given categories including unconscious expectations of the non-art world. However, through the course, students are exposed to the multidisciplinary debate in which artists are engaged. It is a challenging process to move outside of the conventional boundaries of what students’ believe art can and should do, what mediums are appropriate while still labeling it “art,” how far art or public engagement of ideas should go, and which subject matters are appropriate for students to address in the public sphere.

Writes Becker:

In our inclusion or exclusion of such discrepancies within the educational process, we directly influence the art-making practices of the next generation of artists and the place they will be able to assume within a democratic society—either encouraging our students engagement with a larger arena or perpetuating the isolation which has allowed art to become
a vulnerable subject of narrow-minded attacks. ("The Education of the Young Artist" 102)

We become, therefore, a microcosm of the larger public, engaged in an important debate about the possibilities of seemingly entrenched discourse arenas about the role of schools, the art world, and the public sphere.

The question becomes, how can we develop the critical and cultural literacy to communicate across rhetorical frameworks and lenses? As students explore cultural formations thematized by conceptual and activist artists, they engage in trying ideas on for size, engage in play-acting and puzzle-making, in the sense they are re-arranging and connecting different disciplines to create new patterns.

Nancy Fraser points out that the transition towards embracing these new art forms are challenging for students. "... discursive interaction within the public sphere within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality..." (81). However, many begin to see the transformative possibilities of stepping over these apparent boundaries. Students who border-cross through the conceptual and activist arts are foremost engaged in cultural politics. In their grant proposals they are encouraged to become self-conscious about the kinds of cultural memory they might otherwise take for granted, the observation of artifacts, and subversion of material norms. Exercises to achieve this help move students' areas of inquiry across disciplines.

Naturally, as students seek to carve out public space they continually ask, "But who will this really impact? Can I really make a difference?" I agree with John McGowan who writes that engagement in cultural politics,
... is neither trivial nor omnipotent. I happen to think it is more likely to have an impact when its real limitations are acknowledged from the start, when the other sites of political action/intervention are also named, if not (at this moment) engaged. (27)

McGowan argues for keeping the lines of communication open with other fields, “that important work is being done elsewhere, and that a richly pluralistic democratic polity calls for these varieties of work” (28).

Furthermore, it is important for students to practice decentering notions of “truth” and recognizing irony. Such juxtaposing and questioning is inviting to new forms of discourse in the public sphere. By drawing on critical thinking skills, empathy and their studies in subjectivity, deconstruction, and reconstruction of identities through public discourse, students explore new means of addressing the freedom paradox. Semiotic and semantical intellectual practice, when centered in a perspective of border crossing, encourages a pluralistic perspective.

The studies of performance artists such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Susanne Lacy, The Guerilla Girls, and Karen Finley have contextualized the relationship between public discourses and identities. As these become more reflexive, public discourse and identity takes on an element of performance, blurring the distinction between the personal and the political.

I agree with Fraser when she writes, “I see no reason to rule out in principle the possibility of a society in which social equality and cultural diversity coexist with participatory democracy... . In fact, the possibilities expand once we acknowledge the complexity of cultural identities” (86).
Preparing to Turn Reflection into Action Through Town Squares and Grant Writing

Through the first thirds of the quarter, students explore conceptual and activist artists who reinvent the public sphere, as well as research the sometimes contentious relationship between art and government, pondering what the role should and could be within a democracy. Students are surprised to learn our government, at various points, has fiscally supported democratic citizenship through arts in the public sphere. As discussed, we study first amendment rights, designed to redress the government, as an apparatus for social justice.

In the second third of the class students enter the public sphere, and negate passive consumerism, by creating a town square within our classroom using their own conceptual billboard art. Through image and word juxtaposition, student activists design their billboards with the goal of drawing attention to underdiscussed issues within a given community – and compelling viewers to see their issue (and therefore discuss it) in a new way. Students showcase their billboards (generally created digitally and then printed to letter, legal or poster-size) anonymously, followed by large-group discussion based on problem-posing techniques. Since the members of the town square/classroom do not know who the artist is, they do not look to her or him for answers, but are urged to see themselves as agents and activists within community life. Only after the town square ends, do artists reveal themselves and share their intentions.

