Borderlining: An Introduction

I played hopscotch at the border
men in green smile their green smiles
never ask me for papers, my skin is light
I crossed the border at least two hundred times
border linea abstract barrier
between my two concrete worlds.

Gina Valdes[1]

The border looked thin, except at crossing.

Jorge Guitart[2]

In an article on the cultural impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Carlos Monsiváis suggests that the old definition of Mexican identity—most famously articulated by Octavio Paz in his controversial 1950s best-seller, *Labyrinth of Solitude*—is based on a binary play of opposites: civilization vs. barbarism, Mexico City vs. the provinces, culture vs. desolation. This simplistic "us and them" conception of national identity is breaking down in the face of the northern border's ever-more insistent presence as an important cultural and commercial resource.

The borderlands contain several of Mexico's largest and richest cities, Monterrey and Tijuana among them. Their economic and cultural growth has disrupted traditional migration patterns from the country to the city so that Mexico City is no longer the sole force attracting provincial citizens trying to make good. In fact, it is the

border's simultaneous liminality and centrality that challenges Paz's and other's ways of thinking about Mexican identity. Monsiváis is right in pointing out that Paz's conclusions, and those of his followers, are based on a form of social organization that is no longer valid. The impingement of the border on national awareness, then, requires moving away from a national self-concept imagined in such outdated terms. Indeed, as the January 1994 uprising in the southern border state of Chiapas confirmed, the provinces have mobilized themselves without the mediation by Mexico City that central Mexican pundits would once have assumed to be a necessary precondition for any well-founded social or political movement. The provinces are getting their demands for attention and basic rights met, are exerting influence on national politics, and are forcing a reexamination of national identity.

Likewise, the citizens of the provinces have become mobile along alternate routes, choosing, for instance, to move to a border city rather than to Mexico City in search of better economic and social opportunities. Such movement has in effect provoked a continual transformation in the national consciousness, a transformation that takes place along with a circulation of goods, people, and culture among various rural settings and urban centers.

The cultural shock taking place at the border between U.S.- and Mexico-based concepts of themselves and each other redefines on a daily basis the limitations of identities constructed both regionally and nationally. Monsiváis points to "the certified absence of regional traditions and the fact that the 'typical northerner' derives directly from the culture industry, from the opportunistic and commercial use of nationalism, the sincere and sentimental use of nationalism. On the northern border, Mexicanness is, at one and the same time, a heartfelt choice,

a defensive shield, and a sporadic mask . . ."[3] When "Mexicanness" becomes both a matter of choice and a product of popular culture, then we know that we have left Mexico City and the agonizing soul-searching of Octavio Paz far behind, and are entering Tijuana and the world of Federico Campbell.

I. TIJUANA

There are at least half-a-dozen versions of the story behind the origin of Tijuana's name, all advanced more or less seriously and all of which ring true to some facet of the city's image. One version says that *Ti-wan* (city by the sea) was corrupted into "Ranchería de Ti Juan" or "Tía Juana" by Governor José María de Echendía when he established his presence in the area during the 1820s. Others trace the name to *Ticuan* or *Tecuam* (turtle), which, depending on the version of the story, derives from either the clan affiliation of the Cochimi chiefs or the former name of the mountain now known as Cerro Colorado. *Teguana* (inhospitable place or place without food) supposedly captures the Cochimi's frustration with the area's poor agricultural quality. Alternatively, some sources derive the city's name from references to an abundance of food: "Tía Juana," in this popular version of the town's origin, was the affectionate name for an extremely hospitable woman from Sonora who established herself in the area; she became so well known as a wonderful cook that people came from far and wide to sample her cuisine, and a small town sprang up around her to handle all the hungry visitors.

Tijuana has been relocated several times—partly because of disastrous floods—and has gone through numerous boom-and-bust cycles. At the end of the Mexican-

American War the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo separated the small town from the Port of San Diego; the arrival of the Tijuana & Tecate Railroad in 1907 consolidated Tijuana's ties to its nearest neighbor, the United States, rather than to the Mexican center of power in the more distant Mexico City. More than one kind of tourist arrived on the train from the north; in 1911 Mexican president Porfirio Díaz wrote to U.S. president William Taft to complain about excursion trains crossing the border in the middle of the Mexican Revolution: "Every time we have a battle your people run excursion trains to the border. This causes embarrassment and interferes with the discipline of our troops as your girls make cat-calls to my men. Your people are buying the loot of Tijuana from Madero's rebels. . . . There are many other things we could complain of but if these rules are observed we can fight out this war in peace."[4]

