The best history, on might think, the one that most closely matches what actually happened. What actually happened, however, is expressed in a story. Apart from that, it becomes difficult to imagine why what actually happened would matter. To read a book by understanding each individual word, but in a random order, is to know the contents of the book, perhaps, but it is not to understand the book. What’s more, to read a book properly, and then provide a detailed account of what happened in the book, and nothing more, is not to have really understood the book.

This interest in holding someone to what actually happened, I argue, is in question now, particularly in the context of the contemporary United States. I would like to present an unorthodox view here, namely that what has been recently derided as an alternative truth age actually represents a more authentic expression of the multicultural American culture than that which any positivistic or essentialist history has provided. In a multiculture, there are multiple histories to be either synthesized or just admitted as incompatible. Either way, history has to be conceived differently, evaluated differently, and even imagined anew. For better or worse, the United States is at a breaking point, conceptually if not also politically, and attempts to hold it together with an overarching story are not likely to succeed forever.

Gloria Anzaldúa’s self-identification as many things simultaneously is not just important to the idea of intersectionality in identity-politics discourse, but to the
additional, and perhaps more complicated idea of intersectionality in historical consciousness. With increasing attention to political and geographic border questions regarding the United States and Mexico, it is important to consider more philosophically the idea of borders. Is it realistic to have one history for a country? If so, is it essential to have the most comprehensive history, one that captures what actually happened but from multiple perspectives? Or is it permissible, if not beneficial, to have multiple stories, even if these stories seem to be in conflict, and thus overall incomprehensible? It is the last of these considerations in particular that Anzaldúa helps us to understand, especially as the United States is experiencing the signs of what some call a post-truth culture. Her most important text in this respect is part of a pithy poem.

This land was Mexican once

Was Indian always

And is.

And will be again. (Frontera 113)

What follows in this paper is in large part an elaboration of these brief lines. First, though, I provide an anecdote that shows us the relevance of the topic not only in terms of political space, but cultural time.

After touring a creationist theme park in Kentucky, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter was questioned about his experience, and he noted that he personally believed in evolution. Yet, he added, “if God created it four billion years ago, or six thousand years ago, it doesn’t matter to me” (Clark). This idea seems to be based, for better or worse, on a legacy of popularized pragmatism. The context is likely the seemingly interminable
dispute between creationists and evolutionists. And yet both groups are likely to find Carter’s statement to be unsatisfactory, if not offensive. Creationists would find it to be one more instance of worldly corruption, shown in the fact that a former president of what they think of as a Christian nation would deny what they believe is the true Christian teaching. On the other hand, evolutionists would find it to be disappointing, if not harmful, that a scientist and former president of a secular nation would sanction the right to believe in things contrary to what evolutionists believe are settled fact. Carter puts himself in a position in which he seems to validate two contradictory historical facts. And for him what actually happened--or precisely how long what actually happened happened--is simply not important.

If Carter seems to be trying to evade an uncomfortable debate, this is not necessarily a vice. One feature of pragmatism is its disdain for debates that are disingenuously pursued as matters of truth, but are really battles of sentiments among the participants. When William James presents his famous anecdote about the squirrel, the tree, and the disputing philosophers, one can read the story as expressing a subtle disdain for the philosophers. Both the tree-circlers and the squirrel circlers are interpreting things according to arbitrarily-chosen positions, ones that, upon reflection, seem to be little more than tools for winning an argument, and thus dominating an intellectual territory. When temperaments clash, they end up spinning around each other. I for one find it difficult to fault Carter for expressing his productively evasive belief.
Native Transcendentalism

