

“AN ART OF SPEAKING”: A STUDY OF ANZALDUA’S *BORDERLANDS* AS A  
“TACTICAL DISCOURSE”

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“AN ART OF SPEAKING”: A STUDY OF ANZALDUA’S *BORDERLANDS* AS A  
“TACTICAL DISCOURSE”

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THESIS ABSTRACT

“AN ART OF SPEAKING”: A STUDY OF ANZALDUA’S *BORDERLANDS* AS A  
“TACTICAL DISCOURSE”

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The purpose of the present thesis has been to create a “de Certeauian” framework for studying resistance. The author situates Michel de Certeau’s work alongside other theorists, including Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin and Bruno Latour. Additionally, using the notion of “tactics” articulated by de Certeau, this thesis will argue that Gloria Anzaldua’s work is an example of a “tactical discourse,” a kind of rhetorical and linguistic “backtalk.” The author has placed Anzaldua and de Certeau in conversation with one another, in order to study how these two theorists inform and interanimate each other’s ideas.



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## INTRODUCTION

An important thread that runs through the work of both Michel de Certeau and Gloria Anzaldua is the issue of marginalization. Succinctly, marginalization may be defined as the process or the act of being physically or psychologically excluded from a social or cultural space; during their lifetime, both de Certeau and Anzaldua were subjected to this painful experience to varying degrees. In Anzaldua's work, this theme is evident: the title of her famous work *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) highlights the extent to which she was preoccupied by the overt *and* subtle mechanics of marginalization and exclusion. On the other hand, de Certeau's experience was radically different: As an intellectual and a Jesuit scholar, de Certeau's work exhibits "a decidedly Christian character" (Dobozy 173). As a result, he found it hard to find a place for himself in the increasingly secular atmosphere of France. Even when he eventually moved to the United States in 1978, de Certeau was once again made aware of his "marginal" status. As Richard Terdiman explains:

When Certeau came to the United States, his visa had to be renewed annually for him to be permitted to work. The Immigration and Naturalization Service summoned him for what the bureaucracy terms an examination of his immigration status. His association with the French Socialist Party was no help in those



Reagan/cold war years. It took strenuous efforts by university colleagues and officials to get it renewed and his status regularized<sup>1</sup> (417).

In many ways, marginalization is a rhetorical maneuver. While not always obvious and forcible, it is often “performed” to demonstrate the fact that certain individuals or even groups do not fit into the dominant cultural metanarrative. Moreover, it does not have to extend to anyone who is simply deemed “abnormal”; even a person who “belongs” to a dominant power structure can be made to feel marginalized or aware of his/her alien status. Marginalization is not merely “a theoretical counter or an intellectual effect; with its roots always in the political, marginalization inevitably embodies the cruel reality of power” (Terdiman 401). The rhetoric of marginalization and the manner in which it is performed through various cultural tools like language will be one of the main concerns of this project.

In his essay “The Marginality of Michel de Certeau” (2001), Terdiman explains that de Certeau’s work shows an intense preoccupation with “borders.” He “regularly, repeatedly, sought the margin. It was a distinctive feature of his life as of his thought.” As a result, de Certeau was extremely sensitive to “problems of difference, disadvantage and subordination” (400). He was a proponent of “heterology or the discipline of the ‘margin’” (407); in general terms, heterology may be defined as the study of difference, and it was also the title of a book authored by de Certeau in 1986. A large part of de

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<sup>1</sup> De Certeau returned to France in 1984 when he was elected as a “directeur d’études at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes” (Terdiman 417). He died a year and a half after his return to Paris.



Certeau's project involved an attempt to understand the "Other". However, as Tamas Dobozy explains, de Certeau was aware that

we are always trying to know things through the categories and terms and markers whereby our knowing operates; what we do, when we gather evidence, is not so much come into possession of something "other" as simply reinforce our modes of knowing by subjecting an alterity to preexisting cognitive categories. What we come into possession of is not the other but the other in the form of what is intelligible to us (176).

This notion is similar to Foucault's discourse on Reason; anything that cannot be accounted for in "rational" or in "meaningful" terms is discarded or rejected.

It is for this reason that de Certeau espoused the notion of heterology. The basic premise that animated his work was the idea that the "other" must be allowed to speak or communicate. De Certeau understood the fact that meaning is only made as "the consequence of a limit" or a border (Terdiman 399). However, he was interested in what lay beyond the border imposed by rationality. He emphasized that through "reciprocal and bidirectional" communication one could establish contact with the Other and thereby dismantle the notion that "one formulation or monothetic communication can ever be adequate" (407). This means that "multiple options will prevail" (408) and "groups formerly silenced begin to express themselves, their competing perspectives and their needs or demands; dominant structures then adjust to the demands by those they dominate" (410). While the notion of heterology and Terdiman's reading of de Certeau

are both astute and crucial, neither really mention the terms or the manner in which this communication might occur. What kind of language might the Other adopt to express himself/herself? If the Other were to fall back upon dominant modes of expression, wouldn't this imply it has re-interpellated itself into the ideology of the oppressor? Moreover, would communication always lead to harmony or is it in fact a means of resistance? If the Other were to speak, would he/she be understood by the dominant power structure? These questions seem to be overlooked in de Certeau's theory of "bidirectional" communication. This project will seek answers to these questions in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa in conjunction with the theory of creative resistance offered by de Certeau in his work *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).

In *Practice*, de Certeau articulated a theory of creative resistance via movement. He explained that "our knowledge (usually rational or scientific) seems to consider and tolerate in a social body only inert objects" (21). Therefore, that which cannot be grasped or explained in rational or scientific terms is deemed unintelligible. For de Certeau, this is the essential nature of resistance. Anything or anyone that escapes the panoptic vision articulated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and manages to use the products imposed on them by a dominant cultural economy in order to achieve their own ends, are agents of resistance. Such "products" might include anything and everything; agents of resistance "poach"<sup>2</sup> from different areas and reappropriate these objects for their own purposes. This might include something as simple as stealing office supplies from one's

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<sup>2</sup> I offer an extensive definition of this term in section 2.



place of work to blending different languages in order to craft a completely new discourse. Moreover, such resistant maneuvers are “quick” and hard to grasp, and it is precisely this fact that makes them “victorious.” As de Certeau explains:

...a way of using imposed systems constitutes the resistance to the historical law of a state of affairs and its dogmatic legitimations. A practice of the order constructed by others redistributes its space; it creates at least a certain play in that order, a space for maneuvers of unequal forces and for utopian points of reference. That is where the opacity of a “popular” culture could be said to manifest itself – a dark rock that resists all assimilation (18).

In this context, it could be said that this is representative of a form of communication between a dominant power and its subjects. However, this “communication” is mostly antagonistic since it involves the deception of the dominant power to some extent. Oppression - in all its minor and major forms - creates and enables resistance. De Certeau’s theory offers us a concrete way to think about and visualize resistance in all its forms. It allows us to understand how “Otherness” is expressed and how “Others” – within and outside a given culture - might seek to communicate. De Certeau grants us a way to study, qualify and quantify resistance.

The theme of “Otherness” is dominant in the work of Gloria Anzaldua. She is “othered” in several ways: culturally, she does not belong to either Mexico or America; as a lesbian, she refuses to let her sexuality be regulated or controlled by the forces of patriarchy; similarly, as a feminist, she refuses to conform to patriarchal notions of

femininity, and, finally, as a writer, she actively evades linguistic discipline by weaving several languages together. Therefore, in several ways, Anzaldua's life and work are illustrative of several forms of resistance and nowhere is this more evident than in her most famous work, namely, *Borderlands*. While her prowess as a creative writer has been widely acknowledged, as a theorist, Anzaldua's work also provides us with the means to understand the manner in which resistance may be performed and the manner in which the motif of "otherness" might be used to one's advantage. "Otherness" does not have to signify a "lack" or a deficit; instead, Anzaldua demonstrates that this label might be used as a means of empowerment. As such, her work serves to illuminate de Certeau's theories and vice versa. In this thesis, I will create a dialogic framework in order to study and interanimate the work of both theorists. Indeed, the idea of dialogue is central to their work because they seek to establish a mode of communication with the various hegemonic powers that regularly seek to silence the disempowered and the dispossessed.