Tijuana remained very small until Prohibition brought U.S. developers to the city. They built the luxurious Agua Caliente casino, where the West Coast's beautiful people came to dance under a gold-leaf ceiling and to gamble with $50 gold pieces. Rita Hayworth and her father, billed as the "Casinos," danced the flamenco there; Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were regulars. Where the celebrities came to play there followed many other less newsworthy tourists who filled the many less-exclusive casinos, bars, and brothels, took excursions to the hot springs, and bet on the horse races. The consequences were sometimes curious and unexpected. So many people flocked to Tijuana on July 4, 1920 that San Diego ran out of gas and had to ration fuel.[5] The repeal of Prohibition began the town's slow slide into an emphasis on less luxurious forms of vice. In 1937 Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas nationalized the casino and, perhaps with the intent of reorienting Tijuana's unfortunate international image, ordered it converted into a school.[6]

Today Tijuana still has not superseded its reputation as an international flea market and sin city. That image accounts for a large percentage of its extremely high volume of tourism from the United States (with between forty and fifty million *legal* crossings a year, Tijuana is the busiest point on the border, perhaps the busiest border in the world). The volatile combination of brothels and velvet paintings of Elvis Presley or Emiliano Zapata seems to underlie the put-down "It's *so* TJ," which is frequently heard among Californian Mexican-Americans. For many people TJ embodies a flagrant and tasteless "rascuachismo."[7] Others suspect that the garishness is all part of the act, a way of playing to expectations from the other side. As Grahame Greene wrote in 1983, "The border means more than a customs house, a passport officer, a man with a gun. Over there everything is going to be different."[8] I think of Greene's words as I hum the catchy tune of a song by the border-born singer and international musical phenomenon, Juan Gabriel: "Todo es diferente; todo, todo es diferente: la frontera." Greene's and Gabriel's definitions of difference respond to totally divergent sets of expectations about what Mexicans are like, what gringos are like, and what the border represents to both groups. And yet both Greene and Gabriel highlight "difference" as the border's primary feature.

One difference in the two groups' border experiences relates to the borderlands' imbrication in U.S. affairs. This close tie gives inhabitants from both sides a commonality they do not share with the people from the interiors of their respective countries. The influence of the United States is felt intensely throughout Mexico, not

only in relation to its economic and political power and its technological expertise, but also by way of its television programming, its movie and rock stars, and its fast-food chains. This influence sparks a continual process of cultural exchange, though it is frequently underrecognized, that occurs in all parts of the country but takes on particular significance at the border. Interviews with Tijuana teenagers show that unlike their rock-fan counterparts in central Mexico who have to imagine what the U.S. scene looks like, mainly on the basis of television and movies, for the Tijuanans visiting the United States someday is not a distant dream: 41 percent go across the border during any given week, and only 11 percent have never gone across at all. Thus they speak with the same ease about San Diego's planetarium and shopping malls as they do about similar places in their hometown. They watch U.S. television programs, and, in a survey conducted by Néstor García Canclini, they indicate that they prefer U.S. radio stations to Mexican ones and that their musical preferences tend toward rock rather than Mexican folklore.[9] At the same time, as García Canclini perceptively notes, "Given their experience at the margin of U.S. culture, [Baja Californians] are not as susceptible to its glamour as Mexicans of the more distant capital."[10] The impact of the U.S., then, is both greater and more judiciously mediated in the borderlands. If greater familiarity in some cases breeds contempt, then it also offers a way of personally experiencing the language, food, architecture, popular culture, and social interactions common to people from "the other side."

Two Tijuana anecdotes capture the instability and the state of flux between two cultures that are seen as options to be picked up and discarded at will:

> "You don't use a passport?"
>
> "No, because I was born on the other side, but I have a birth certificate in Tijuana. So when they ask me where I was born, I have to say 'here.' Or there, depending on whom I am answering."[11]

> A photograph that we took by chance while walking down the Agua Caliente Boulevard provided us with a sudden synthesis: next to a poster that recommends "rock en tu idioma," was one written in English for a Mexican beverage [Don Pancho Coffe Liqueur (*sic*)]. When we are talking about language, ¿cuál es the other choice?[12]

This fluidity of identity that requires no passport to establish home ground in one place or another is echoed on another level with the unexpected juxtaposition of two Tijuana street signs and the real undecidability between the two major languages of public exchange and commerce. In such a context critics note,"even for the most monolingual of Latinos, the 'other' language looms constantly as a potential resource, and the option to vary according to different speech contexts is used far more often than not."[13]

