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### Editorial

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## Editorial

### Transborder Matters. A Conceptual Approach

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Borders stimulate acts of crossing, processes of transcending, and intents of trespassing. Representing supervised endings and beginnings, regulation, and state observation, borders are inevitably linked to the often highly politicized notions of closure and hindering, but also of protection and safety. Even though they suggest detained flows, they also ambiguously motivate the crossings they seek to control or stop. The significance of borders depends crucially on the movements along and through them. Crossings dissolve fixed ideas of *us* and *them* and propagate, as Julia Kristeva put it, that we *are* the other, and that if we flee it, we fight against own subconscious selves.<sup>1</sup> The passages through borders, and the blockages that they cause, reveal them once more as sites of power struggle. At times, borders impose a sheer insurmountable barrier. Then again, currents can become strong enough to completely cover division lines and make them unrecognizable. The "liquid" ideas of "flows" or "currents" can be useful, as intended here, to appreciate the movements connected to borders. However, they are far from being innocent concepts. The emotionally charged image of "waves", for example, has been regularly used by politics and media to refer to people entering the United States from Mexico, with the effect of dehumanizing the experience of border crossing, and of criminalizing it.

In recent years, border studies have increasingly highlighted the quality of crossing. The use of an adjectivization of the term *border* with the prefix *trans-* can be observed, resulting in the neologism *transborder*, or in Spanish, *transfronterizo*, as a concept which has entered academic, artistic and political discourse. The *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, for instance, was developed in 2007 by researchers and performance artists of the *Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 / B.A.N.G. Lab* (linked to universities such as the UC San Diego). Through easily usable, low-cost cellphone devices, the *Transborder Immigrant Tool* was meant to improve border crossers' chances of survival in hostile territory between Mexico and the United States, giving them access to water supplies, orientation, and information about border patrols. The tool also

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<sup>1</sup> See Kristeva (1990: 208-209).

supplied them with experimental poetry to help them endure the hardships of crossing. On their cellphone devices, migrants could read poems. The *Transborder Immigrant Tool* provided a Global Positioning System, but first and foremost envisioned as Geo Poetic System. Unsurprisingly, it was enthusiastically embraced and broadcast through activist and digital arts media, but also covered by the same mainstream journalism who supported US governmental security investigations on the creators of the Tool.<sup>2</sup>

Across the border, the Tijuana-based collective *Torolab* had been working on improving living conditions for people of the, as they state, transborder region since 1995. With their label *Torovestimenta*, Torolab designed clothing especially for border crossers. Their product "Pantalones transfronterizos" ("Transborder Trousers") were meant as a survival suit for Mexican as well as US citizens while crossing the border. While both were made with solid denim, wide legs and multiple pockets, the one for Mexicans had a pocket for their passport and credit cards, and the one for US citizens, who might not even need a passport when crossing, pockets for credit cards, money and pharmaceuticals purchased at Mexican discount stores.<sup>3</sup> In their project *La región de los pantalones transfronterizos (The Region of Transborder Trousers)* (2004-2005), *Torolab* provided five people with a GPS system in order to track their movements in the transborder region. A cartographic video installation presented the results of the tracked movements, affirming the constant crossings through a territory marked by a heavily guarded national border.

The focus on passing through, which both border-based performance projects – one in Tijuana, one in San Diego – propose, responds to the social reality of the border and to the immediate needs of its people. It reflects the contemporary situation in the Mexican-US region. Both projects illustrate how borders function: how imposed dividing lines are material facts as much as artificial constructions, how they block traditional, current and future paths through border topographies, and how they generate acts of crossing, touching people and places that can be close by or far away from the border in question.

*Transborder Matters: Circulaciones literarias, transformaciones culturales mexicanas y chicanas* takes up the perspective on borders with regards to their malleable characteristics, sounding it out and further expanding it. While a vast number of publications on borders and the Mexican-US Border already exists, this volume accentuates one specific aspect, expanding border thinking to transborder thinking. *Transborder Matters* combines eleven contributions by

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<sup>2</sup> See Aguirre (2015: 53f.).

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see Torolab (1995-2009) and EDT 2.0 / B.A.N.G. Lab (2007).

international scholars, researchers, theorists and artists who each explore and define the concept of *transborder / transfronterizx* through theoretical approaches and applied case studies.