What practical difference does it make if the 4-billion-year or the 6-thousand-year history were true? We can classify the four-billioners and the six-thousanders as two types of historical communities. This idea should not seem completely foreign to us: Different Native American communities, for example, kept track of time in different ways—at least prior to the conquest. To understand this idea of plurality invites consideration of what I’d like to call a *native transcendentalism*. This is offered as an alternative, or a supplement to the idea of *native pragmatism*. Scott Pratt’s excellent work on *Native Pragmatism* sets as plausible, from even a traditional historian’s perspective, the idea of influence from Native Americans on the early hints of pragmatism among the European occupiers. In his view, pragmatism was influenced by both Native American and European sources. Pratt says that “to account for the development of American thought, we may refigure the frontiers as borders, as regions of interaction, exchange, and transformation. He notes, significantly, that “some aspects of the border are surely aspects of conquest, that is, ‘frontiers’ of European expansion and the accompanying destruction of Native life and culture.” This is not the end of the story, though, since while “borderlands are regions of colonization, but they are also regions of decolonization” (16-17). Pratt’s overall argument is that “much of what American philosophy is known for can be traced to its origins in the borderlands between Europe and America and its ‘originality’ to well-established aspects of Native American thought” (16-17).
Why not re-orient this consideration of borders toward the north and south axis, which would mean crossing a river instead of an ocean? We do not need to establish the plausibility of linear-history connections, but to give greater consideration to the mythological understanding of history present in pre-Columbian America. As Vine Deloria explains, “Indian tribes had little use for recording past events.” Rather, “The way I heard it” or “It was a long time ago” usually prefaces any Indian account of a past tribal experience, indicating that the story itself is important, not its precise chronological location. That is not to say that Indian tribes deliberately avoided chronology. In post-Discovery times, some tribes adopted the idea of recording specific sequences of time as a means of remembering the community’s immediate past experiences. (99)

It is worth noting that the past tribal experiences were bound to a community, and not merely fancied by an individual story teller. The historian is bound to the people through whom the story is transmitted. DeLoria denies, however, that the story is bound to a chronological location, that is, a supposedly high-fidelity picture of what actually happened apart from human experience. DeLoria’s view is more a natural part of the American consciousness than we acknowledge. Eschewing traditional history, DeLoria speculates that “we have on this planet two kinds of people--natural peoples and the hybrid peoples.” He continues with a claim that some might find surprising:

the natural peoples represent an ancient genetic engineering that irrevocably changed the way these people from the Near East--the peoples from the Hebrew, Islamic, and Christian religious traditions--first adopted the trappings of
civilization and then forced a peculiar view of the natural world on succeeding
generations. The planet, in their view, is not our natural home and is, in fact, ours
for total exploitation. (2)

DeLoria is creating an alternative history. Compelling on some level, it starts from the
fact of humanity’s exploitation of nature and postulates a transcendental exploiter, some
form of extraterrestrial engineering. This idea can be understood in a fairly ordinary,
but significant way. To think of something as extraterrestrial means, ultimately, to think
of something that is in some important respect outside of *la tierra*. To think of an earlier
time in history, with people who had an uncanny and distanced relationship to the
Earth, is to have imagined something extraterrestrial. In mythology, there tends to be a
collapse of the literal-figurative distinction, and we can, without excessive difficulty,
understand DeLoria as postulating either space aliens or alienated humans. It is the
latter that is the most plausible, fitting better into what we already believe factually
about our world, namely that human beings are, for better or worse, the exploiters of the
Earth, and the primary exploiters were those from the Hebrew, Islamic, and Christian
religious traditions.

**Anzaldúa: The None and the Many**

Gloria Anzaldúa identifies herself, implicitly, as one the hybrid people to which Deloria
refers. She does not support the exploitation of the planet, but she believes in a personal
multiplicity that allows her to transcend what we have come to see as natural
boundaries. As such she is alienated from nationality and ethnicity. Anzaldúa’s frontier
philosophy is an ungrounded movement between cultures, races, ethnicities, and sexualities. Similar to Deloria, she is engaged in the development of new forms of historical consciousness. Jacqueline Doyle refers to this as a “collective birth of a new culture” (173).