If familiarity with the United States has mitigated the glamour of the other side, the Tijuanan businesspeople are still well aware that a large part of their city's revenue derives from maintaining a glamour of their own, an image of "difference" that will draw the tourists. So a bit of Spanish is mixed in with a bit of slightly distorted English, making the adventure both homey and defamiliarized at the same time, or the "rascuache" elements are played up, all in an effort to meet tourists' expectations. Unlike the southern parts of Mexico, say García Canclini's survey respondents, where the local people can count on the pyramids to pull in the tourist dollars, Tijuana never had much of anything to work with. Thus, says one

Tijuanan, "It's like we have to invent something for the gringos." And so, as Monsiváis and others have observed, they created a spurious difference. Today's Tijuana has more than one million inhabitants, over 60 percent of whom work in businesses directly or indirectly supported by tourism, and these are people cannily aware that U.S. citizens are not crossing the border to visit another good-sized modern city; they could go to Santa Barbara or Cincinnati for that experience. So Tijuana becomes TJ, projecting its difference. The dancing halls and brothels with their easily available alcohol and women feed one kind of fantasy. Other tourists buy big sombreros and get their pictures taken on stuffed burros painted with zebra stripes; as one Tijuanan commented in García Canclini's survey, "It responds to the myth that North Americans bring with them, that has to do with crossing the border into the past, into the primitive, into this thing about riding horses."[14] These tourists are in a sense crossing the border to enter into a Hollywood version of the U.S. frontier of a hundred years ago, with good guys and bad guys riding horses through shoot-'em-up cattle towns. Of course, since it is located in Mexico, TJ has to be both similar to those Hollywood dreams and slightly different, thus the silliness of sitting on a painted stuffed donkey rather than a horse.

In this transaction both sides are winners. The gringo tourists amuse themselves and confirm their superiority to themselves. Sitting on a zebra-ed donkey reminds them of the imaginary pleasures of riding a horse across the plains, but of course they are in Mexico, on a donkey, that stereotypical mount of the bumbling Mexican campesino rather than the regal and powerful steed of the all-American cowboy like the Lone Ranger. At the same time, the Tijuana businesspeople have a little harmless fun with

the tourists who fall for the cheap made-for-tourists attractions.

The stereotype of the city as a place for cheap—and not always entirely safe—adventure is complicated by Tijuana's equally powerful reputation as a point of entry to the United States for illegal immigrants. The daytime flow heading south is, then, matched by a surreptitious nighttime flow heading north; the U.S. Border Patrol calls this section of the international border the "war zone." Every evening campfires dot the fields around the fence, helicopters take to the sky with searchlights, and Migra vans line up waiting for their first load. Caution signs on border highways showing a stereotypical image of an immigrant family in flight serve as a constant reminder to drivers in the area that people, and not just deer, flee across superhighways.

Such generalized perceptions leave the impression, however, that Tijuana is a city of transients of one kind or another: hopeful emigrants heading north, hopeful tourists heading south. It is important to remember that much of the city's recent growth derives from a generalized border boom in assembly plants (*maquiladoras*) and from its relative prosperity as an industrial center.[15] Tijuanans also have one of the highest rates of literacy in the country, with a high level of participation in cultural activities of all sorts on both sides of the border and a successful program of keeping young people in school through the junior-high level. This prosperity has triggered internal immigration from all parts of Mexico, thereby creating extremely rapid and unplanned growth with the attendant problems: lack of housing, water, sewage removal, health services, etc.

Concerned citizens and worried city planners see this crisis as both economic and moral, one which not only

stretches the city's resources but also activates the breakdown of the social fabric and produces behaviors ranging from manifestations of psychological stress to criminality. This crisis is often framed imaginatively as a blocked or bounded potentiality for development. As one inhabitant put it, combining a frustrated utopianism with a concrete limitation, "It is the city of the future, but there is no water."[16] Another Tijuanan poignantly pointed to the way in which the borderline fence itself simultaneously serves as a horizon that turns Tijuanans back upon themselves and suggests the continuation of Tijuana on the other side, in another space both temporal and spiritual: "I've always thought that if there are monuments in Tijuana, there ought to be a monument with that design. The fence is full of symbolism. Those who emigrate always say, 'I crossed the fence.' It represents a massive crossover, or an attempt to cross, not just a political or geographical division."[17] The possibility of border crossing in either direction, whether acted upon or not, licenses dreams and permits the promiscuous cohabitation of different orders of reality. "Crossing," then, at the Tijuana/San Diego border is both a metaphor for a spiritual passage and a specific space of struggle and transgression.