Transborder phenomena can be understood as extending and moving between two or more separated entities. These can be physical, such as countries, regions, topographies, bodies, textures, texts, images, products; or they can be non-material in the form of laws, beliefs, thoughts, common senses, emotions, identities, disciplines, or processes. Transborder phenomena are shaped by borders that cross or divide them, and by concomitant struggles and negotiations. They seem to define division lines as one, but not as the only part of existence. They transcend borders, relating them to other phenomena such as language, space, identity, or history. In these new combinations and by changing themselves, transborder phenomena change supposedly stable confines. Transborder matters materialize in people and their actions, affecting them, modeling their being, thinking, and expression.

Mexican and Chicana/x cultures and literatures, for instance, are intrinsically a transborder field that has been shaped by constant flows between two cultural poles which were often defined through, and as, two nation states: the United States and Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Hence, a transborder perspective arises organically out of – and can be applied to – Mexican and Chicana/x Literatures and Cultures, establishing a rich tradition of transborder philosophy and an important transcultural archive. Mexican and Chicana/x literary circulations and cultural transformations have revised, dissolved or displaced borders from the cultural memory of resistance of a specific geopolitical space. They have informed us about borders' binary functioning that not always operates the same way: it matters who wants to cross them and from which position. "I did not cross the border, the border crossed me", Latino voices have stated, affirming their ongoing presence in the United States after the annexation of Mexican territory in the mid-19th century and their consciousness about the relativity of representation. Moreover, they have made existing and emerging safe and unsafe interstitial spaces visible, destabilizing ideas of nation-states and essentialist categories while proposing transborder ontologies and epistemologies.

*Transborder Matters* is centrally informed by a regional understanding which explores Mexican and Chicana/x border concepts, stories, narratives, discourses, markets, materials, images. Yet, this specific Mexican/Chicana/x literary and cultural topography is shown as interconnected with other transborder contexts, expanding its visions throughout the Americas and around the globe. The investigations circle around Chicana/x and Mexican notions, leave

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<sup>4</sup> I use the today widely accepted term "Chicana/x" instead of "Chicana/o" to highlight the border crossings this specific form performs between genders. This decision reflects the terminological use of several articles of this volume, but not of all. Some contributors wish to address specifically one gender or the other.

them behind, return to them. Following the paths of transborder phenomena, *Transborder Matters* is interested in the separating logics of borders, but concentrates centrally on the transformations envisioned beyond borders, and on the flows of human, artistic and geographic areas affected by dividing lines. The different contributions of the volume articulate transborder matters and ask in which ways transborder issues matter. Which are the borders to be crossed and which borders cannot be crossed? Which borders cross us? Which transborder cultural and literary fields deserve to be mentioned and studied? Which languages do transborder and transcultural spaces speak, which images do they show? What repercussions do they have? How do cultural and literary notions of the Americas inform historic and contemporary transborder phenomena? Which dialogues can be established between literatures, cultures and theories of the Americas and those of other spaces and geographies?

Epistemologically, transborder matters reflect a "re-member-ing", pondering on processes that wish to unify loose pieces, to harmonize contradictory experiences and to heal affected bodies, minds and souls.<sup>5</sup> *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987), the seminal book by Chicana theorist and writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004), originally introduced the epistemological shift that would later shape current transborder reflections. It considered the self-conscious vision of those who have learned to live with borders, suggested approaches of how to move strategically with and around them; and told stories of those who have suffered yet managed to cope with the consequences of divisions. This understanding positions border crossers as powerful, active agents. Anzaldúa underlines the importance of "*La encrucijada*", where "*La mestiza*" becomes a "priestess of crossroads", thus aligning the notion of border crossing with a conceptualization of decolonial spaces-in-between (Anzaldúa 2007: 102).

'Transition, song of my cells' (2009), an experimental poem by Amy Sara Carroll written for the above mentioned *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, is one of the most frequently cited poems of the Geo Poetic System. It explicitly quotes *Borderlands / La Frontera* and Anzaldúa's and Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Audrey Lorde uses the term 're-member' in *An Open Letter to May Daly*, Lorde's contribution to Anzaldúa's and Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back* (Lorde 1983: 96). Gloria Anzaldúa uses the idea when developing the *Coyolxauhqui imperative*: "Remember that while Coyolxauhqui in her dismembered state (depicted as a disk with topsy-turvy body parts) embodies fragmentation, she also symbolizes reconstruction in a new order. Her round disk (circle) represents the self's striving for wholeness and cohesiveness" (Anzaldúa 2015: 89). The use of *re-member-ing* suggested here (with colons) refers to decolonial embodiment as well as memory work which the term encompasses, see Anzaldúa (2015).