For example, when Anzaldúa is regarded as a lesbian writer, she emphasizes that “there are no lesbian writers,” but only “lesbian perspectives, sensibilities, experiences and topics” (163). She prefers the words “dike” and “queer” because, “as a working-class Chicana” (163) they have more agreeable connotations to her. And yet, she notes that I have the same kinds of problems with the label “lesbian writer” that I do with the label “Chicana writer.” Si, soy chicana, and therefore a Chicana writer. But when critics label me thus, they’re looking not at the person but at the writing, as though the writing is Chicana writing instead of the writer being Chicana. By forcing the label on the writing they marginalize it. (164)

The evasion might thus be considered strategic, an attempt not to “fall into the trap of the colonized reader and writer forever reacting against the dominant” (165). Yet because of this evasiveness, the secondary literature is somewhat at a loss to interpret Anzaldúa, because she is someone who consciously moves out of reach in order, paradoxically, to be more accessible. Anzaldúa saw herself as a multicultural shaman whose writing would clarify the identity of an imagined community. This shamanic positioning is, in the words of Betsy Dahms, “simultaneously of the community and separated from it,” where “the movement towards a deeper spiritual connection separates the shaman psychically and sometime physically” in order to “return
transformed to her community and enact change” (11). Anzaldúa promotes two forms of consciousness, a *mestizaje* consciousness that is located “in the synthesis of many sites at once,” and a *nepantla* consciousness that “affiliates herself with no side at all” (ftn. Koegeler-Abdi, xz). This amounts to an expansive process of identification in the North American continent, what we can think of as an explicitly pan-American version of Walt Whitman’s famous contradictory self-identification. Whitman is large, containing multitudes, but these were presumably limited to the U.S. border; Anzaldúa is larger, containing more multitudes.

Especially earlier in her career, Anzaldúa was trying to be many things at once. “*Simultaneamente, me miraba la cara desde distintos ángulos,*” she says invoking mystical art. “*Y mi cara, como la realidad, tenía un carácter multiplice*” (*Borderlands* 66). She can be interpreted as multiple-Marys standing on a serpent, while, as she says, “something in me takes matters into our own hands, and eventually, takes dominion over serpents--over my own body, my sexual activity, my soul, my mind, my weaknesses and strengths” (73). Or perhaps she *is* the serpent, the unsettling force underneath the foot of those hybrid people attempting earth domination.

**Herida Abierta**

To engage with Anzaldúanism is to engage with Anzaldúa herself, as a figure of mythological expansion. The mythical body of Anzaldúa expands spiritually, maternally, in order to incorporate the Americas. And this is not easy. Charles Sanders Peirce based his theory of inquiry on the irritation of doubt, which results from not
having fixed beliefs. In Sarah Ohmer’s description of Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness, we see that this un-fixed state is

painful, in constant motion, it’s a break in the subject/object relationship, it’s adopting two or more cultures, ambiguity, plurality, and an evolution to be free of cultural dominance. The mestiza consciousness is not: an establishment; a unity; a fixed category; a system of exclusion; a lifestyle manual; or an identification process with specific steps. (143)

Everything in this description could be applied to pragmatism, except that Peirce’s pragmatism refers to the beginning of inquiry by using the rather privileged term irritation, a condition that results when comfort is disrupted. Anzaldúa, on the other hand, is expressing pain. Elsewhere she talks with an almost disturbing honestly about being una herida abierta, not disguising the fact that this open wound is sourced in her own body, the result of the startlingly young age at which, because of a medical condition, she started to menstruate. Anzaldúa’s painful split consciousness is imposed from birth¹. People like her “bleed in mestizaje,” and “eat and sweat and cry in mestizaje” (“Artists” 11).² Her belief is similar to that of philosopher Leopoldo Zea, who talks about being part of two undervalued cultures as “an inheritance that we feel more like a weight [lastre] than as an asset [ayuda]” (qt. in Pappas, 193).

¹ Sports fans, for example, sometimes make ridiculous assertions such as that they bleed black and gold, signaling their devotion to a particular sports team and its colors. The irony with which this is presented is lost when one considers the actual level of devotion people have to sports teams, investing time and money into allegiance to the imaginary dominion of sports victories, one that possibly serves to hide the real dominion of white privilege.