II. TIJUANA: STORIES ON THE BORDER

Campbell's collection of short stories is part of a body of literature only recently beginning to receive, in both Mexico and the United States, the recognition it deserves. There is, in all of these eccentric texts, a different geosocial awareness from that of mainstream works from either country, a different linguistic texture, and a different relation to narrative agency. Like Rosina Conde and Guadalupe Rivemar, Campbell describes the often gritty and strident aspects of Tijuana's infamous nightclub scene; like Bárbara Jacobs, whose references range from the Spanish Civil War to San Francisco's hippie communities to the wars in Central America, Campbell too moves with ease and confidence between the depiction of a provincial childhood to convincing portrayals of the U.S. and Mexican metropolises of his adulthood.[18] Likewise, Campbell's work will be compared to Miguel Méndez's now-classic Chicano novel, *Pilgrims of Aztlán*.[19] In Méndez's novel, first published in Spanish in 1974, Tijuana serves as a metaphor of all that is wrong with the border culture created by the oppression of the United States. In style it is brisk and colloquial, using dialogue and staged vignettes to make its political point. In comparison to Méndez, Campbell's Tijuana is both more complex and less programmatically ideological. Campbell, unlike Méndez, describes a city that is struggling to define itself against the double pressures of the two great metropolitan centers that serve as its cultural and political reference points: D.F. (Mexico City) and L.A.

Campbell's stories graphically illustrate the confluence of many types of borders. One border is, of course, the political border between the United States and Mexico, physically impressed upon the consciousness of border dwellers in the form of the fence that slices through the San Diego–Tijuana metropolitan area. The fence, then, serves as a primary location and symbol. Some roads, suggest the narrators of this collection, lead up to the fence and then abruptly cease to exist. A few others break off at a border post presided over by an immigration officer, only to resume mysteriously, discontinuously, on the other side. Anyone who drives in the border region is always aware of the possibilities opened by the paved surface, and of the possibilities foreclosed. For people of the

two Californias the fence imposes itself as the most potent monument to their shared and divided history.

A second border is that between fiction and nonfiction. Campbell draws freely on autobiographical elements and crucial historical moments in Tijuana's history in constructing this volume. He was born in Tijuana in 1941, the son of a telegraph-operator father and a schoolteacher mother, and he characterizes the Campbell side of his family, like the characters in these stories, as observers of life rather than participants.[20] As is also true of the characters here, Campbell has particularly potent memories of trains and airplanes, and like the narrator of *Everything About Seals,* he recalls with affection his childhood vacations to Navojoa, of which he says: "A sense of belonging follows my footsteps. I know myself to be more complete here than in any other part of the world. I do not have the slightest doubt that my name is what it is. There is nothing left between the lines."[21] Campbell's father's sudden death and his mother's long and agonizing death from cancer also mark his life and his style. Campbell says of his mother: "I listened to my mother's voice all throughout those eighteen nights that I spent at her side as she lay dying, not because the timbre sounded like hers, but rather because there are internal voices that one saves up: the voices that taught us to speak, to learn a certain language, to name things, voices that remain engraved forever giving us the first sense of the world, a composition of place."[22] Both the sense of place and the physicality of voice are very much present in these stories.

In a similar way, Campbell calls up a number of crucial elements in Tijuana's historical record: its early Incarnation as a mission settlement linked to other towns in the area including Tecate, San Isidro, and San Diego; its Prohibition boom, largely dependent upon the casino business; the closing of the casino and the depression following the end of Prohibition in the U.S.; the demographic explosion in the last few decades. These events all become part of the texture of the collection of stories, a constantly shifting backdrop to the narrators and their interlocutors.

A third border is created in the encounter between land and sea, and Campbell recurs frequently to the metaphor of that border as well. Land and sea answer to each other in this California coastal borderland, just as the U.S. and Mexico must: the two borders, seashore and fence, run perpendicular to each other. This perfect conversation, these competing and cacophonous monologues—of land and sea, United States and Mexico, fence and shoreline, English-speakers and Spanish-speakers—pervade both Californias. Humankind follows the surfaces of the land or the traceries of its roads; fish swim the sea roads, and only those strange, ambiguous creatures, the seals, easily slip back and forth across the borders between them. The seals, says the narrator of *Everything About Seals,* are "halfway beings; metamorphosed borderliners." The human border dwellers, Campbell suggests, are also "halfway beings" in some ways, perfectly at home in their own territories but ungainly, perhaps incomprehensible, or even mutilated, outside them.