The classroom town square also serves the purpose of helping students find their voice as activist artists engaged in transformation of the public sphere, therefore, preparing them for the final grant project.
In the final third and culmination of the course, students are charged with developing a grant proposal in which they think through (and in some cases begin) a conceptual or activist art project, or non-profit outreach project, strategizing action that helps them cross from the role of passive consumers to active participants in democratic practice. Students are asked to develop an in depth grant proposal that either requests funding from a specific public or private agency (or agencies), or strategizes specific ways to implement their project without such funds. Suggested categories of the grant include: an abstract or cover letter; description of the concept the project; description of the background issues which make the project potentially socially, culturally, or ideologically transformative; discussion about a specific community’s involvement in the project and impact on that community; materials and their relevancy (how they connect symbolically to content); use of space/land and its significance; implementation plans; time frame and follow-up; funding sources; budget; and concluding thoughts on the conceptual/critical purpose of the activist art project or outreach organization and its intended effects.

Through the praxis of border pedagogy, my aim is for students to feel empowered to get past the “what now” stage of reflection and act in the interest of social transformation, developing tools and frameworks for dialectic reflective action. In this sense, it is my hope they will take border pedagogy out of the classroom. Their projects are designed with the explicit goal of engaging an audience or community in some form of border crossing. Below I briefly describe eight recent student projects. In some cases
I briefly share information or impressions of a student so as to illustrate their border crossing.

1) “Race Magazine: Peace Begins With U” by Brian Bode.

   Brian, a graphic design student, developed a plan for a publication that aims to “build interconnectiveness and explore the complexity behind the human race (1)”

   Articles focus on humanity in all its diversity and are selected with the aim of representing true diversity—cultural, ethnic, religious, philosophical, sexual, political.

   Photography and graphic images depicting the diversity will play a key role in the publication as well, offering visual dignity and complexity. As Brian states in his conclusion, “The magazine’s intention is to ultimately create a social movement, to gather people who want to reach out to others and explain their life perspective, and in turn gain something from learning about someone else’s perspective (8)”.


   PEEJAE entered the class with the preconception that activists were angry and negative and was therefore initially resistance to the project. Due to PEEJAE’s considerable artistic talent, he was able to leave his low-income home in Detroit to attend art school in Los Angeles, and believed individual determination could result in success. However, he often characterized the bombardment of negative images he experienced as an young African American male in Detroit, and believed these often worked to his
psychological detriment. He believes that if it weren’t for the support of his parents he might not have entered college at all (and have been the first in his family to do so).

PEEJAE therefore determined he wanted to do “positive” activism, emphasizing his composition and painting ability, while altering the images of African Americans that so dominated the environment he grew up in.

PEEJAE, therefore, decided to raise funds from African-American owned businesses in Detroit to take over billboard space that often hawks alcohol and cigarettes on the highways near the African-American neighborhoods. In the replacement images PEEJAE aims to juxtapose photographs of actual successful African-Americans from the Detroit area with phrases like “Integrity” and “Passion.” Also included are a brief description of their work, such as “Community activist,” “Teacher,” “Doctor.” PEEJAE views the billboards as digital murals and will make them especially vibrant by texturing the photographic billboards with paint. Through his project PEEJAE aims to bring inspiration through the public space of Detroit by offering energetic alternate images of the African-American experience.

3) “CADD Kids: Children, Activists, Dreams, Drama” by Sherry Faulkner.

Sherry begins her grant with these questions: “What do kids think about their future? Do you know? Of course not. That’s why this project is so important” (4).