² There is a sense that this place of the open wound is sacrificial, and not exactly desirable spiritually. In fact, it might not even be desirable politically. Smadar Lavie notes that the Palestine-Israeli border is a place where “none of the border’s South-South coalition members -- Mizrahim or Palestinian -- want to be in this ‘third country’ emerging out of” what she calls a “painful dispossessio of lands, languages, and cultures” (114).
Anzaldúa expresses a universalized sense of embodied mestizaje. Through a character named La Prieta, for example, Anzaldúa tells us not to get “fixated on a certain kind of reality--that this reality is not all it appears to be. There are cracks in the picture. Maybe other worlds exist and they sometimes bleed into this one through the cracks.” The situation is transactional, since “it bleeds into my world and I bleed into its” (Reader 275). William James did not have access to the same type of spirit-body experience as Anzaldúa. Late in life, however, when his heart condition was likely expressing itself with cracks in his own system, he writes to stained glass artist Sarah Wyman Whitman, asserting that he is

against bigness and greatness in all their forms, and with the invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet rending the hardest monuments of man’s pride, if you give them time. (Correspondence 544)

The main point is that there is an effusion from below. Anzaldúa and James are both expressing a leaking precariousness of identities, political systems, and philosophical theories. For her part, Anzaldúa does not easily identify as a certain thing because she cannot, and she cannot because she understands at a fundamental level the fluidity of consciousness.3 Still, the situation of a Bostonian pragmatist-transcendentalist was one of relative privilege compared with that of a working-class mestiza who sees “oposición e

3 Kelli Zaytoun says Anzaldúa “calls the very metaphysics of self into question,” (Pathways 152) while Kim Diáz refers to this as a rejection of a substance metaphysics that would create “la Mexanidad with a set of immutable properties” (47).
insurrección,” and the “heat of anger or rebellion or hope split open that rock” (Borderlands 73). Our tendency might be to interpret Anzaldúa’s split-consciousness as a later example of James’ split consciousness. Yet, with a subversive shift in emphasis, we can interpret James’ idea as a foreshadowing of Anzaldúa.

Another foreshadowing of Anzaldúa is found in Ralph Waldo Emerson. With his usual confidence, Emerson the “pragmatic romanticist” (Field 19) proclaims the truth he feels: “As always,” he notes, “I venerate the oracular nature of woman. The sentiment which the man thinks he came unto gradually through the events of years, to his surprise he finds woman dwelling there in the same, as in her native home” (Emerson 123). Perhaps the history of philosophy in the United States has to this point been a lagging history of development in the male consciousness of what women knew much earlier. Emerson doesn’t quite understand Anzaldúa, and expresses his privilege both in putting woman in a natural place, and in choosing to venerate such a place. In contrast, Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness, “seemingly aimed at women” according to Danielle Lamb, is “a place of psychic restlessness, multiple personality, mental nepantilism, unchoque (collision), and counterstance” that exemplifies “the anxiety that exists within the new mestiza psyche” (290--291).

Demographic shifts in the United States signify that white supremacy is due for a fall. The meztiza consciousness is leaking into the American psyche, which provokes the kind of psychic restlessness that results in many collisions among, for example, white supremacist viewpoints and multicultural viewpoints, each with a different history. One indicating a wish to return to a mythical beginning, the other to move forward to a
utopian end. As Anzaldúa says in her poem, America both is Mexican and will be Mexican at the same time. America both is Indian and will be Indian at the same time.

**Spiritual Praxis**

Chris Tirres has stressed the importance of spirituality in the work of Anzaldúa. He identifies three different philosophical positions: a “realist” position that assumes spirits are real; a “pluralist” position, “which affirms that spirits are both literally and imaginatively present”; and a “functionalist and pragmatic option” that considers “whether or not the spiritual journey makes positive changes in a person’s life” (120). Tirres notes that “Anzaldúa’s pluralism is evident in her defense of imaginal journeys as both literally and imaginally present. Wary of intellectual imperialism, Anzaldúa does not want to have to decide definitively between one or the other” (132). Anzaldúa’s spiritual praxis involves “trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut ... trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be” (qt. in Tirres 137). The world is not what is out there, but that which is yet to be changed. If Anzaldúa sounds pragmatic, it is of a more idealistic kind, one that might better be described in terms of transcendentalism than pragmatism:

> The struggle is inner: Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado, mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian--our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before
changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (xy)

Anzaldúa does not say that the source of the struggle is interior, as a traditional idealist might, but merely that the place of the struggle is interior. As Aimee Carrillo Rowe explains, “personal experience which might be taken as individual or unique, is actually a function of the socio-political forces that extend well beyond the individual” (14). Anzaldúa is thus neither a passive victim stuck in her own world nor an active reformer focused only on the outer world, but a spiritual revolutionary taking the conditions imposed upon her and transforming them. Anzaldúa is a transcendentalist poet who promotes changes of heart first and then a pragmatist philosopher who acknowledges the fundamental interconnectivity of self and world.