Finally Campbell's stories ask us to reevaluate the ways in which we think of social interactions. Social theorist Roger Rouse has argued that multidirectional circuits of migration—for example, Mixtec-speaking Indians moving, on a regular schedule, from the Oaxacan highlands to California and then back to Oaxaca—force us to rethink conventional notions of social science in which migration from Mexico to the United States is presumed to

be unidirectional. Rouse explains how seasonal migration affects the small Mexican towns in the interior of the country as well as the large cities on the border. Thus, the Mixtec Indians may have only a rudimentary knowledge of Spanish and little or no contact with the central Mexican government, yet they are bilingual in Mixtec and English, have access to fax machines and VCRs, and have developed sophisticated means of keeping the lines of communication with the United States open.

The braceros who come north to work in the U.S. interact with the United States and its cultural products, and they bring some of these ideas and products back with them to Mexico. The migrants who cross the border and decide to stay in California, becoming part of an increasingly internationalized Latino population in that state, add their visions and perspectives to the ever-shifting California identity. Rouse concludes that, in this sense, the borderlands become only the most obvious case of a general deterritorializing drive imperative operative in many societies.[23] It is one that requires an alternative mental cartography, one based on the notion of the border rather than on traditional, and largely superseded, concepts such as community or nation.[24] Campbell would agree with this notion of an alternative mental cartography, but he would also insist on remembering the specificity of the Tijuanan perspective on this issue. "We live in different, divided worlds," the narrator of *Everything About Seals* says to Beverly, the woman who obsesses him; he is both right and wrong in his assertion, since what divides the two characters is also the basis of their common identity. Campbell's starkly poetic novella ends abruptly, and the truncation of the novella, with its narrator's fall into the recital of meaningless commonplace courtesies, reminds us of how *situated* discussions of border reality, border identity, and border politics tend to be.

Campbell's poetic meditation on this complexly cross-cultural territory stimulates literary critics and cultural theorists to look beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries to find new ways of speaking and interacting. "What is unraveling now," says a recent article on the pachuco/pachuca, "is the discursive formation of a discipline—the conjunctural effects of its practices, institutions, technologies, and strategies of explanation."[25] This unraveling is particularly noticeable in borderline texts like Campbell's that focus on the lives and identities of border dwellers. Art from the borderlands, like Campbell's writing, cannot easily be accommodated to the cultural histories of either nation. Says Campbell in *Insurgentes Big Sur*, "And you'd turn your gaze from one side to another, from Los Angeles to the DF and vice versa, like in a Ping-Pong game. You couldn't decide very easily which of the two poles most attracted you, it wasn't ever very clear to you if the innovations in speech or dress . . . came from Tepito or from the East Side." In the Ping-Pong view, central Mexican culture and the Spanish language exert a strong pull from one side, but Los Angeles's popular culture and the appeal of a secure income exert an equal and opposite attraction: "Where have you been, in Los Angeles?" asks a character in *Tijuana Times*, and the narrator muses, "The question presupposes a myth. Every absence is related to an adult destiny on Los Angeles's East Side." The constant to-and-fro from LA to the DF also defines the narrator of *Everything About Seals*, a character who longs for safe limits—but not the limits imposed from outside, of a reality circumscribed by an all-too-real fence.

These stories not only mark, but also provoke a certain kind of internal cultural crisis in narrowly conceived

ideas about the definitions of nation and nationalism. Furthermore, while these stories in no way endorse the kind of violent conflicts that often result from the friction between cultures in the border region, they do illustrate how assumptions about gender roles, personal politics, and appropriations of authority are played out in these regions of cultural miscegenation.

III. FEDERICO CAMPBELL

Federico Campbell, who was born in Tijuana in 1941, has written one other work of fiction, a novel loosely based on the 1968 student demonstrations in Mexico City and entitled *Pretexta (o el cronista enmascarado)* (Pretext [or the masked chronicler]). He is, however, best known in Mexico for his work as a reporter and a journalism teacher. After studying law and philosophy at the National Autonomous University of Mexico from 1960 to 1965, Campbell dedicated himself to what would become his primary career, journalism. His work has been published in Mexican newspapers such as *El Día*, *Excélsior*, and *Siempre!*, as well as in South American publications like *Marcha*, *Amaru*, and *El Nacional*. In 1967 he obtained a scholarship from the World Press Institute in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and for a period of time he worked with the *Hartford (Conn.) Courant*. In 1969 he became the Washington, D.C., correspondent for the Mexican news agency.