CADD Kids aims to compensate for the lack of art programs in low-income public schools by developing a drama program that creates plays based on students’ testimony and experiences. The program takes a workshop approach and is performance-
driven to show students' the power of their voices in a community setting. Sherry's method includes developing "material topics" such as "My mom and dad fight all the time, and he hits me" and "My gang is my family; what do you want to do about it" (7). Students improvise and talk; drama coaches urge them forward through questioning. Based on the stories that emerge, the group develops scripts. From there they are coached through the production process until they have an innovative and professional ensemble play. From there they will perform in community spaces such as public parks. Sherry aims to conclude the final productions with community town squares about the issues kids our facing and their questions about the future.

4) "Video Diaries: Growing Up with American Youth" by Angie Loving

Angie’s project puts mini-digital video cameras in the hands of junior high school inner city youths to document their experiences over the course of a year. The kids come from multiple cultural backgrounds around the Los Angeles area, and will apply for the project through diverse identified schools. Students will “have the opportunity to find and capture their own story and vision through the lens of the camera while also learning independent and creative thinking” (1).

Students meet regularly with mentors who “guide them through the filmmaking process” (1). Mentors will be identified from throughout the filmmaking industry in Los Angeles and will be trained in posing ideas and questions to students such as “What do you want kids across the country to know about your family? How can this be achieved through the camera?” (4). Students will join mentors in the editing process.
After the filming and editing cycle is complete, students will attend a major screening of work, which will be edited to demonstrate a larger canvass, juxtaposing their lives. Angie maintains that “tolerance and understanding must be fostered in our youth and there is no better way to do that than through the creative process. In compiling these diverse personal accounts in the lives of kids, we hope to show the common thread that ultimately ties them together” (1).

5) “A Performance Piece Giving Identity to the Homeless” by Rex Maningding.

Rex developed a public performance piece that seeks to both “bring to light the humanity of the homeless” (1) and the ambivalence felt by citizens.

The performance is to be held in the business section of downtown Los Angeles during lunch hour. “The performers are children dressed in colorful clothing and black blindfolds walking around a blocked off main street while a voice-over recording of actual homeless accounts plays in the background” (1). The colorful clothes humanize the children and make them approachable while the blindfolds underscore their alienation. Often the children will approach pedestrians in a circle and turn their heads “leaving an eerie image” (3). Interwoven with personal testimony are the statements: “‘I’m a son,’ ‘I’m a daughter,’ ‘I’m a father,’ ‘I’m a mother,’ ‘I exist.’”(3). The performance ends at the sounds of a gong at which point the children stop dead in their tracks, remove their blindfolds and repeat in unison five times, “I wish I were home” (3).

To further layer the performance and its questions about the tension between the inner and out world of the homeless, real homeless will be dressed as reporters,
“questioning the onlookers about the performance on videotape” (4). These questions include:

- What do you think the performance was about?
- Does this change your attitude towards the homeless?
- Do you think there is anything you can do to help the situation? (4)

Later a screened version of the performance will be followed with the interviews done by the homeless, along with a forum including both the homeless and pedestrians.

Rex maintains that his main goals are to explore and confront the “lack of concern” most of us have towards the homeless. “They are our brothers and sisters and we treat them as if they were lower than our pets...They need our help and we have the means to give it to them” (8).


Sanaz came to The Art Institute as an exchange student from Sweden, where her family emigrated from Iran. Her experience in the United States was one of shock, as she watched our country go to war and, she felt, demonize people from the Middle East. During this time she learned about the women of Juarez, Mexico, over four-hundred of who were murdered while working for American-owned companies near the U.S. border. While we invaded Iraq, Sanaz wondered why we weren’t intervening to stop the murders at our doorstep.

Sanaz describes a project in which she will aim to inform the American public about the issue by placing billboards on the U.S. side of border towns, some of the most
crossed borders in the world. Each billboard will show a family photograph of the face
of a murdered woman. These billboards will draw stark attention to the lives lost and the
contextuality reality of working at the maquiladoras. They emphasize the humanity of
the young women through the intimacy of their family photographs. As Sanaz writes:
"This project helps the community telling them about the gruesome killings, by showing
that these women have an identity, that they are humans and not disposable objects" (4).
In her conclusion Sanaz claims her own voice:

As a woman and a citizen of this world I am speaking up against this injustice... I want the public to know about this. I want to bring forth this extremely underdiscussed issue into the mainstream, and I want to start making changes in the names of the victims and human rights. Nobody deserves to be treated this way, and nobody deserves a fate or death like this (9).