Until now, critical studies of *Borderlands* have focused on the manner in which the "book presents itself as an outsider and a transgressive text" (Ford 84). Other writers have mostly focused on her bilingualism and the hybrid nature of Anzaldua's writing (Shafiq 2006; Reynolds 2004) to explore the manner in which she exploits her "outsider" status. However, to valorize Anzaldua's position as an outsider effaces the unique quality of her resistance. It must be remembered that no matter how "excluded" she may be, Anzaldua still writes and lives within the same system that created the conditions of her oppression; her writing and resistance does not exist in a void and her work was not



created using tools that were heretofore completely unknown. Instead, what is significant is the manner in which she uses the tools of the oppressor, namely language, to articulate her resistance. Therefore, instead of studying Anzaldua's bilingualism and hybridity as a "new" way to articulate resistance, this project will argue that such methods are merely a different means of "performing" the various cultural tools that are available to us. This also falls in line with de Certeau's idea that cultural tools cannot be created anew; instead they can be "reconfigured" to fit our needs.

Firstly, it must be noted that a sense of movement, activity and performance is evident in Anzaldua's work: she does not merely "write" her stories; instead she "performs" them. As she explains:

My "stories" are acts encapsulated in time, "enacted" every time they are spoken out aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as "inert" and "dead" objects (as the aesthetics of Western culture think of art works). Instead, the work has an identity; it is a "who" or a "what" and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers. The work manifests the same needs as a person, it needs to be "fed" (67).

In many ways, Anzaldua's medium is her message and her writing also shows an awareness of the fact that it cannot be easily "controlled" or interpreted. Her writing is not inert or static. The fact that she rapidly "switches codes" forces her reader to "move along" in order to keep up with her prose. In her essay "Spaces Inside Out" (2006),

Katherine Ford points out that,

language is a key space of contradictions, and Anzaldua permits herself to flow out of English and Spanish with little preoccupation for reader comprehension. Here bilingualism manifests itself in the same paragraph or contiguous words in a title, creating a shift that the reader must endeavor to understand and register. The reader is required to enter into this bilingual world and submerge him/herself in it in order to comprehend the words themselves and the larger project that Anzaldua puts forth. The reader is given an active role in the production of the text – a role that is always more demanding in a border text than in any other (84).

Moreover, while Anzaldua's work is intended to be a form of communication, it most certainly does not carry a "passive" message. Instead, it is openly defiant and invites the dominant power structure to meet the "Other" on its ground and not vice-versa. Anzaldua performs her own marginality by using the very tools that are "dumped" on the colonized. Also, by not using the colonizer's language in its "received" form, Anzaldua refuses to let herself be interpellated back into the former's ideology.

Both Anzaldua and de Certeau's work also display an intense preoccupation with the concept of being alienated from "home" and both emphasize the need to "make do" or even "remake" the different materials in one's possession. For de Certeau this can be achieved by "manipulating and enjoying" (*xxii*) the spaces that one is restricted to. For, in essence, de Certeau's theory is one of making strategies "habitable." This can be done in multiple ways and through "everyday" practices such as cooking, reading, walking, etc.



In de Certeau's opinion, the *manner* in which such things are done constitutes a subversive move and is not easy to "trace." Therefore, de Certeau's theory of resistance is a theory of *performance*, even though its untraceable nature makes it difficult to demonstrate or prove. Resistance is embodied in the manner in which we "alter" external objects after having changed them on an internal or cognitive level. It is for this reason that de Certeau's theory may be termed a theory of "personalization"<sup>3</sup>. We alter things to our own liking and to fit our personal needs in a way that does not fit the dominant cultural map or narrative. A reflection of this idea is found in Anzaldua's *Borderlands*. She writes:

I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture –*una cultura mestiza* – with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture (22).

There is a sense of "making" here, of refashioning objects to one's own liking in a space of one's own. While this "refashioning" is not merely accomplished via textual means, and while other semiotic, symbolic and material media are possibly involved, I believe that an analysis of the manner in which language works in Anzaldua's texts offers the

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<sup>3</sup> When I use this term, I am trying to imply that a "tactic" is an inherently personal act, performed by an individual for his/her own convenience. One tactic might not resemble another due to the fact that it is tailored to fit individual needs. This does not mean that a tactic might not be replicated, but it does mean that it will always differ from one person to the next and is always contingent on the individual who "performs" it. While a strategist seeks to "organize" and create a more homogenous structure, a tactician seeks to evade such blatantly homogenizing overtures by "personalizing" the materials at his/her disposal.

best possible way to quantify and qualify resistance. I believe that Anzaldua's books are a rhetorical space in themselves and that they *embody* resistance. If all resistance is intended to carve out a space for oneself under the very gaze of oppressive elements, then Anzaldua's books certainly achieve this objective. While a purely textual analysis of Anzaldua's work does have its merits, I believe that the entire space of the book is an embodiment of a "tactic" and, as such, provides us the means to perform a "de Certeauian" analysis. The rest of this thesis will create and provide a framework for performing such an analysis. The objective will be to understand how we personalize and turn inherently disciplinary spaces such as the page and the book into "homes." It must also be understood that, like oppression, resistance is always enacted and embodied. It has a concrete existence and it is diffused across both animate and inanimate media.

In a sense, like gender, culture itself could be deemed a performance;<sup>4</sup> depending on the materials that are made accessible to us, we try to perform certain cultural expectations. For instance, the practitioners of every discipline are expected and encouraged to master the discourse associated with it; therefore, if one were to internalize and "perform" this discourse in the "correct" manner, one is guaranteed a place in the higher echelons of this discipline. Similarly, we "perform" certain cultures in order to gain acceptance, using the very materials that they provide us. Language is but one of the many materials that we are "given." While we may choose to be a part of certain cultures,

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<sup>4</sup> Here, I am drawing heavily from the theory and methodology laid out by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler argues that all gender is merely a performance and that gender is a category that is inscribed on us by culture.



we are often born into them and are forced to internalize their expectations; we have no choice but to perform culture the way we have been “taught.” When we speak of “cultural identity,” we seem to ignore the fact that it is but a set of internalized codes and costumes and not some essential category. In fact, every other identity category, first and foremost, draws authority from cultural norms and expectations. While we certainly question the legitimacy of these other categories, culture still stands as an “absolute” narrative that cannot be rewritten, but only maneuvered around by altering other identity categories,<sup>5</sup> be it national, sexual or social. There are cultural metanarratives that we either conform to or face the risk of being marginalized. However, like gender, such cultural metanarratives may also be subverted. This may be accomplished by “performing” cultural materials<sup>6</sup> differently.

All cultural materials serve some rhetorical purpose. The manner in which they are used determines their role as tools of oppression or resistance. Therefore, both oppression and resistance (overt and covert) are rhetorical maneuvers. This notion may very well be extended to language; it affords and embodies the possibility for both oppression and resistance. Language does not have some inherent capacity for rhetoric. Its role as a rhetorical tool depends on how it is used and the person using it. No one is

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<sup>5</sup> I hesitate to term other identity categories “cultural materials,” purely because these categories are also “performed” using the materials that are available to us in our cultural milieu. Instead, I would argue that other identity categories are narrower derivatives of “cultural identity.”

<sup>6</sup> This phrase is mostly derived from sociocultural and activity theory or Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). I also use the phrase “cultural tools” elsewhere in the project. These phrases were inspired by Vygotsky and his followers. They are used to indicate the fact that all human activity, including cognition, is enabled and mediated by cultural artifacts.

ever a passive recipient of language. Instead, as de Certeau explains, we “insinuate our countless differences” into the space of a language. He writes:

Procedures of consumption can be found in the use made in ‘popular’ milieus of the cultures diffused by the elite that produced language. The imposed knowledge and symbolisms become objects manipulated by practitioners who have not produced them (32)

This implies that while cultural materials cannot be created anew, they can be “reconfigured,” and this may be accomplished in the very space occupied and controlled by a dominant power.

A deep awareness of these facts runs through Anzaldua’s work. In her essay “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” (2004), Anzaldua first actively “personalizes” the genre of the essay by turning it into a letter, an intimate communication between herself and other women. A genre may be construed as another cultural tool that places rigid restrictions on a writer. We do not write in a genre; in fact, we write *to* it and adapt to its restrictions. The use of a genre serves a rhetorical purpose and it conditions the audience to react to it in a certain way. As a cultural tool, a genre also conditions reality itself to some extent. By writing to a genre, we are forced to adapt language to its restrictions and that in turn mediates the way we perceive reality. However, by turning an essay into a personal letter, Anzaldua subverts her reader’s expectations and performs the genre differently. To some extent, she not only alters her own reality, but also that of her readers. As she explains:



It is not easy writing this letter. It began as a poem, a long poem. I tried to turn it into an essay, but the result was wooden, cold. I have not yet unlearned the esoteric bullshit and pseudo-intellectualizing that school brainwashed into my writing. How to begin again. How to approximate the intimacy and immediacy I want. What form? A letter, of course (79).

Resistance, therefore, is enacted and embodied in the genre itself. By insinuating a more personal tone and genre into the concrete medium of a book of essays, Anzaldua subverts the expectations that the book and its audience impose on her. Moreover, this kind of “personalization” also collapses the differences between creative and critical forms and creates a space in the more critical genre of the essay for a more creative and personal form of writing.