Anzaldúa’s work is that of creating a new myth. She says she is cultureless, challenging “the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos” and also, paradoxically, “participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet” (Frontera 80-81). This culture is deep, drawing from the same hidden source that motivated the transcendentalists in the United States. “Man is a stream whose source is hidden,” says Emerson, famously. Anzaldúa refers to this same kind of hidden source in terms of her own geography:

I have to surrender to the forces, the spirits, and let go. I have to allow el cenote, the subterranean psychic norias or reserves containing our depth consciousness
and ancestral knowledge, to well up in the poem, story, painting, dance, etc. El Cenote contains knowledge that comes from the generations of ancestors that live within us and permeate every cell in our bodies. (*Reader 291*)

The cenotes of Central America have existed for just as long, for example, as any New England stream or pond that collects it. Henry David Thoreau muses about this with a peculiar sense of history. “Perhaps on that spring morning when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden, Walden Pond was already in existence,” perhaps as a mythical pool for countless “unremembered nations’ literature” (123). The underground lakes of central America are metaphors just as deep as legendary Walden Pond, and just as good of a referent for unremembered people.

**Alternative Temporality**

The person who dismisses the idea of “alternative facts” probably should also be willing to dismiss, for example, the 2010 World’s People Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth’s call for a “traditional ecological knowledge” that Joni Adamson

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4 Cenotes contain human ancestors, they also contain non-human ones. Anzaldúa’s views on animals are not clear. Norma Cantú notes how she walked with Anzaldúa through a famous zoo, starting a “discussion of how the animals must feel, cooped up, away from their natural habitat, as we are away from our beloved borderlands where Texas and Mexico abut.” It is not made evident what Anzaldúa’s specific take was on that, although Cantú concludes that the animals were “protected, yes, but not free” (1). The issues of zoos is a subset of the issue of animal exploitation in general, an

5 As Dann puts it, transcendentalism is “an antidote to the seductive dangers of both Mammon, the materialist mindset, and Lucifer, the unmoored angel of light whose promise of knowledge glimmered blindingly from the temples of Spiritualism, Mormonism, and Freemasonry.” “Thoreau’s martial attitude,” continues Dann, involved believing that “he was doing daily battle with a godless adversary,” something that he calls “as much historical reality as personal myth” (164).
reasonably interprets as “an ‘alternative modernity,’ which calls on all the world’s people to turn away from an ‘irrational logic’ that threatens all life on Earth” (7). Or one might agree with Tace Hedrick’s reference to “the appeal to ancient or primitive knowledges as a foundation for the rebirth or renewal of the present” in reference to Anzaldúa, a figure who for her serves as “an antidote to the sense that modernity’s emphasis on technology, science, and rationality had precipitated a spiritual crisis” (70). One should probably also at least appreciate claims, neurotically motivated as they might seem, that darwinian evolution has created a similar spiritual crisis for Christianity, which some believe needs a renewal through the return of a more ancient or primitive form. The question here is whether the creationist parks are promoting what we consider the right kind of primitive Christianity. This is a pragmatic redirection of matters of fact-assertion toward matters of value deliberation, coupled with a lack of shame about considering a radical, and epistemologically alternative, spirituality.

What is required is perhaps no small matter. In this respect we can re-read Anzaldúa’s verse:

This land was Mexican once

Was Indian always

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6 There is precedent for a re-thinking of time and space, though. Sociologist Barbara Adam, for example, has critiqued the movements of transnational capital by noting the notion of time that goes along with globalization. The transcendence of clock-time, for example, takes over the particularities of a culture’s own time consciousness. The result is that “work practices that are particularly difficult to subsume under the clock-time regime are all those loosely classified as care work and caring activities.” These in turn “are not easily fitted into the clock-time” and “considered ‘women’s work’ irrespective of whether or not it is carried out by women” (16).
And is.