7) “Pistolas en Las Manos de Angeles Perdidos: A Latino Community Mural Project
Depicting Gun Violence in Los Angeles” by Andre Reyes.

The title of Andre’s grant translates into “Guns in the Hands of Lost Angels.” It is a very personal topic for him, since his brother, friend, and cousin were all shot by gangs in the Culver City area of Los Angeles. Although his brother’s shooting was not fatal, the other two were. Andre writes, “All these situations left an impression on me, so I want to do something about this (1).”

Andre chose the medium of muralism since he wants to convey “visual narratives” (2) through the eyes of young Latino artists who have witnessed or participated in gun violence. Andre wants to capture the “pain, heartache and regret” and respond to the need of “community-shared power, so we can express ourselves
constructively out of remembrance for our loved ones instead of acting out of revenge” (3). Through this process Andre turns testimony into transformative images in public space. He aims to place the mural on a bare wall off of Culver Boulevard and Centinela, across from the Culver City police station, a predominately Anglo area, to remind the police of all the unsolved murders of young Latino men from the Mar Vista projects.

8) “Reaching Out: Juvenile Inmates at The Dorothy Kirby Center Express Themselves – A Group Show” by Irena Volkova.

After her own conscientization, Irena began volunteering at The Dorothy Kirby Center, a detention camp for juvenile inmates, sometimes as young as nine years old. There she was struck by unsanitary and physically dangerous facilities, where there is ongoing harassment and violence between staff and inmates, as well amongst the inmates. Irena describes the children as “emotionally and physically scarred,” having endured “poverty, broken families, drug abuse by parents, and child abuse” (2). As she spent time with the children, Irena resolved they felt “unwanted and forgotten by society (2) and have experienced the kind of trauma “that can not be resolved by locking them up” (2).

In contrast to the surroundings of The Dorothy Kirby Center, Irena discovered that there was a great well of creativity amongst the youth: many wrote poems and created drawings on their own time. Irena determined that art works could be encouraged through workshopping, then documented and displayed for the community, thereby achieving both therapeutic effects and community understanding. Her chosen medium is
a website devoted to their testimonies and their art. Since Irena is a graphic designer, she wants the design to be very evocative and beautiful, so as to give full dignity to their expression. The website would then become a base for further outreach with the community, projecting the youth away from the limited worlds of their cells and placing critical imaginations in dialog with the larger community. As one anonymous inmate wrote in a poem:

I've been told my heart is a 'black empty box.' What most people don't know about me is that I can be as gentle as a falling leaf on a beautiful autumn day...(9).

Ending/Begginging

The above are just eight examples of the twenty-five or so grants that I collect each time I teach the course The Arts in Society. I find that, more often than not, students (initially cynical about social activism) leave believing democratic practice is possible through the transformation of public space. Perhaps the border between reflection and action is one of the most difficult to cross of all. I believe the step of specific real-world strategizing and contextualizing is an important first step. One day I hope to hear that one of these grants has been realized. I believe I will.
CONCLUSION: BORDER THOUGHTS

This dissertation attempts to historicize, theorize, and explore the praxis of border pedagogy with the goal of democratic practice in the classroom. It has aims to synthesize the early voices of emancipation education with critical pedagogues and border artists to paint a portrait of a shared project: responding to the “freedom paradox” of the Americas through consciousness-raising about geographical and ideological borders.

It has been my hope to broaden and refine the definition of border pedagogy by tracing its historical roots and connecting it to the work of literary and performance/activist border artists. My specific interest of the postcolonial borders of the Americas and their impact has been emphasized.