Anzaldua’s writing also shows an awareness of the manner in which cultural expectations condition us: she knows that as a “poor Chicana” (81), writing is not her prerogative. Writing is an act performed by the ubiquitous “white man,” who then passes his words down to others who are incapable of performing the act themselves. However, for Anzaldua, to write is to create, “to put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it” (83). She writes “because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me” (83). For Anzaldua, writing is an act of power and survival. She reappropriates several cultural materials<sup>7</sup> – which includes the pen, the

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<sup>7</sup> I must clarify that when I use the terms “cultural tools” or “cultural materials,” it does not only indicate concrete objects, but it also implicates abstract notions such as “genre” and “history.” Essentially anything that was created by human beings in order to fulfill human needs in a given culture would fall under the

paper, the book, the genre, language(s) and writing – in order to articulate her resistance to dominant cultural maps. Resistance, therefore, is not just a “situated” activity. It is not restricted to the act of writing or the moment of inscription. Instead, it is “diffused” over a range of media that facilitate, enact and embody the dual acts of resistance and survival. Moreover, this act of resistance will be further “remediated,” especially since Anzaldua’s works continue to be published and are still in circulation. This means that those that read her work are equally implicated and, to some extent, enact and embody resistance by the sheer virtue of the fact that they purchase or read her books.

In a “de Certeauian” sense, Anzaldua is a cultural “poacher.” Moreover, poaching is not an activity that has a “beginning” and an “end.” Instead, a cultural poacher must constantly capitalize on previous victories and take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. In a sense, almost everyone and everything is implicated in this act of poaching, including Anzaldua’s audience, since they become responsible for disseminating her ideas even if they do not agree with her. Therefore, Anzaldua’s resistance is possibly enabled and mediated by the very cultural tools and materials that were responsible for creating the conditions of oppression in the first place. In a Bakhtinian sense then, almost every act of “poaching” has a reciprocal effect on something and someone else, and, therefore, no such act can ever be “isolated” or “lost.” Every act then becomes part of the larger “conversation,” and such a view of resistance can have serious implications for the manner in which we conceive of “communication.”

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category of “cultural tools or materials.” Such materials also often fulfill a rhetorical purpose, although this might not be a conscious choice. People might also be classified as “cultural tools.”



It is, of course, beyond the scope of this present project to analyze and quantify the manner in which resistant efforts and maneuvers proliferate beyond a given space/text; in the following sections, however, I will continue to apply de Certeau's terms and methods in order to analyze Gloria Anzaldua's role as a "tactician" and the status of her work as a "tactical discourse."<sup>8</sup>This thesis will further study the manner in which Anzaldua turns the "border" itself into a tactical tool in order to craft a discourse of the "Borderlands." In the concluding portion of this work, I intend to discuss the implications of applying a "de Certeauian" lens to the study of resistance and the manner in which his work might be extended to other theories of cultural and social activity.

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<sup>8</sup> I offer an extended definition of these terms in section 1.

## SECTION 1

In the past decade, a number of scholars have discussed the importance of Michel de Certeau's work for the field of cultural studies. For instance, Richard Terdiman explains that De Certeau's insights about heterology "provide a powerful model for conceiving social relationships in an increasingly diverse and differential world" (417). More recently, in his book, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (2007), Ben Highmore writes that "'strategies and tactics have been de Certeau's biggest export: it has circulated in all sorts of disciplinary spaces (but most insistently in cultural studies) to the point where a theory of strategies and tactics is simply what de Certeau stands for" (177-8). Instead, he argues that privileging other aspects of de Certeau's work can provide "fertile ground for rethinking the business of cultural studies and cultural analysis" (178). While this is indeed a cogent argument for refocusing our attention on de Certeau's other contributions, not many studies have actually *deployed* the notion of "strategies and tactics," as a theoretical lens. For instance, in his analysis of the manner in which street gangs declare "metaphorical ownership" of a town, Ralph Cintron invokes de Certeau's notion of "tactics" in order to make a strong argument about the "closed" nature of the public sphere (177). However, Cintron does not really employ a "de Certeauian" framework to support his analysis. Instead, he uses the notion of "strategies and tactics" as a rhetorical tool in order to merely *mobilize* his own argument. While "strategies and



tactics” may have been over-used across several disciplines, its significance for the study of resistance has clearly been overlooked. Indeed, the notion of “strategies and tactics” allows us to understand and quantify the manner in which resistance might occur in various circumstances. It provides us with a new rhetorical framework to understand textual resistance. Moreover, de Certeau’s ideas about the role of language as a tool of resistance have yet again been ignored. The dual but linked concepts of “strategies and tactics” provide us with the terminology to describe linguistic resistance.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau defines “strategies” as the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an environment. A strategist assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper and this serves as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (*Practice xix*).

Strategists establish their power in terms of space; once they “occupy” a territory - physical or metaphorical - they also establish a certain discourse to clearly demarcate this territory. Those individuals that live in such territories are subject to the power of the strategist.

While de Certeau’s theory clearly seems to gesture towards physical spaces<sup>9</sup>, I believe that a strategist’s power could also extend to spaces that do not have a real

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<sup>9</sup> While I am aware that I use the terms “space” and “place” interchangeably in this project, I must note that de Certeau makes a critical distinction between the two in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. For de Certeau, a “place” is something that may be “organized” and “ordered” by a strategist. In other words, a place may be

physical presence. In such an instance, an individual's subjection may not be physical, but purely psychological. For my purposes, I intend to read *texts* as "spaces" that are metaphorically owned or dominated by "normative discourses" that do not tolerate the presence of other discourses that subvert their authority. Such a normative discourse then becomes the determining factor in deciding who will be allowed within the space established by the strategist. Fluency in this discourse guarantees power within this apparatus. For instance, a greater fluency in the conventions of the academy and academic discourse ensures one a place and a certain amount of power within the university system.

In order to understand the notion of power through discourse, it is important to turn to the work of Michel Foucault. For Foucault, "discourse" is mainly an instrument of power and discipline and it is used to "explain" the world. The word has a distinct institutional/ideological emphasis and it is commonly used to "order" things or control them or make them understandable. Anything that falls beyond the purview of institutional discourse is deemed "abnormal" or excluded. Moreover, power through discourse cannot be "localized"; its source cannot be isolated. Instead, power through discourse is exercised from several locations and by several individuals. Such power does not always have to appear in the form of a verbal order or communication. Discourse,

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subjected to the panoptic view of a disciplinary mechanism. A "space," on the other hand, is something that may be "constructed" using the same elements that a "place" affords. While a place has a real physical presence, a space is something that may be rewritten over and over again by a tactician in order to suit his/her own purposes. Due to the fact that a space may be constantly "reinscribed" and is therefore unstable, it escapes the panoptic vision articulated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*.



therefore, does not have to refer solely to language; instead, language is an instrument of discourse, and, in Foucauldian terms, it is only one of the methods used to subdue or subjugate individuals<sup>10</sup>.

Foucault further argued that “where there is power, there is resistance and yet this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (95). Since power is completely overarching and omniscient, it is even capable of encompassing resistance. Indeed, in a sense, power *enables* resistance. As Claire Colebrook (2001) explains: “If subjects are effected through power, rather than being subjected to power, then opposition need not be conceived outside power. Resistance itself is a mode of power. Subjects are not victims but modes of power, and, as such, subjects are also possibilities for the reconfiguration of power’s dominant logic” (544). This means that although the exercise of power is responsible for the creation of several identity categories, it also allows individuals to subvert and alter those categories from within.

Both de Certeau and Foucault also clearly see some kind of “force” operating in power relationships. This force, however, may not be purely physical. In many cases, force operates on a psychological level and is often reinforced by the subjects themselves. Foucault acknowledged that there was no way to “escape” power. As he put it: “One is

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<sup>10</sup> A good example, provided by Foucault himself, would be the discourse that grew around the idea of madness during the seventeenth century. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault explained that the idea of madness/chaos came to be pitted against the idea of order/rationality and anything that did not fall within the discourse of Reason or rationality came to be classified as “non-reason” or irrationality. This discourse grew to be so powerful that it succeeded in excluding a section of the population that did not conform to the dictates of Reason.

always inside power” (95), and whether an individual is aware of it or not, he/she is still compelled to obey. However, he also explained that

points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network... there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are probable, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant or violent... by definition, they can only exist in the *strategic field* of power relations... they are the odd terms in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposition (*History of Sexuality* 96; emphases mine).