And will be again. (Frontera 113)

This is a prediction of revolution, in a sense as political as one likes to consider it. This is a revolution of thought at the least, involving new consideration of history. As Michelle Bastain argues, Anzaldúa does not “assert a linear history of the South-West U.S. Instead, she writes a history of the borderlands that affirms and recognizes its contradictory historical trajectories simultaneously” (158). Hedrick says that Anzaldúa replaces “a sense of time (past) with ... a deep space of the psyche” (65). As Felicity Amaya Schaeffer puts it most succinctly, “she queers notions of time and space” (1005). Whereas “hegemonic history constructs itself as the default point,” says Miriam Bornstein-Gómez, “giving primacy onto itself and imposing a history that marginalizes and oppresses,” Anzaldúa is intervening against this “densification of meaning” (48). As DeMirjyn puts it, Anzaldúa represents both “a disruption and reinterpretation of history” that extends to more than just imagination and myth-making.

One criticism of Anzaldúa is that she is just too new-agey to be taken entirely seriously. She herself seems to take seriously ideas that are often, perhaps not without

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7 Perhaps Anzaldúa represents the eventual destruction of a largely white nation-state, or of the nation state altogether, in favor of what Martina Koegeler-Abdi calls a “vision of planetary citizenship beyond essentializing frames of reference” (xz). Or, as Claire Joysmith notes, “hybridity and novel proposals of mestizaje are, ironically, often perceived in (central) Mexico as unsettling, even threatening, particularly when they are gender related and when they demand that we seriously and pragmatically rethink mobile cultural identities” (49).

8 See Laura Perez’s “The Performance of Spirituality and Visionary Politics in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa” in this respect. Dann’s work also shows how what we now might deride as new-agey was, for better or worse, part of the environment of transcendentalists such as Thoreau.
reason, be degraded as anti-scientific. Zaytoun, for example, talks about Anzaldúa’s references to shapeshifting, taking them seriously enough to note her statement that “present-day humans do not have the skills to literally shift their bodies into another form of matter,” but rather that this “occurs on the level of the imagination, and the imagination has the power to transform our physical bodies and worlds” (Shift 10). Taking Anzaldúa seriously in this case requires transcending the difference between literal shapeshifting and imaginative shapeshifting. But this too has precedent in U.S. history and literature. The vision of transcendentalism involves a suspension of disbelief in considering the varieties of imaginative and transformative experience. As Carlos Alberto Sanchez notes in relation to Anzaldúa, America is a land of visionaries, and “where else else could one find visionaries but in a land lacking a sense of place on the historical stage?” (190)

The presence of American-sourced visionaries is not new. A re-imagined history for the continent, and indeed for the world, is unsettlingly revolutionary only to those unfamiliar with the world of religious innovation. The U.S.-specific religious history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints might be the most prominent example, but we cannot forget the alternative history of DeLoria noted above. There is another history by Nation ofIslam, whose prophet Elijah Muhammad teaches that 6,600 years ago there was a rebellious scientist named Yacub who created “a devil race—a bleached out, white race of people” (Daschke and Ashcraft 234), along with a general process of whitening the human race through selective breeding⁹.