Between 1973 and 1977 Campbell edited the journal *Mundo médico* (Medical world), and he founded a small press, La Máquina de Escribir, in 1977. From 1977 to 1988 Campbell worked as a reporter for the weekly journal *Proceso*. In 1990 he was recognized with a major award from the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las

Artes (National Council for Arts and Culture), and since 1991 he has been a member of the Association of Investigative Reporters and Editors, which is headquartered at the University of Missouri. Campbell has also given free courses in journalism in several cities along the U.S./Mexico border.

His literary activities include translating plays, including works by William Shakespeare, Harold Pinter, David Mamet, and Leonardo Sciascia, from English and Italian into Spanish and authoring several volumes of essays and interviews as well as a journalism textbook. His works in progress include *La invención del poder* (The invention of power) and *Máscara negra* (Black mask), both of which are works of political philosophy, and a literary journal entitled *Post scriptum triste*.

IV. BORDER STUDIES AND AMERICAN STUDIES

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that in recent years the border in general, and Tijuana in particular, has become a magnet for theoretical work by philosophers, writers, and artists. French philosopher Michel de Certeau spent the last years of his life in San Diego, and his experiences there deeply influenced his contention that life is a constant crossing of borders.[26] *Borderlands/La frontera* by Texas social critic Gloria Anzaldúa is required reading in many university classrooms, and Tijuanan "border brujo" Guillermo Gómez Peña was awarded a MacArthur "genius" award for his sometimes scandalous performance art. On the other side of the border, Mexican writers and thinkers like Carlos Monsiváis, Néstor García Canclini, and Elena Poniatowska all point to the importance of considering Mexico's northern border in any serious reevaluation of Mexican culture and society. This

recognition of the critical importance of border studies has been reaffirmed in more tangible ways as well: in 1982 the Colegio de la Frontera Norte (Northern Border College), which emphasizes research on border issues, opened in Tijuana.

Borderlands writers and thinkers argue for the need to grant equal status and validity to their point of view when ranged against American Studies' traditional privileging of a cross-Atlantic orientation; that is, American Studies tends to look to places like Great Britain and France for theoretical support rather than to Latin America or Asia. For example, Donna Haraway concludes that in theoretical debates too little attention has been paid to the politics of location, when in fact, geographical sites affect theoretical statements in critical ways. In an interchange with other scholars Haraway made this position clear: "It's a California statement I want to make. It has to do with seeing the world in relationship to Latin America. . . . living in conquest territory. . . . It's a sense of the Pacific."[27]

One of the attractions of the border area for scholars rests upon their perception that, unlike other geographical sites that have traditionally served as the location where abstract thinking originates, the border offers an alternative space featuring a flexible and mutating set of social and cultural arrangements. The border sets up a position for both living and thinking, one involving a sense of place as well as implicit displacement. It suggests a space that is both neatly divided and, in the crossover dreams of its inhabitants, disorientingly confused. Because of this feature, the border seems to many thinkers to be a particularly clear and forceful example of issues ranging from the political to the aesthetic, all of which

are imagined less extremely, or articulated less clearly, in other situations. "It often occurred to me," writes García Canclini, "that, along with New York, Tijuana is one of the major laboratories of postmodernity."[28] Homi Bhabha goes even further when he hypothesizes that "where the transmission of 'national' traditions was once the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants . . .—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of World Literature."[29] Emily Hicks would agree that the border is both laboratory and canvas for many postmodern artists; yet, she reminds us, it is a version of postmodernity with a particular edginess: "What is most intriguing about border culture is its refusal of the emptiness of the U.S. post-modern culture of simulation, on the one hand, and its refusal of the rigidity of the folk and modernist cultures of Mexican nationalism and some Chicano nationalists, on the other."[30]

García Canclini (Mexico City), Hicks (San Diego), and Bhabha (Sussex, England) are all fascinated with the theoretical implications of borderlands studies, and all are working on parallel projects aimed at reconstructing and reinscribing the reciprocal exchanges that take place at the intersections of uneven and unequal abutting cultural structures. These theoretical discussions have another function beyond instilling an appreciation of the aesthetic implications. As Hicks suggests, and George Yúdice confirms, they return an awareness of ethical concerns to both narrative and theoretical acts.