In his preface to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau clearly situates himself in relation to and, to some extent, argues against Foucault’s ideas. He states that in Foucault’s work<sup>11</sup>, “the microphysics of power privileges the productive apparatus (which produces the ‘discipline’).” He writes that even though Foucault clearly discerns a “system of ‘repression’” and

shows how, from the wings as it were, silent technologies determine or short-circuit institutional stage directions. If it is true that the grid of “discipline” is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also ‘miniscule’ and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them, and finally, what

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<sup>11</sup> Here de Certeau is mainly referring to the ideas articulated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1977).



“ways of operating” form the counterpart on the consumer’s... side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of the socioeconomic order (xiv).

De Certeau’s dissatisfaction seems to stem from the fact that while Foucault expressed the notion that individuals do resist dominant systems of power, he rarely offered any clear-cut examples of such behavior. While Foucault chose to analyze the mechanics of power, de Certeau instead chooses to analyze the even more elusive mechanics of resistance.

De Certeau also drew his notion of strategies from Foucault’s work. In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault articulated the notion of “strategy that is immanent in force relationships” (97). However, he once again did not offer clear definitions for this term. De Certeau draws upon this notion of “strategy” in order to articulate the idea of tactics whose purpose is to constantly evade the power of the strategists. While Foucault argued that individuals always exist within a system of power, de Certeau instead seems to believe that one always exists within a field established by a strategist. He defines a “tactic” as a

calculus which cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional location), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its extensions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances (xix).

A “tactician” is usually disempowered or has very little power in the field established by the strategist. As a result, the tactician is forced to make use of the gaps or opportunities that present themselves in the space of the strategist. On a daily basis, a tactician evades and resists the power of the strategist, on some minute and even unconscious level. While the tactician might not be aware of his/her practices of resistance, for de Certeau, it is “the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is “seized” (*xix*) that becomes important. De Certeau characterizes many everyday practices such as “talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking etc” (*xix*) as tactical practices. His theory relates to “pedestrian” and situational practices. Resistance of any kind contains a personal emphasis. In a manner of speaking, resistance begins at home. While de Certeau believes that almost any everyday practice may be studied as a form of resistance, for the purposes of this project, I shall specifically focus on the practice of writing, whose most visible manifestation is language. Since language is an instrument of discourse, and therefore, ideology, it would be interesting to study the manner in which writers – I will be focusing specifically on Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands* – subvert ideological discourses.

De Certeau perceives of most spaces as “terrains” and, as a result, almost any space can be converted into a terrain on which there is a daily, but minute struggle between the forces of power and resistance. If this were the case, then the space of various texts might easily be classified as “terrains” on which competing and conflicting discourses fight for mastery. This would also imply that texts are more open to



reappropriation than we would suspect. A fundamental aspect of de Certeau's theory is the fact that it entails a radical re-envisioning of the idea of ownership and private spaces. If a tactician is someone who takes advantage of spaces, then the smallest unit of textual production, namely, the page itself, is open to reappropriation. The page has always been considered the bastion of private ownership by virtue of the fact that a writer makes his or her "mark" on it. However, even if the writing on the page figuratively belongs to someone, those words can always be taken up and re-used elsewhere in an endless cycle. In this manner, the text and the pages within a text are always going to be endlessly reused and remediated by other agents. The page then becomes a public space.

Any discourse that does not "make sense" or is linguistically or grammatically "flawed" is metaphorically outlawed from the page and replaced by more normative discourses. "Standard language" is considered normative for most texts *and* such a language is usually determined by institutional/ideological standards; it would therefore be interesting to study the manner in which other, more marginalized discourses take advantage of these terrains for their own purposes. For instance, the space of an academic paper is dominated by "academic discourse," usually determined by the conventions of that particular field of study. On the terrain of this paper, no other discourse is tolerated. Yet, writers of academic papers constantly "personalize" such terrains and use it not to promote the academy, but themselves<sup>12</sup>. The manner in which writers "insinuate their countless differences" (*xii*) into various texts may be conceived of

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<sup>12</sup>The insertion of one's name, at the beginning of such papers, may be an ideal example of a "tactical" practice.



as “tactical discourses.” A tactical discourse is any text/voice, which in minor, but significant ways resists and challenges the authority of dominant discourses. In the following sections of this project, I will be analyzing Gloria Anzaldua’s role as a “tactician” and I will demonstrate that her work is an example of a “tactical discourse”: a kind of rhetorical and linguistic “backtalk.”

De Certeau also believed that “rhetoric and everyday practices can be defined as internal manipulations of a system: that of language or that of an established order” (*Practice* 24). If language is part of an “established order,” then there are certainly hegemonic forces at play within this system: the way one uses language, in some instances, is used to determine one’s place and station in society. Systems of language are often established by ideological forces and are used as tools of subjugation. Anzaldua terms this kind of subjection “linguistic terrorism”; she also writes that “because we (Chicanas) speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified” (58). This implies that language may either be used as tool of cultural and national alienation or integration.

This notion of linguistic hegemony is certainly not new. The idea that every language has a “verbal-ideological” center was articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 48). In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Bakhtin studied the smallest unit of language, namely, the word. He argued that the word is technically “empty” of semiotic content and it just absorbs the properties that are attributed it<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The exact authorship of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is still a matter of dispute. While the text is widely attributed to Bakhtin, it is also believed that the text was in fact authored by a colleague of his named Valentin Voloshinov. Both Bakhtin and Voloshinov were part of the same intellectual circle in the 1920s in Soviet Russia. For the purposes of this project, I intend to consider Bakhtin to be the author of



## The word

*is the ideological phenomenon par excellence...* the entire reality of the word is wholly absorbed in its function of being a sign. A word contains nothing that is indifferent to this function, nothing that would not have been engendered by it... A word is neutral with respect to any specific ideological function. It can carry out ideological function of *any* kind. (*The Rhetorical Tradition* 1213).

The word is meant to exercise discipline<sup>14</sup>: As bearers of ideology, words generally carry out the task of either privileging or disenfranchising certain versions of reality. In fact, Bakhtin argued that words *create* reality and, therefore, the users or recipients of any language are *disciplined* to accept the reality generated by the ideological apparatus<sup>15</sup> that they are part of. This means that the users of a language will never be able to exercise any kind of agency if they are always forced to accept an ideologically-determined version of reality through words. However, in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin went on to

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*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* even though in many ways the views about language in this text are distinctly “monologic.”

<sup>14</sup> When I use the term “discipline,” I am referring specifically to the ideas articulated by Michel Foucault in his work *Discipline and Punish*. In this work, he demonstrated that human beings are constantly being subjected to a “microphysics of power.” While Foucault mainly wrote about the effects of various disciplinary mechanisms on the human body, he also acknowledged that the constant exercise of discipline has a definite psychological aspect. Individuals *voluntarily* and often unconsciously change their behavior in order to conform to the dictates of various institutions. One way to achieve such perfect psychological conditioning is through constant verbal reinforcement. Language, therefore, certainly plays a huge role in exercising and maintaining discipline.

<sup>15</sup> Here, I am drawing on the Althusserian notion of ideology. Althusser argued that one does not “choose” one’s ideology; instead, one is *always* a subject and individuals are “interpellated” within an ideology even before they are born.



express the view that “language is not a totality” and the word is in fact “not bounded,” but has “many sides<sup>16</sup>” (60). As a result, the word came to be perceived not as “absolute dogma,” but as an “image,” that could be reinterpreted depending on the situation (61).

This means that if a culture were to use language as a tool of discipline and oppression, the same tool could be used as a means of articulating resistance. If language is used to articulate a rhetoric of dominance, then it may also allow the possibility of a rhetoric of resistance. For instance, every genre is both determined and limited by the style of writing that it allows. Certain genres of writing create certain versions of reality. However, if style determines genre, then would it not be possible to subvert the hegemony of a certain genre by insinuating alien styles of writing into it? Not only is this an effective rhetorical move, it may also distort reality itself to some extent. Moreover, this is a good example of a “tactical maneuver” because such a move changes the very terrain of a genre while remaining within its boundaries. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldua constantly muddies and renegotiates the boundaries of more “critical” genres by insinuating creative styles of writing into them. This demonstrates de Certeau’s view that resistance is always an internal activity.