Throughout the dissertation, I have underscored the complex web of processes and practices involved in the creation of a theory of border pedagogy, as well as its dynamic nature. As wide-ranging as this dissertation is, I hope it has also been as specific in its connections, the synthesizing goal of historicizing and theorizing border pedagogy (with an emphasis in the arts and humanities), and then conveying methods and models of its practice.

The current literature on border pedagogy as such is still quite limited, though it is closely connected to the growing influence of Freirian critical pedagogy. One contribution I have tried to make is to connect the practices of border pedagogy and border artists, how in many ways they are involved in the same project of democratic practice, and how the praxis from both disciplines can be used in the classroom to compel students in move from “reflection to action” in the world.
Like most work that falls under the categories of cultural studies and critical pedagogy, I have considered the intersections of history, language, power, and culture. How my dissertation differs is that I have focused on the border as the metaphor for these intersections and have brought together disparate disciplines and genres, with the purpose of devising an inter-disciplinary cross-border pedagogical framework for social change.

In conclusion I argue for the importance of reflexive pedagogy, where nothing is taken as given, and where we remember the borders of land and language, and hence our ideas, are humanly constructed. The fragility and implications of these constructions are contextual, making the notion of constructionism not just an apparent one, but a shifting one, leaving us in a permanent state of flux. However, when we teach, we impact our students' abilities -- and through them our interconnected cultures' -- to make brave and humane choices in the complex zones of our postcolonial and postmodern world. We hope to impact their ability and desire to analyze the paradoxical individual and dialectal nature of culture/s. As teachers and students that create pedagogy, we also write history, we deploy or deconstruct rhetorics and ideologies, and therefore can consciously decide what kind of relationship we want with our world. By encouraging students to analyze, empathize and create -- to reflect and act dialogically -- and then cross (or in some cases consciously not cross) over borders, we encourage not only articulations of pedagogical agency, but actions of democratic practice. We can view the texts we read, write and speak as part of an ongoing dialog for social transformation, a contact-zone of both contestation and possibility.
At a time of war and occupation, the study of border pedagogy proves in the end to construct a new kind of “battleground,” a conscientious confrontation of a cultural moment, an intent to create a zone of multiplicity, subjectivity, reflexivity, counterdiscourse, and social action. In fact, border pedagogy feels even more urgent than it did four years ago, when I began my research for the dissertation. It is not irrelevant that this writing occurs as the Bush administration is overtly challenging these values through the “Patriot Act” and “Homeland Security.” There is tremendous economic and ideological investment in constructing new master-narratives through the global corporate media conglomeration. Furthermore, there has been more legislation for standardization and content homogenization in schools, further institutionalizing the master narratives, making it more difficult for students and teachers to transgress and create in the borderlands. Challenging these new “standards” and the hegemonic implications is a disturbing task, one for serious evaluation and action. It’s easy to get discouraged.

Yet it is especially in such a political environment that teachers, students, and citizens must contest notions of rigid social “truths,” determinism, and the constructions of individual and cultural identities as monoliths.

Finally, it does not escape me that the very articulation of these goals, definitions and contestations culminate in the construction of borders. And, ironically, all paths in this dissertation converge here: in the conclusion, in the permanency and rigidity of the binding in the text.
So, perhaps, the ultimate question for this dissertation and border pedagogy as a whole is: *if democratic practice is the goal, if some form of border is inevitable, what kind of borders should we as students, teachers and citizens draw? And then what should we do with them?*

Shall I declare my borders now? Shall I define and name them? Defiantly cross them? Or shall I invite you to ask me your own questions, and I'll ask you? Shall we listen better than we have before? Shall we sit somewhere less familiar? Shall we try to unmap the question?

And then what?

Let's not stop here.
APPENDIX A: INCLUSION OF COVER OF PUBLISHED PAPER AS CHAPTER IN

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REFERENCES


<http://www.ed.arizona.edu/AILDI/program.htm>.


---. Personal interview. 2 August 2003.