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⁹ If these stories seem implausible, it is perhaps largely due to their specificity, which suggest either contrivance or the sometimes surprisingly detailed way in which the
One can be offended by what has been specifically created by historical imagination. Such creations can suggest, for example, conservative world-views that we might believe are bad, or radical world-views that frighten us in their material implications. Yet it is difficult, especially if one inclines toward pragmatism, to be offended simply by the belief that such history is not an accurate copy of some postulated state of affairs anterior to any story that is being told about it. Our offense at the implausibility of the story is not in relation to the what actually happened, but it is in relation to what we judge as the greater plausibility of other stories we have of the world. And this judgment of plausibility involves considering how the stories work in unconscious can operate, as it often does in the production of dreams. We might be justified in being offended by the presence of conscious contrivance, but it is more difficult to be offended by the operations of unconscious creativity. This unconscious creativity can be thought of as conditioned by living in an environment of oppressive histories, but such interpretations are themselves oppressive in their sometimes patronizing assumptions that they are just responses to oppression. The implication is that what really happened was, for example, white supremacy, and imagination created the protective narratives. Accordingly, those of DeLoria and Nation of Islam, for example, are merely more reactionary expressions of such consolatory imagination. At best, this line of thinking deconstructs all religions and their histories. But what I have presented here is a view that I believe is more comprehensive, giving respect to the transcendentalism that opens up the religious imagination, and the pragmatism that allows us to evaluate this imagination with a focus on the fruits rather than the roots. If Anzaldúa as a figure is to be important, it is in Anzaldúa’s native transcendentalism, which is something as trite and noble as an openness to new imagination within the pan-American experience.

Philosopher Brian Henning is helpful here when he describes the concept of false equivalency of stories, which he says is created when two unequal positions are presented as though both were equally plausible. If my theory that a race of shy mole people living below Earth’s surface causes earthquakes receives equal airtime with the theory that earthquakes are caused by shifting pieces of Earth’s crust (plate tectonics), that would not be an instance of fairness but of false equivalency. Suggesting that my mole person theory deserves equal consideration to that of plate tectonics is not scientifically appropriate. Decades of careful observation and research support the latter, while the former rests on nothing but wild conjecture. (65)
relation to other parts of our experience. Simple offense at the idea of imaginative history amounts to a preference for what Serge Grigoriev calls a “pre-conceptual vision of reality, of the kind that would be delivered by an impartial camcorder in the sky.” Conflicts arise “because different conceptualizations of reality, undertaken with different interests in the mind, are obliged to measure up” to this ideal (180), an ideal that must be ahistorical because it is outside of any engagement or interest in history. Perhaps history is shifting from the impartial recording of events to what we might call the omnipartial representation of events. To take Anzaldúa seriously here is to take seriously her mestizaje identity, her omnipartial identity, one in which many things are occurring at once.

This requires a mestizaje imagination. Rubén Medina, following Arjun Appadurai, distinguishes “fantasy” from “imagination.” The former is

What is meant here by wild conjecture might be something like what Henning’s choice of examples is revealing. If one were to believe that earthquakes were caused by personal moles rather than impersonal tectonic shifts, and acted accordingly by beaming signals into the ground in hopes of pacifying the agitated Molians, it is not clear that this would be any less effective means of preventing earthquakes than anything that would arise from believing that unfathomably massive pieces of matter were the cause. The belief that humans can stop tectonic shift and the colossal concussions that result from it is almost as fanciful as the belief that we can change the minds of powerful gods to prevent natural disasters. On the other hand, perhaps humbling ourselves before mythical Molians is better than believing hubristically that human ingenuity will always save us. Those with a hybrid mentality look for technology to solve the problem, or, as is also the case, look to technological wisdom to identify the problem. The native mind takes neither hubristic approach: it does not maintain faith in humans creating more technology to counteract the effects of the technology they have already created, yet they also do not rely on epistemological technology to disclose the problem. In a curious way, the native mind shares with the climate denier a lack of faith in science, relying instead on a felt sense of what is the appropriate relationship to the Earth. The difference in this sense, however, makes quite a difference: the native senses the connectedness; the hybrid senses only their own confidence in maintaining separation.
un pasatiempo elitista y una forma de escapismo. La imaginación, en cambio, representa las aspiraciones de una comunidad y sobre todo constituye un factor en la agencia de las personas. Por tanto, realidad e imaginación no se ven ya como en oposición, sino como entidades complementarias, que afectan mutuamente, es decir, que inciden sobre la agencia de los individuos. (122)