Bakhtin also argued that systems of language are not inert and that they evolve over many centuries and tend to absorb or be absorbed by other systems. Such changes in

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<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin referred to this particular phenomenon as “polyglossia.” He wrote: “Language is transformed from the absolute dogma it had been within the narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia into a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality... Only polyglossia fully frees consciousness from the tyranny of its own language and its own myth of language” (61).



language cannot be attributed to single individuals or even a group of people. They occur slowly and are gradually integrated within a language system. However, this idea still privileges a system or an apparatus as a whole. It does not account for “personal languages”: discourses that are used and changed every day by people and do not have a place in the “public discourse.” It completely effaces all those “miniscule and quotidian mechanisms” that de Certeau prefers to highlight. In his opinion, since resistance is an internal activity, private discourses<sup>17</sup> often insinuate themselves through and within a space generally reserved for “normative discourses.” As de Certeau explains:

Turns (or tropes) inscribe in ordinary language the ruses, displacements, ellipses, etc., that scientific reason has eliminated from operational discourses in order to constitute “proper” meanings. But the practice of these ruses, the memory of a culture, remains in these “literary zones” into which they have been repressed (as in dreams, where Freud recovered them). These tricks characterize a popular *art of speaking*. So quick, so perspicacious in recognizing them in the discourse of the raconteur and the peddler, the ear of the peasant or worker can discern in *a way of speaking a way of treating the received language*. His amused or artistic appreciation also concerns an art of living in the other’s field. It distinguishes in

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<sup>17</sup> While my use of the term “discourse” here directly refers to language, I would still argue that the term is loaded with ideological significance. Since every individual is caught up in some ideology or the other, even “private discourses” are subject to ideological conditioning. My primary interest, however, lies in the act of manipulation of language and the manner in which it takes place. Even if an individual is within ideology/power/strategy, he/she still tries to evade it in some way or the other.

these linguistic turns a style of thought and action – that is, models of practice (*Practice 24*; emphases mine).

De Certeau's interest lies in the manner in which "ordinary" people "personalize" what he terms the "received language" and thereby make it meaningful and "real" for themselves. While, on the surface, this may not seem to constitute an overt act of resistance, such miniscule, but pedestrian actions do affect and fundamentally alter the manner in which individuals internalize and accept dominant cultural, ideological and linguistic metanarratives. While such discourses may not necessarily register on the radar of dominant narratives, by themselves, they constitute minute "tactical discourses."

Gloria Anzaldua's work is a fine example of a "tactical discourse." In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she describes herself as a "border woman." She writes that borderlands,

are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other , where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (n.p.).

Her work articulates the unique tension of being unable to belong entirely to the Mexican or American culture, both of which exercise linguistic and cultural violence upon her being. As she explains, "hatred, anger and exploitation are prominent features" (n.p.) of living on the Mexican-American border. In order to combat this sense of alienation, Anzaldua turns language into her homeland.



Anzaldua's writing "switches codes" from "English to Castillian Spanish to the North American dialect to Tex-Mex to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all these..." (n.p.). Ultimately, Anzaldua pens what she calls "the language of the Borderlands" (n.p.). As a rhetorical maneuver, this form of writing is highly effective. It simultaneously highlights and eases the tension between two different languages and cultures and creates a space for the birth of "Chicano Spanish" or, as Anzaldua calls it, a "bastard language" (n.p.). Katherine Ford explains that "Anzaldua's writing creates an uneasy harmony between languages and cultures through contradictions and fracturing, which is a first step to a negotiation of meaning" (83). She also explains that "both linguistically and thematically the book (*Borderlands*) presents itself as an outsider and a transgressive text" (84). However, my interest lies in the way Anzaldua "personalizes" her writing. All resistance has a *personal* and creative emphasis, and it is this aspect of Anzaldua's work that intrigues me the most. This also nicely illustrates de Certeau's idea that resistance is a pedestrian activity and that it need not always occur on a large scale. Instead, resistance is a daily and individual activity and is almost unconscious. The only way one can resist the blatant and homogenizing overtures of a dominant culture is by "individualizing" the cultural products that it imposes on us. In Anzaldua's work, I find that she constantly evades cultural and linguistic discipline by reappropriating and molding *several* dominant discourses in order to give expression to her own reality and identity. For instance, not only does she create a unique blend of languages, she also merges several genres together: *Borderlands* is a synthesis of several genres including

history, mythology, auto/biography and poetry. To use a term coined by de Certeau, Anzaldua actively “poaches” from several sources in order to craft her “language of rebellion” (56).

Moreover, her work does not merely articulate a theory of creative resistance. Instead, she literally enacts this resistance and, in a sense, her medium *becomes* her message. This form of writing muddies the boundaries between critical and creative writing and creates a space within the critical discourse for a tactical theory of resistance. Furthermore, Anzaldua is aware that her “Anglo” readers might not be able entirely to comprehend her writing. This is, however, an integral part of her project. As she puts it: “...Chicano Spanish is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture – to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurting out of our mouths with every step. Today we ask to be met halfway. This book is our invitation to you – from the new mestizas” (n.p.).

Perhaps these views can best be encapsulated by drawing upon Jean-Francois Lyotard’s theory of “language games” (*The Postmodern Condition* 10). He argues that the nature of the “social bond” is essentially “linguistic, but not woven with a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (in reality an indeterminate number) of language games obeying different rules). There is “no universal metalanguage” (41). This also neatly illustrates de Certeau’s notion that language is not something to be passively “received.” Instead, its “rules” – formal, grammatical and



stylistic – are constantly manipulated by its users. In the light of these views, it would then not be incorrect to say that by deliberately transgressing the boundaries between the private and the public and the creative and the critical, Gloria Anazaldua becomes a practitioner of a unique kind of “language game.”

## SECTION 2

“The US-Mexican Border... where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the life blood of two worlds merging to form a third country- a border culture.”-Gloria Anzaldua (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 3)

In *Geographies of Writing* (2004), Nedra Reynolds writes that in Anzaldua’s work “margins and borderlands offer women and people of color a place from which to speak, a site from which to resist the center while finding or cultivating an alternative voice” (36). She explains that “outsiders” like Anzaldua recognize that “borders are not impenetrable” and that “they develop tactics to subvert or resist the laws of territoriality and learn how to ‘move’ in ways that will allow them inside...” (37). While this is an interesting interpretation, in *Borderlands*, Anzaldua is not really trying to gain access to territories that have routinely excluded her participation. Instead, she tries to acquire “metaphorical ownership” (Cintron 177) of the border itself. According to de Certeau, a tactician tries to “make do” with the resources at hand and since the border is one of the few resources available to Anzaldua, she reappropriates it for her own purposes. Indeed, the most obvious manifestation of Gloria Anzaldua’s role as a “tactician” is the manner in which she uses the *border* itself as a “tactical tool” In fact, in *Borderlands*, the border is a character and has a life of its own. It is transformed from being a static and silent marker of difference to an active participant in the performance of its own identity. Reynolds further argues that writers like Anzaldua are aware that “freedom of movement” and “mobility” are often important for survival in the Borderlands (36). However, Anzaldua



mobilizes the border for her own purposes. Her theory of the Borderlands highlights the fact that a place of exclusion may be transformed into a space of power. The border may be termed a “dialogic” space because it is not just a place of danger, but also a place through which one may empower oneself. Therefore, by using it as a tactical tool, Anzaldua makes the *border* move between meanings and uses it as a *shield* for her own survival.

Additionally, instead of letting herself be confined to and *by* the border, Anzaldua uses its liminal status to give herself a voice. She accomplishes this by reappropriating the multiple languages and discourses that inevitably find their way to the edges of any “strategic society.” This also emphasizes the immensely heterogeneous and dialogic nature of any language, and the fact that when they are pushed to the edges of a society, languages don’t disappear, but evolve as a result of their interaction with each other. In a sense, the border is a place where well-established rules dissolve and change, and it is exactly this dynamism that Anzaldua highlights in *Borderlands*.

Growing up in the town of Hargill, Texas<sup>18</sup> - located on the border between United States and Mexico - Anzaldua was always aware of her status as the “alien element” (n.p.) in society. She describes the border as an exclusionary space, a place for the isolation of “the prohibited and the forbidden” (3). This is not unlike the situation portrayed by Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* (1965) to describe the unique predicament of those that were classified as “insane” in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The

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<sup>18</sup> Anzaldua was born in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas on September 26, 1942.



only way in which “madness” could be contained was through confinement. Through the forced physical removal of discordant elements from society, the keepers of Reason also sought to erase the “insane” from public memory. Similarly, according to Anzaldua, the border is a place for the confinement of those that do not claim any country or culture as their home: the border is a place for “half” beings who straddle “in-between” spaces. Anzaldua writes: “*Los astravedos* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal” (*Borderlands* 3). Such “deviants” are a threat to the myth of normalcy carefully constructed by the dominant power structure. However, as Ralph Cintron explains in *Angels’ Town* (1977), such “deviants” are created by the very society that rejected them in the first place; the idea of “deviance” is a signifier drawn from the dominant culture. And no matter how much a society tries to exclude them, such “alien elements” often draw upon the notion of deviance itself to empower themselves, especially when they believe that the dominant power has failed them in some way (Cintron 184). This is evident in the manner in which Anzaldua plays upon her status as an “outsider” and a “border woman” to make herself heard. She uses the very labels that are meant to exclude her in order to empower herself.