<sup>6</sup> See Anzaldúa (2007: 33).

Gloria Anzaldúa writes, 'We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing la migración de los pueblos mexicanos, the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán'. The historical? The mythological? Aztlán? It's difficult to follow the soundings of that song. Today's borders and circuits speak at 'lower frequencies' [...]. This Bridge Called my Back, my heart, my head, my cock, my cunt, my tunnel. Vision: You. Are. Crossing. Into. Me. (Banglab 00:04-00:28; 01:31-01-41.).

Even though life and ideas about it may have changed, Carroll's poem sees the necessity to continue to think in Anzaldúan terms and to tune them with changing circumstances and points of view. In 'Transition, song of my cells', this means connecting them with a strong – acoustic, bodily – emphasis on crossings, that is, a transborder way of conceiving division lines.<sup>7</sup>

Anzaldúa herself expanded her ideas on borders and their transcendence significantly throughout her life. In the posthumously published *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo oscuro* (2015), she defined *nepantla*, an indigenous concept, as multidimensional interstices. The people who live in them are *nepantleras* who are able to cross between different dimensions and connect them. They recognize the damaging effect of borders, but have found passageways through them, and thus, they build bridges between different kinds of knowledge and encourage us to perceive the web of connections between all phenomena.<sup>8</sup> *Nepantla* allows us to think of borders not just as physical or psychological, emotional or political, textual, imaginary or discursive realities, but to combine all and constantly cross between all of them.

To various contributions of this volume, *Nepantla* and other Anzaldúan concepts are highly relevant to conceive processes of passing through and building bridges. MARISA BELAUSTEGUIGOITIA's article centers around Anzaldúa's thinking and applies it creatively to Mexican academia. Based on Anzaldúa's concepts, Belausteguigoitia defines *tilting pedagogies* to explain acts of crossings between academia and social realities, theory and body, different languages, and from northern to southern epistemologies and vice versa. Her theoretic approach targets ways to set up educational situations as critical space for "inclined", embodied thought and action. Belausteguigoitia proposes a valid reformulation of deeply theory-based, applied pedagogies to interrupt hierarchic classroom structures and social systems of inequality. By bringing together Chicana and Mexican concepts and realities, she also eases the pathway

<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank my colleagues from the MLA executive forum *Literatures of the United States in Languages Other Than English* (LOTE), Uriel Quesada, Karen Bishop, Bill Johnson González, and Néfer Muñoz Solano, to point my attention to Amy Sara Carroll's work. Amy Sara Carroll was a Keynote Speaker at the forum's organized panel *Without Papers* at the MLA convention 2020, and forms part of the forum starting in 2020. The LOTE forum introduces a multi-literary perspective and seeks to uncover the often neglected multilingual character of US literatures, concentrating not only on literatures written in Spanish, or Portuguese and French, but also on native and minority literatures. Such a focus intrinsically stimulates the quality of crossing, as it was reflected in the panel *Without Papers* which asked about mechanisms of un/de/authorization for writing and literatures.

<sup>8</sup> See Anzaldúa (2015: 81-84).

between social classes, questions of gender and sexuality, and geopolitical coordinates, demonstrating the connections and fusions of diverse knowledge systems in a globally linked world.

Other contributions, such as the ones from Anja Bandau, INVASORIX, Verena Melgarejo et.al. or Romana Radlwimmer, refer to Anzaldúa's ideas of borders and crossings, or mention them as part of their methodologies. ANJA BANDAUI intersects the Northern and Southern sides of the border by concentrating on what she defines as the current, threefold approach to it: firstly, a Chicana point of view, secondly a transnational Mexican perspective which destabilizes centralism, and thirdly, a non-national one that sees the zone as larger transborder territory. Bandau then goes on to capture the depiction of transfronterizo cultures in contemporary narrative texts, weaving her reflections into an analysis of three Mexican border novels by Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, Heriberto Yépez, and Yuri Herrera. To all three novels, a Mexican-US border crossing is central. Bandau reads Crosthwaite's *La luna siempre será un amor difícil* as a narration of migration, crossing and transnational identity construction and as a response from south of the border to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera*. The personified transborder space leads to Florinda's, the indigenous main protagonist, emancipation. Bandau further emphasizes that Yépez' *A.B.U.R.T.O.* challenges views of individualized criminality and replaces them through a critical vision of Tijuana as decentralized center. Herrera's *Señales que precederán al fin del mundo* is a tale of Mexican migration from South to North; yet, as Bandau states, it could take place at any border as it prominently discusses liminality and permeability.