The idea of a single *grand récit*, or generally understood master narrative, is itself a concept with political as well as aesthetic and theoretical implications. More importantly, the limitations of such abstract and universalizing

structures can be seen most clearly in the dissonant borderlands and peripheries of both societies and theoretical structures. Yúdice writes:

> My argument as regards Latin America is not that informal economies or narcotraffic *are* postmodern phenomena but, rather, that they are simultaneously responses and propositions that pose alternatives to the *grand récit* of postmodernity as it has been constructed by Lyotard, Jameson, and their predecessors. . . . How we (re)think modernity and postmodernity has consequences for how we construe the ethicopolitical goals of theory. Paz's poetics of reconciling opposites in the transhistory of the present leads to an antimodern irrationality with little room for accommodating the democratic demands of diverse social movements. Rethinking democracy outside the terms set by the *grand récit* of modernity is an enterprise many Latin American social movements see as necessary.[31]

What follows naturally from such a radical rethinking of the *grand récits,* those of both modernity and postmodernity, is a rethinking, as well, of the nature of such concepts as nationalism and citizenship, which also need to be revised to take into account the specificity and heterogeneity of communities. When one moves into the borderlands, the crossing of cultures, languages, races, experiences, social statuses, and economic expectations serve as an interrogation of such master narratives. Even where mobility remains restricted, an awareness of the potential for such crossings serves a similar function. Thus, even for Tijuanans who never visit the United States, an awareness of the existence of the fence continually reminds them of the potential for crossing, or not crossing, to the other side. And, certainly, the fence and the border guard, which enforce a legal definition of identity—documented or undocumented, also bring to the forefront questions involving the differential treatment of people based not only on citizenship, but also on factors such as race and assumed social class. Likewise, along with critical practice sensitive to border issues is recognition that the idea of a single, absolute meaning (such as unequivocal answers to questions like "Who is Mexican?" and "What is Mexicanness?") is not so much lost as it is subject to negotiation, as are the other products of cultural conditioning. In such renegotiations of identity, cultural constructs are both eroded and reinforced. The querying of Mexicanness, as constructed alongside a northern border identity, is also a locus for recouping the memory of a slowly dying historical record from the general gravitation toward social amnesia, which has been noted by so many border scholars.

Border studies, accordingly, uncovers and provides a space for exploring the constructed nature of what Yúdice would call "ethics-talk" and "identity-talk." It also provides important examples of *how* such constructions are formulated and provides a starting point from which to begin to explore the pressures involved in both their evolution and their maintenance of these constructions.

And, to a certain extent, that is the lure of Tijuana for me, here in upstate New York.

NOTES

1. Gina Valdes, *Comiendo Lumbre: Eating Fire* (Pismo Beach, Calif.: Maize Press, 1986), 16.

2. Jorge Guitart, "On Borders," *Buffalo Arts Review* 3, no. 1 (1985): 5.

3. Carlos Monsiváis, "De la cultura mexicana en vísperas del Tratado de Libre Comercio," in *La educación y la cultura ante el Tratado de Libre Comercio,* eds. Gilberto Guevara Niebla and Néstor García Canclini (Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1992), 202.

4. June Nay Summers, *Buenos días, Tijuana* (Ramona, Calif.: Ballena Press, 1974), 26.

5. Ibid., 37.

6. Mexican anthropologist and culture critic Néstor García Canclini notes that the current residents of Tijuana have mixed feelings about Agua Caliente. They recall, for example, that the tower "was located elsewhere, burned down, and has been restored as the symbol of a past that in part tends to be denied. They say that its relocation in a different place corresponds to the reelaboration of a time now seen as displaced, denied, and relocated. They see in this removal a way of taking on their history: even though it is an exact replica, it is changed." Néstor García Canclini and Patricia Safa, *Tijuana: La casa de toda la gente* (Iztapalapa, Mexico: INAH-ENAH, Programa cultural de las fronteras, 1989), 53.

7. In a recent interview, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto defines "rascuachismo" as "an underclass sensibility that uses parodic expression and is rooted in particular forms of community culture." "Interview with Tomás Ibarra-Frausto," in *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture,* eds. George Yúdice, Jean Franco, and Juan Flores (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 214.

8. Cited in Marcienne Rocard, "The Mexican-American Frontier: The Border in Mexican-American Folklore and Elitelore," *Aztlan* 18 (1989):83.