Borders also need not be purely physical. Anyone who does not fit or conform to the dominant cultural, sexual and linguistic metanarratives may be classified as an inhabitant of the “borderlands,” a liminal being who refuses to accept and be accepted by the dominant power structure. As a Mexican American lesbian feminist, Anzaldua



literally embodies the “contradictions” that are characteristic of the borderlands (n.p.).

She explains:

I am a border woman. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory). I have been straddling the *tejas*-Mexican border, and others, all my life. It's not a comfortable territory to live... However, there are certain compensations for this *mestiza*. Living on the borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an “alien” element. I have the sense that certain “faculties”... and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. And yes, the “alien” element has become familiar – never comfortable, not with society's clamor to uphold the old, to rejoin the flock, to go with the herd. No, not comfortable, but home (n.p.).

Anzaldua's work highlights a number of postcolonial concerns, including the loss of selfhood in a climate of constant oppression. However, if one were to study her work using a purely postcolonial lens, this would still privilege the “disciplinary” mechanism, so to speak. By highlighting the ravages of colonialism, one would still be trying to understand how the colonial apparatus exerts its power. Moreover, Anzaldua's work would continue to be read using the “rhetorics of victimization and compensation” (Terdiman 403). Terdiman further argues that

in certain parts of the developed world being on the margin has come to mean occupying a rhetorical *center*. Some early versions of cultural studies that concentrated on a multitude of marginalisms effectively institutionalized this inversion, and, while such strategies may resolve inequality on an imaginative level, they do very little to remedy material or political inequalities. So however progressive such paradigms were at an earlier moment of uncovering and valorizing the experience of disadvantaged groups, that effect can no longer entirely compensate for the static, even rigidifying, idealization of marginality that results from projections of its paradoxical benefit. It would be a very restricted revolution if such a turnaround – such a valorization of disadvantage – amounted to nothing more than a shift of arithmetical sign, substituting *plus* for *minus* (404).

In many ways, the term “postcolonial discourse” creates certain expectations about the text and conditions the manner in which we read it. It prepares us for a tale of victimization and marginalization. While these are important issues to be addressed, it also does not allow us to read the text through a rhetoric of resistance instead. To classify Anzaldua’s work under the general canon of “postcolonial discourse,” would efface the unique and creative manner in which she uses her art and language itself as a weapon against the colonizer. If, as Foucault explained, “points of resistance” exist everywhere, then it is imperative to study the manner in which resistance occurs on an individual level and not just on a grand scale. If there is indeed a “microphysics of power,” then there



surely exists a “microphysics of resistance.” Certainly, in Anzaldua’s work the issue of colonization is important and is foregrounded for a purpose; however, my interest lies in the “miniscule and quotidian procedures” or “ways of operating” that Anzaldua adopts to articulate her resistance to the colonial apparatus.

One of the most conspicuous tactics used by Anzaldua to manipulate and evade the “established order” is language. For de Certeau, such tactics constitute a form of *art*. As he explains:

the actual order of things is precisely what “popular” tactics turn to their own ends, without any illusion that it will change any time soon. Though elsewhere it is exploited by a dominant power or simply denied by an ideological discourse, here order is *tricked* by an art. Into the institution to be served are thus insinuated styles of social exchange, technical invention, and moral resistance... an ethics of tenacity (countless ways of refusing to accord the established order the status of a law, a meaning or a fatality) (*Practice 26*).

Usually, such tactics are momentary and difficult to trace; it is also true that such tactics are miniscule and do not really affect or change the dominant system. However, such procedures do remap and rewrite dominant cultural narratives on an individual level<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> A good illustration of this idea would be the example provided by de Certeau in order to explain the everyday practice of walking. He writes that maps provide a panoptic view of the city that charts and delimits various territories. However, on a daily basis, walkers evade the discipline imposed by maps. As de Certeau explains: “The ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers... whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as lovers in each other’s arms. ... it is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness.



For de Certeau, it is this personal remapping that is significant, and it is also further proof of the fact that the near dystopian vision articulated by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* is resisted on a daily basis. However, this “revision” also depends on the fact that the “players” or “users” are familiar with the dominant narrative on some level. Even if resistance itself is often an unconscious activity, there still needs to be some awareness of the “rules” that are being subverted. For instance, the practice of idly scribbling in one’s notebook or daydreaming during classes may be an unconscious form of resistance, but it still constitutes a way of “tricking” an academic institution.

In Anzaldúa’s case, one finds that she remaps and subverts *several* dominant narratives simultaneously by molding language. First, she crafts a new “border discourse.” If the border is a space charted and delimited by a dominant power or a strategist, then it certainly has an ideological discourse of its own. As Anzaldúa explains:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition... The only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with the whites (*Borderlands* 3-4).

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The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other... A migrational, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned or readable city” (93).



Here the US-Mexican border is quite obviously a hegemonic space and “the whites” determine what is considered “normal” in this space. Only certain “discourses” are tolerated here, and if an entire group of people are not considered normal, then their discourse also falls under the category of “abnormal.” As a Mexican-American, Anzaldua spoke both English and Spanish. However, since language is an instrument of discourse, Anzaldua writes that in school she was *disciplined* to speak English all the time. In her view, this is a form of “linguistic violence,” because if language communicates reality, then the imposition of an alien tongue fundamentally alters not just one’s reality, but also one’s identity. If language is ideological, then the forced adoption of a language also forces one to adopt an alien ideology. Anzaldua writes that when she was forced to speak English she was also made to believe that Spanish and, by extension, anyone who dared to speak the language was also “inferior.” Since she was constantly disciplined to speak English in school, this had the adverse effect of alienating her not only from the Spanish language, but also from her Spanish identity. The forced internalization of such views is a good example of the manner in which the power of a strategist could extend over individuals: If people were to be conceived of as “spaces” where conflicting discourses fight for mastery, then would it not be possible for these spaces to be “appropriated” by strategists through language? This means that individuals are constantly held hostage to the ideology of a strategist, and in some cases this bondage is voluntary, because it also guarantees one a certain amount of power in this apparatus. To a certain extent, Anzaldua herself may be considered a “hostage”: she was inevitably only able to articulate



resistance by becoming a part of the strategic apparatus in the first place. She was, after all, able to be widely published because she wielded a certain amount of power within the university system<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, there is no such thing as “disinterested” resistance. It has to occur within and through the system that produced it and the agents of resistance have to be part of the system to see its shortcomings. However, this does not automatically imply that all resistance is futile or any less effective.

In Anzaldua’s case, the situation was further complicated by the fact that she was part of the “Chicano” community. As a “border people,” Chicanos neither speak standard Spanish or standard English; instead, they speak a distinct blend of both languages. As Anzaldua explains, Chicanos “speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages<sup>21</sup>” (55). Deprived of a sense of belonging to either a country or a language, the Chicanos had no recourse but to turn language into their “homeland” (55). Anzaldua writes:

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<sup>20</sup> Anzaldua taught Chicano Studies, Feminist Studies and creative writing at the University of Texas at Austin, San Francisco State University and Vermont College of Norwich University.

<sup>21</sup> According to Anzaldua, Chicanos are a “complex, heterogeneous people” who live in various parts of the United States and they in fact speak a distinct blend of at least 8 different languages. Some of the languages spoken by the Chicanas are:

1. Standard English
2. Working Class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. *Pachuco* (*Borderlands* 55)



For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country where Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country where English is the reigning tongue but are not Anglo; for a people who cannot either entirely identify with either Standard (formal, Castillian) Spanish nor Standard English, what recourse is left to them, but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and identities true to themselves... Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate ourselves, a secret language (55).

This is clearly an articulation of a sense of agency, of the ability to take what's been "given"-namely, language-and reappropriated and reused to one's own advantage. As a tactician, then, Anzaldua reappropriates the languages that have been "imposed" on her by dominant power structures. If language itself might be perceived as a "product," then, in de Certeau's view, it can always be subjected to other uses than that which it was originally intended for. This may be achieved through the manipulation of its various "rules" – formal, grammatical and stylistic – and it is precisely this tactic that Anzaldua resorts to. She utilizes the "gaps" or opportunities that present themselves, not only in the language of the colonizer, but also in the other languages that are widely prevalent in the Borderlands. Therefore, if language is an instrument of power, then Anzaldua uses the same instrument to subvert the colonizer's authority. What is even more special about this "secret language" is the fact that its many distinctive "turn or tropes" cannot be



readily identified. No matter how often one reads Anzaldua's work, it is impossible to identify the many "ruses, displacements and ellipses" that she makes use of to express herself. This is because these "turns" are unique to the language that Anzaldua chooses to use, and as "outsiders," many of her Anglo and Spanish readers may not be able to grasp the full import of her resistance. It is precisely this sense of the "ungraspable," that is the mark of a tactician. Even if he/she is caught in the act, so to speak, there is always *something* about the activities of a tactician that will always remain beyond the grasp of a dominant power structure. No matter how well one is "disciplined," there will always be something that remains "untouched" by various disciplinary mechanisms. It may also be argued that by insinuating such surreptitious "tropes" throughout her text, Anzaldua also "personalizes" the language that she has chosen to use.