The reguetón *Me duele la cara de ser tan güerx* presented by collective INVASORIX from Mexico City builds its theoretic foundation on a fusion of native Mexican and Chicana theories, activisms and feminisms. Inspired in Cherríe Moraga's *La güera*, and rewriting the 1980s Spanish pop song *Me duele la cara de ser tan guapo*, INVASORIX analyzes intersectional privilege of skin color, gender, class, race, language, and translation. It recalls the different repercussions of the power of speaking Spanish on either side of the Mexican-US border, and the perpetuation of varying processes of exclusion and inclusion.

The art work of VERENA MELGAREJO WEINANDT ET AL. is an Anzaldúan exploration of Latinx and migrant subjectivities in a central European context. The presented photographs are the results of a workshop held by Melgarejo Weinandt in the framework of *A(r)mando Voices*, a project which circled around Gloria Anzaldúa's crossings between image and word, theory and practice, calling on the Chicana theorist's notion of images as bridges between evoked emotion and conscious knowing. In a text preceding the art work, Melgarejo Weinandt explains the objectives and structures of the workshop. The photographs by workshop participants

Marisel Bongola, Isabel Mendoza, Romina Palacios, and Sophie Utikal depict multiplying entrances, a shyly growing aloe vera plant on the window-sill in a northern night, details of stones and plants, oscillating and concrete images of skin, dresses, people, and shadows. Through the images, the poetic vision of those who have crossed and built bridges becomes visible.

While the contributions of Anja Bandau, Marisa Belausteguigoitia, and INVASORIX open up a Mexican space that communicates and connects with Chicana thought, Daniel Schreiner, Maria Wiehe, Laura Varela, and Heidi Denzel de Tirado put the accent on Chicana literatures, popular cultures, and film, and on the inherent crossings to Mexican heritages that define a Chicana perspective.

DANIEL SCHREINER presents his thoughts following the interviews of two Chicano authors who share their last name, Rodríguez. While Richard Rodríguez, known for his polished style and controversial conservative political points of view, received a formal education in a catholic school and different US and UK universities, Luis Rodríguez grew up in a barrio where he experienced gang violence, prison and, finally, writing as a tool of empowerment. Their differences let both Luis and Richard Rodríguez appear as distant from one another; however, Schreiner proposes a reading that shows how, through years of development, both authors' positions have started to oscillate and coincide in an accentuated awareness of loss and pain which modified and approached their writing regarding unresolved questions of belonging. In this sense, Schreiner constructs a transborder perspective that combines apparently opposed sides.

Echoing Schreiner's article on Catholic-raised Richard Rodríguez, who was often seen as a counter-figure to the traditional grassroots' Chicana movement, MARIA WIEHE demonstrates the traces of Protestantism in Chicano literature, which she understands as a transborder and transdenominational way to narrate identities. Wiehe's reading of two Chicano literary worlds, José Antonio Villarreal's unfinished tetralogy and Rudolfo A. Anaya's *New Mexico Trilogy*, detects their religious and denominational references. Through thorough literary analysis and biblical knowledge, Wiehe argues how in Chicano texts the narrative crossings between denominations and religious borders function. Villarreal's characters shift between different narrative structures concerning denomination and religiousness, and Anaya's protagonist Tortuga is revealed as denominational border crosser par excellence, in a setting resembling mythical Aztlán.

LAURA VARELA'S photo essay neatly fits into the same line of research. The Chicana photo and video artist from El Paso allows us to take a glimpse into her short documentary *Segundo*



*de Febrero in San Antonio, Texas*. The images from the film document a religious event taking place every year in a Catholic parish church in the Mexican American barrio of San Antonio. The celebration of the Segundo de Febrero blends the political event of the anniversary of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo into an ongoing popular, religious tradition of the parish. "The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo", as Gloria Anzaldúa wrote critically about the mythically elevated historical date (Anzaldúa 2007: 7). In the barrio, however, the date is perceived as a blending of traditions, of crossings of cultures, and is celebrated as such. The ritual is co-shared by a catholic priest, indigenous spiritual traditions, and activist consciousness to keep alive the spirit of crossing, blending, mixing of all elements which could otherwise appear contradictory, yet are embraced as one in this context.