On this view, imagination is more pragmatic than fantasy, since it represents ends-in-view for a community. What Anthony Lioi, for example, explains in terms of sacred symbols also applies to myths, whose “peculiar power comes from their presumed ability to identify fact with value at the most fundamental level, to give what is otherwise merely actual, a comprehensive normative import” (4). This fundamental task seems especially difficult when considering the development of an overarching myth to encompass the diverse perspectives in the United States. The colonizer myths are normative for the colonizers, while, to avoid being colonizers, we must acknowledge that the indigenous myths are authentic only for the indigenous. The task is thus contradictory and difficult. As Gregory Pappas explains, Anzaldúa’s multifaceted border-crossing existence make us consider the importance of a cultural metaphysics, which he refers to as a “landscape of all cultures.” He extends this cultural metaphysics to the individuals themselves:

On our map of political nations, we do not recognize the border between two nations as some distinct third nation, that is, it does not have the same ontological status. Does it then make sense to talk about border cultures as being cultures or as having a distinctive existence in the landscape of all cultures? The
same goes for gender. What are lesbians in relation to the man/woman map?

(266-267)

Pappas questions the ontological status of borders between nations the way some might question borders between genders. To deny the ontological status of political borders is to reject the presumed legitimacy of the conquest that has established these borders. As Benay Blend accurately states it, Anzaldúa lives in “synthesis of the conqueror and the conquered” (6).

In his 1994 article “Half-Hearted Pragmatism,” Gerald Mozur argues in favor of “transhistorical’ truths--beliefs that hold good for all epochs.” His choice of examples, though, seems to me to reveal the most important issue. Mozur says “such transhistorical beliefs as ‘Caesar crossed the Rubicon’ hold good across all contexts subsequent to the one in which it was first formulated and in which the events occurred” (249-250). Yet how is it, we might ask, that crossing the Rubicon, which references a military event, has come to mean what William James referred to in “The Will to Believe” as a momentous decision, that is, one in which is the opposite of a trivial choice in which “the decision is reversible if it later prove unwise” (4)? Anzaldúa shows us that the American condition is indeed irreversible, that it is not possible to return to any particular ownership of the land, since land is not the kind of thing that can be owned. Colonization was monumental, and our only response seems to be a new form of conceptual, spiritual, and ultimately political border-crossing. Attempts to stop such

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11 US Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump have both made use of the idea of being a nation of laws in defense of immigration restrictions and even deportations. This vacuity of this statement seems to reveal the mania for borders, and invites the radical consideration that migration restrictions between nations are perhaps as
border-crossing by referring to the way things really are—whether those things are nation, gender, or original event of creation—have to address the presence of Gloria Anzaldúa straddling the Rio Grande like a mythical giant. What makes her compelling is her willingness to accept blurred boundaries of class, gender, sex, language, race—as well as nation—while also somehow maintaining a personal integrity. One is drawn into this creative tension, perhaps even recklessly, as one tries holding together the various parts as loosely as possible without experiencing a repellant dispersal. “En vez de dejar cada parte en su región y mantener entre ellos la distancia de un silencio,” Anzaldúa says, it is “mejor mantener la tensión entre nuestras cuatro o seis partes/personas” (166). This, according to Marisa Belausteguigoitia Rius, means that “la tensión que demanda al cruce entre subjetividades diferentes producen una textualidad llena de atravesamientos, de negociaciones entre opuestos, con el fin de aceptar, entender y recodificar lo ajeno” (765).\(^{12}\)

Acceptance, understanding, and recodification are themselves temporary states, and so border-crossings are perpetual. Nothing can be completely forgotten, and nothing can be tenaciously maintained. In the words of Panchiba Barrientos, Anzaldúa “problematiza la identidad en el borde del abismo entre la continuidad y la promesa de término de un proceso migratorio que parece no tener fin” (156). Still, it is difficult for me to see how it would be bad, all things considered, if any transhistorical truth unjustified as having migration restrictions between states within a nation. If Anzaldúa identified herself merely with the border between Texas and Oklahoma, one could only be offended by her in the most ridiculous of ways.

\(^{12}\) Anzaldúa wrote in English, with Spanish phrases included seemingly at random, as if she were showing the reader her somewhat disordered bilingual mind.
supposedly behind “Caesar crossed the Rubicon” was forgotten. And Anzaldúa is an invitation to a transgressive form of imagination, a spiritual crossing of the Rubicon that makes unnecessary the kind of material crossings of the Rubicon that characterizes colonialist history.

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