The manner in which Anzaldua manipulates genres is also interesting. In his work on speech genres, Bakhtin argued that "when there is style there is genre. The transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds, under conditions unnatural to it, but also violates or renews the given genre. Thus, both individual and general language styles govern speech genres" (*The Rhetorical Tradition* 1231). A genre, to some extent, is also implicated in the act of "creating" reality. For instance, at a certain point of time, the writing of history or historical facts dictated the use of a certain style of language because such writing is supposed to communicate certain objective truths. The use of this language alters our perception of the past and, to some extent, determines the manner in which we conceive of our present and our future.



Once again, all genres impose a kind of reality upon us. However, if the boundaries of a genre were to be muddied by insinuating alien styles of writing into it, it also muddies the manner in which we perceive reality. Anzaldua's book switches codes<sup>22</sup> in more than one way. She also fluently switches between genres: for instance, while her work contains a great amount of information about the history and mythology of the Chicanas, she does not hesitate to insinuate personal and autobiographical information into the text. It emphasizes her view that every genre and, therefore, every style straddle a border of some sort and it is easy to switch from one way of speaking to another. This, however, does entail a change in one's point-of-view, but, of course, a large part of Anzaldua's agenda is to make people aware of the perspective of the dispossessed and the marginalized. While *Borderlands* is a defense of the language and culture of the Chicanas, Anzaldua also articulates a more "personal" theory of language and writing. This is evident when she writes:

This book, then, speaks of my existence. My preoccupation with the inner life of the Self, and with the struggle of that Self amidst adversity and violation; with the confluence of primordial images; with the unique positionings consciousness takes at these confluent streams; and with my almost instinctive urge to communicate, to speak, to write about life on the borders, life in the shadows (n.p.).

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<sup>22</sup> When I use the phrase "code switching," I should clarify that, in my view, anything from a genre to a dialect may constitute a "code" or a way of speaking. Anzaldua's role as a tactician is evident in the manner in which she "switches" between several such codes and is never "at home" in any of these.



This foregrounding of individual experience in the midst of a discourse and theory of the borderlands is certainly significant. First, it highlights the fact that no theoretical discourse is entirely objective and the manner in which theorists are capable of “framing” reality for their audience. Secondly, this is also a good example of a tactical move because it creates a “personal” space in a discourse that is reserved for more objective and critical purposes. It is also a postmodern maneuver in many ways because it also demonstrates that Anzaldua is not attempting to create a metanarrative here, but that her theory is influenced by “local” concerns. Anzaldua’s avowed purpose is also to challenge “dominant cultural paradigms” that are mostly masculine. She seeks to create a “personal” paradigm that is not just “feminine,” but one which highlights the multiple and heterogeneous aspects of her existence.

Furthermore, the structure of *Borderlands* is also slightly unconventional. While the first part of the book articulates Anzaldua’s theory of the borderlands and contains an intermingling of several genres and languages, the second part of the book is written entirely in verse form. Anzaldua uses poetry to cross several boundaries and borders. Katherine Ford explains that “Anzaldua’s poems emphasize the impossibility of cohabitation and the omnipresence of the borders and their antagonism. She insists on multiculturalism remaining on uncomfortable space where we must negotiate our identities... (Anzaldua’s poems) challenge the reader to question the established borders in order to fracture the dominant subjects” (90). While this is true, if the entire book could be considered a rhetorical space, then the act of moving from “theory” to poetry is



an act of “border crossing” by itself. While reading the book, at no point is the reader allowed to feel “at home” in just one language, genre or even section. Constantly, the book demands that readers “move” from one space to another, and this is even more dramatically pronounced in the book’s abrupt shift from theory to poetry in the second section. Moreover, the poems also contain a blend of languages and are a continuation of the theory of the Borderlands that Anzaldua begins in the first part of the book. Such a move makes it difficult to tell where her critical discourse ends and the creative part of her work begins.

Essentially, Anzaldua crafts a “border” discourse and Chicano Spanish becomes a way of making this new discourse comprehensible to “outsiders.” In a sense, through the establishment of this discourse, Anzaldua herself becomes a strategist of a kind: she indicates her fluency in Chicano Spanish by constantly “switching codes” and, while this is an effective tactical maneuver, it serves to isolate those of her readers who are not fluent in some of the languages that she uses. In this manner, she clearly demarcates who is allowed to be part of the “discourse community” that she has created and she also restricts her readers’ access to some parts of it. Moreover, the entire space of her book might itself constitute a “strategy” and she has power over the discourse that she has created within it. This falls in line with de Certeau’s view that writing proliferates through the establishment of spaces. He refers to such activities as “the scriptural enterprise” (135). He explains:



I designate as “writing” the concrete activity that consists in constructing, on its own, blank space (*un espace propre*) – the page – a text that has power over the exteriority from which it has first been isolated... The writing laboratory has a “strategic” function: either an item of information received from tradition or from the outside is collected, classified, inserted into a system and thereby transformed, or the rule and models developed in this place (which is not governed by the) allow one to act on the environment and to transform it. The island of the page is a transitional place in which an industrial inversion is made: what comes in is something “received,” what comes out is a ‘product...’ the scriptural enterprise transforms or retains within itself what it receives from its outside and creates internally the instruments for an appropriation of the external space. It stocks up what it sifts out and gives itself the means to expand. Combining the power of accumulating the past and that of making the alterity of the universe conform to its models, it is capitalist and conquering (134-5).

Clearly, for de Certeau, writing is an “expansionist” exercise and so even an overt act of resistance like Anzaldua’s book has a “strategic function.” Certainly, Anzaldua’s work is also implicated in the capitalist enterprise in at least two ways: first, it establishes its dominion over the space of the page and reinstates the notion that the page is the bastion of private ownership. No voice, other than Anzaldua’s, may be represented on the pages of her book and, therefore, no other view of reality may be represented on it either. If one were to adopt this view, then one may argue that Anzaldua’s work is inherently



exclusionary. Moreover, the fact that her work may be “seized” and analyzed, makes it less effective as a “tactic.” For de Certeau, resistance must necessarily be spontaneous, momentary and untraceable; the fact that it cannot be “seized” or analyzed in any way is what makes all resistance unique. However, it may also be argued that Anzaldua’s “tactics” may still enable future forms of resistance. Moreover, even if writing is a strategic enterprise, could it not be argued that almost every form of writing exhibits an immense amount of heterogeneity that might itself be classified as a tactic? It is the *manner* and not the extent to which writers re-utilize the space of various texts that is interesting and significant. If all texts are only supposed to allow for the proliferation of “normative discourses,” then what becomes interesting is the manner in which writers subvert these discourses through the use of different kinds of language. Moreover, if de Certeau values the moment itself, the instant during which an opportunity is seized by a tactician, then would not the so-called “creative impulse” of writers fall under this category? Could not the spontaneous decision to utilize the space of a text in a different way be classified as a “tactic”? Such moments or instants will still remain ungraspable and beyond the reach of a strategist.

Perhaps, at some point, every tactic and tactical discourse become a strategy, but what must be valued is their ability to inspire future acts of resistance. It is also possible that such moves/discourse will always be exclusionary spaces and exert some amount of power over others. Yet, what must be valued about de Certeau’s work and, for that matter, Anzaldua’s is the fact that they allow us to articulate a theory of resistance. So

far, the “other” has been construed as an absence that must be studied as a “lack.” Such a view prevented us from being able to articulate a theory for their activities. But de Certeau and Anzaldua provide us with the terminology to quantify and analyze their activities and provide them with some amount of agency in spaces where they have been historically construed as an absence. Perhaps there is no such thing as a totally disinterested tactic, but the work of these two theorists provides us with the ability to see things from the perspective of resistance and not that of power.