The transborder media network Pantelion Films, founded 2010 in California, and two bilingual migration comedies it produced, are at the core of HEIDI DENZEL DE TIRADO's article. To approach the media network and its productions, Denzel de Tirado expands the concept of "borderscapes" which focuses mainly on mental restrictions, to cinematic "transborderscapes". She defines "transborderscapes", constructed through images and media, as landscapes of crossing of geographical and linguistic boundaries, opening multifaceted perspectives, world views and memories from both sides of the border. Denzel de Tirado demonstrates her theoretic framework in the analysis of the films *No se aceptan devoluciones / Instructions not Included* (Eugenio Derbez 2013) and *Pulling Strings / Amor a Primer Visa* (Pitipol Ybarra 2013). Both films cover Mexican and US realities, and conclude with happy endings on the southern side of the border.

Wolfgang Müller-Funk's and Romana Radlwimmer's articles approach transborder matters from a poetical and phenomenological side. As Denzel de Tirado, WOLFGANG MÜLLER-FUNK places a cinematographic analysis at the center of his reflections. He reads Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) not as a great narrative of globalization, but stresses the film's vision of the global world as an obscurely intertwined network of small narratives. However, he also shows the film as paradigmatic example of a poetry of the space-in-between which he elaborates in the process. Müller Funk starts out by critically questioning whether a world structured as rhizome, without centres or limits, could be reality. He asks where (disappeared) borders become contact zones, or spaces-in-between, and defines the threshold, the bridge, the door, the wall, the fence, the barrier, and the membrane as different modes of (transcended) limitations. He argues in which ways these phenomena are different in character and how they cause different consequences for crossing and trespassing. According to Müller Funk's analysis, the limitations and spaces-in-

between multiply in *Babel* through objects such as the tourist bus or television, which allow realities to be separated yet permeable.

ROMANA RADLWIMMER detects a shift of perception towards transborder matters which has happened throughout the last decades and which she seeks to capture through different theories, media, art, literary and cinematographic works. She sketches a draft to a phenomenology of crossing, contemplating the diverse semantics and uses of ways through and beyond barriers and limitations. Concentrating on the Mexican-US border from both sides, Radlwimmer concludes that through acts of crossing, the border becomes an ambiguous regional and superregional site of unity and separation, violence and healing.

The present political situation of the Mexican-US border is one moment that motivates MARÍA SOCORRO TABUENCA CÓRDOBA's critical intervention. As a scholar from the border region Ciudad Juárez-El Paso, she observes the new limitations to crossing and its consequences as imposed through the Trump administration, reactions from the Mexican side, and the discursive changes going along with these developments. Tracing and expanding the term *transfronterizo* and its development since the 1990s, she points out how it touches concrete experiences of the border, and how it offers the possibility to choose between different strategies of thinking and being along lines of division. She also stresses the need to rethink the concept's meanings and its cultural and material foundations, asking in which ways the contact zones and movements it designates may also entail intellectual colonialism. Tabuenca Córdoba argues that once a *transfronterizo* shifting across borders and between sides, meanings, and options, is occupied by singular projects (may they be Mexican, Chicana, or other), they lose their political effectiveness and openness and fall into a hegemonic trap. She further explains that, while the Mexican-US border may have been at the center of discussions, voices from the North of Mexico or the Mexican Northern Border have been often overseen or neglected, and that transborder academics, who intrinsically live between worlds, have often not been seen as such, but ascribed to just one side or the other. With her intervention, Tabuenca Córdoba reminds of the fact that transborder realities frequently continue to be either simplified or silenced, and calls for a change of perspective.

The epistemological and political relevance of a transborder focus becomes clear throughout the different artistic and scientific contributions. Historically informed and within the framework of the latest regional, national and global events and understandings, the volume sounds out overlapping territories and mindsets, migratory or poetical flow, and extensions across borders or bodies. The case studies and theoretic explorations explain and navigate

through transborder phenomena as specific materiality and narrations, enhancing the literacy about the world we live in as an interconnected place: transborder phenomena appear through time and space. The different contributions question life and art from the perspective of crossing, transcending and trespassing through established orders and borders, and show the impact of shifting, moving and transforming them. They look at transborder practices as acts of moving and relocating (any type of) borders. The contributors develop and call for a transborder approach to today's political cultures and aesthetic paradigms. By doing so, *Transborder Matters* aims to enrich future conversations on border poetics, border politics and adjacent phenomena such as migrations, translations and experiences of the self and the other.

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