9. García Canclini and Safa, *Tijuana,* 49–50.

10. Néstor García Canclini, "Cultural Reconversion," in *On Edge,* 42.

11. García Canclini and Safa, *Tijuana,* 47.

12. Ibid., 58.

13. Juan Flores and George Yúdice, "Living Borders/Buscando America: Languages of Latino Self-formation," *Social Text* 8, no. 2 (1990): 75.

14. García Canclini and Safa, *Tijuana,* 29.

15. The borderlands on the Mexican side are experiencing rapid growth because income in that area tends to be at least three times higher than elsewhere in the country. I say this prosperity is "relative," however, since the Mexican border-dweller knows very well that the more prosperous "other side" still represents some of the most economically depressed regions of the United States. See Milton H. Jamail and Margo Gutiérrez, *The Border Guide* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 1–2.

16. García Canclini and Safa, *Tijuana,* 40.

17. Ibid., 45.

18. Rosina Conde is the author of numerous chapbooks and volumes of poetry. Among her narratives are *De infancia y adolescencia* (About childhood and adolescence) (Mexico City: Pantomima, 1982) and *En la tarima* (On the platform) (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1984). Guadalupe Rivemar's work, which has been published in various places, includes "El New Yorker," in *Memoria del primer encuentro de escritores de las Californias* (San Diego: SEBS-DAC, 1987) and "Regresamos" (We are going back) (*El Oficio* 5 [1987]). Bárbara Jacobs's best-known work is her autobiographical novel, *The Dead Leaves,* which focuses on her early life in Mexico with her Lebanese-American father and Mexican mother (trans. David Unger. Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone, 1993).

19. Miguel Méndez, *Pilgrims of Aztlán,* trans. David William Foster (Tempe, Ariz: Bilingual Review/Press, 1993).

20. Federico Campbell, *De cuerpo entero* (Mexico City: Ediciones Corunda, 1990), 34.

21. Ibid., 16.

22. Ibid., 15.

23. The concept of "deterritorialization" comes from the influential works of French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *Anti-Oedipus* (trans. Mark Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane [New York: Viking, 1977]) and *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (trans. Dona Polan [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986]). They use the concept to describe how internationalization, polyglotism, political immediacy, and high technology all affect contemporary writing. The sense

of the term might be aptly captured for my purposes here by a familiar phrase often repeated by Chicano writers and artists: "From Aztec to high tech." I am indebted to D. Emily Hicks's *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) for her work in theorizing deterritorialization in the context of border culture.

24. Roger Rouse, "Mexicano, Chicano, Pocho: La migración mexicana y el espacio social del posmodernismo," *Unomásuno* (31 December 1988), *Página Uno* literary supplement: 1–2.

25. Marcos Sánchez-Tranquilino and John Tagg, "The Pachuco's Flayed Hide: Mobility, Identity, and *Buenas Garras,*" in *Cultural Studies,* eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 557.

26. See Michel de Certeau, "Californie, un théatre de passants," *Autrement* 31 (April 1981): 10–18.

27. Donna Haraway, discussion period recording in *Cultural Studies,* 703.

28. García Canclini, "Cultural Reconversion," *On Edge,* 40.

29. Homi K. Bhabha, "The Home and the World," *Social Text* 10 (1992): 146.

30. D. Emily Hicks, "Review of Herbert Blau's The Eye of the Prey," unpublished manuscript, 1988, 32–33.

31. George Yúdice, "Postmodernism and Transnational Capitalism in Latin America," in *On Edge,* 4, 7.

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Everything About Seals

> And on the right hand of the Indies
> there was an island called California,
> to one side of earthly paradise, totally
> populated by women without a single
> man. They had strong, beautiful bodies
> and were fiercely courageous and very
> powerful. . . . Now and again men from
> the mainland went there and lay with
> them and if they bore female children,
> they kept them, and if the babies were
> boys, they threw them out of the
> community.
>
> *Garci-Ordóñez de Montalvo*
> The Adventures of Esplandián, 1492

I

I can't really tell much difference between one city and another. I can land in places I've never seen before, and I drive around as if I had spent my whole life there. Wide streets and narrow streets, the architecture of the houses, none of it really catches my attention. Maybe only the movement of people and cars bewilders me and makes me wander from one place to another without heading anywhere in particular. It's all the same to me. Little by little the discrete qualities of things slip away, and almost every afternoon I end by falling asleep, then waking, and—naturally—not speaking to anybody. I have given myself truces: periods of time in which I postpone