## CONCLUSION

Until now, scholars who have written about Anzaldua have mostly confined themselves to an analysis of the manner in which she uses language. For instance, Muna Shafiq has argued that “an interaction between languages and untranslated *other* languages on the periphery of a dominant culture allows writers (like Anzaldua) to stabilize and subvert the identity of protagonists who travel between languages as a way to explore hybrid representations of reality” (“Linguistic hybridity” 4). Other scholars have focused mainly on the hybrid nature of Anzaldua’s writing, her bilingualism and the manner in which she articulates the significance of a “mestiza consciousness” (79). Such a view assumes that, as a writer, Anzaldua is solely responsible for this kind of “movement” between languages and that her activity is completely unmediated by other tools and resources. One of the goals of this project has been to reconceptualize such a restricted view of resistance. The idea of a “tactical discourse” lets us move past mere textual or linguistic analysis and allows us to understand the manner in which resistance is actually “performed” through the reappropriation of various “cultural materials” other than language. Writing itself is a “social activity” that is not isolated to the space of the page. Instead, through the process of reappropriation, it continually transgresses these boundaries and makes its impact felt outside the restricted confines of the text. Resistance, therefore, is no longer something that may be uncovered through an extended analysis of the words on the page. Instead, it is distributed across several media and cultural tools and is even *enacted* by all of these elements.



So far, resistance has mostly been viewed an isolated activity that occurs as a reaction to power. This is evident in Foucault's work, especially in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. While he provides an extensive explanation of the manner in which the "network of power" is organized, Foucault fails to extend the same idea to the study of resistance. Indeed, the notion of resistance is almost a footnote in Foucault's comprehensive discourse on power. He chooses to describe resistance as a series of minor "uprisings" that expose the many fault lines in the façade meticulously established by power. However, these "minor rebellions" never seem to last too long. This is evident when he writes:

the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior... just as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities (*Sexuality* 96).

De Certeau's work is clearly a response to this overarching discourse on power. He chooses to identify and explain the subtle mechanics of resistance. It is in this context that his theories of strategies and tactics become important. The minor and often unacknowledged work of tacticians may be described as a "network of resistance." If tacticians choose to perform various cultural materials differently, the same materials



may be constantly reappropriated by other tacticians in order to maintain an endless cycle of resistance. For instance, while the “border” is a cultural tool that signifies oppression, Anzaldua’s use of it transforms it into a tool of resistance and empowerment. This “discourse of the borderlands” may be reappropriated by tacticians other than Anzaldua in order to create a complex network of resistance. This proves that resistance does not merely occur in mere “points or knots.” Instead, like the network of power, the network of resistance is also ubiquitous; almost any cultural tool – human and non-human – may embody and *enact* resistance, and all of these various elements “work” together to form a single, complex network.

While de Certeau’s theory is certainly illuminating and provides us with the necessary terminology to analyze various activities using a discourse of resistance, it is still informed and encapsulated by various binaries, such as power and resistance, consumer and producer, dominant and subdominant etc. Instead, I have argued that all culture is merely a performance, and if this were true, then it would mean that everyone and everything is part of the same cultural network; we just deploy various elements within this network differently. This would dismantle the easy view of binaries that have thus far informed our study of culture. For instance, de Certeau argued that “everyday life invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways on the property of others” (*Practice xii*). As a result of “poaching,” a cultural tool is inalienably altered. However, this does not mean that the tool is “lost” in any way. Instead, after being reused, the object would be plugged back in to the same network from which it originated. This means that there aren’t



separate networks of power and resistance. Instead, we take objects out of the same network or system<sup>23</sup> and reintroduce them in an altered form.

For example, the various languages and genres that Anzaldúa actively “poaches” and reappropriates are part of the so-called dominant power network. However, by performing these cultural tools differently, Anzaldúa rewrites and re-negotiates this network. Moreover, since this “revision” is embodied in the form of a book, it may be insinuated into the dominant network and may be further appropriated and negotiated by someone who is part of the same system. This view makes it difficult to make a distinction between “dominant” and “subdominant”. If everything is a part of the same network and if everything could be used, either as a tool of power or resistance, then the two activities are definitely not mutually exclusive. It becomes difficult to say where exactly power ends and resistance begins and vice-versa. In fact, it could be said that the two concepts exist in a dialogic framework and *interanimate* one another. Instead of conceiving binaries as polar opposites then, perhaps we must come to think of them as two aspects of the same activity. Therefore, binaries do meet and interact with one another and in fact, enable one another. I am certainly not arguing that binaries can be “dissolved” entirely, but I also do not believe that they are mutually exclusive especially if all cultural tools are open to reappropriation and resignification.

These views place de Certeau’s work squarely in the realm of current theories of social and cultural activity, particularly Actor-Network theory (ANT). In *Reassembling*

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<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this project, I intend to conflate the terms “network” and “system.”



*the Social* (2005), Bruno Latour defines the social “not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar moment of re-association and reassembling” (7). According to this view, all cultural and social activity is a series of associations that repeatedly need to be “performed” in order to be maintained consistently. However, this performance is mediated – directly or indirectly – by various tools which often modify the original purpose one might have had in mind. ANT makes no distinction between animate and inanimate objects: everyone and everything is an “actor” and together responsible for the maintenance of social associations. This means that no activity is “isolated” anymore and is in fact dependent on a host of other actors within a given network.

ANT provides us with a way to extend de Certeau’s theory of strategies and tactics. While de Certeau certainly argued that resistance is possible through the reappropriation of various products that are available to us through our social and cultural milieu, he still conceives of resistance as a wholly isolated act performed by a single individual with the materials at hand. He fails to acknowledge the fact that cultural materials are also “acting” with the individual to make resistance possible. He states that

similar strategic deployments, when acting on different relationships of force, do not produce identical effects. Hence the necessity of differentiating both the “actions” and “engagements” that the system of products effects within the consumer grid, and the various kinds of room left for consumers by the situations in which they exercise their “art” (*Practice xvii*).



Here, he acknowledges that the different “products” available to us exercise a reciprocal effect on us, but he fails to see them as actors and enablers of resistance; rather, these objects are always just “present” in one’s milieu waiting to be reappropriated by the canny tactician. De Certeau suggests that the manner in which *we* use different cultural tools shape our activities, but he does not account for the manner in which an activity is in turn dictated and shaped by various cultural tools. It could even be said that various cultural tools have a dialogic association with one another and this to some extent determines the shape of the activity that they enable or mediate. Resistance is not just embodied in the individuals who “enact” it. Instead, resistance is distributed across a series of semiotic, symbolic and material media and embodied by the cultural tools that enable it.

To some extent, this idea definitely complicates de Certeau’s notion of tactics. A tactician is someone who takes advantage of a space that belongs to someone else, but he/she is not acting “alone.” According to de Certeau, if resistance is to be effective, it must be quick and “untraceable.” It is in conjunction with this idea that he developed his notion of trajectories which “trace out the ruses of other interests and desires that are neither determined nor captured by the systems in which they develop” (*xviii*). This means any activity that cannot be “grasped” by the dominant power structure qualifies as an act of resistance. But if we were to reappropriate the cultural tools that are “imposed” on us, then we would necessarily leave a trace because our actions modify and are modified by these tools. Moreover, according to ANT, all activity is but a trace of



associations and if something does not leave a trace, it cannot be “followed.”

Such ideas also complicate our notions of writing and textual production. While De Certeau dismisses writing as a solitary act, Latour explains that the text is “a test on how many actors the writer is able to treat as mediators and how far he or she is able to achieve the social” (129). This means writing is not an isolated activity and it is definitely a part of the social world. When an individual is involved in the act of writing, the production of the text is mediated and limited by his/her knowledge of the genre, the style, the various implements that he/she chooses to write with, the space of the page and a myriad other influences that shape the form and content of one’s writing.

In the light of these new ideas, our understanding of Anzaldua’s work may be radically altered. For instance, the structure of *Borderlands* is highly unconventional. The first part of the book articulates Anzaldua’s theory of the borderlands; she actively blends several genres and languages together in order to craft this theory and, in the process, she collapses the difference between the creative and the critical and the public and the personal, among other things. By choosing to perform these languages and genres differently, Anzaldua creates a new series of association between them and this is clearly an articulation of agency. However, even though she subverts many hegemonic discourses, her agency is limited and mediated by the same discourses. Therefore, her books are no longer solitary acts of resistance. Instead, her work is mediated by a number of cultural tools and this makes it an inherently social activity. Anzaldua and her work are part of the same network that created her oppressive circumstances *and* enabled her resistance. While this might seem like a Foucauldian interpretation, I believe that de



Certeau and Foucault's work do not necessarily have to be treated as polar opposites. Instead, they exist in a dialogic relationship and the frameworks offered by both theorists enable and interanimate one another.

Additionally, a pattern of social associations may often become oppressive and end up including or excluding various elements that don't seem to "fit." A social network is considered "complete" when all of the actors<sup>24</sup> in it adequately participate in its maintenance. Those elements that are inessential to the network are often "left out." However this does not mean that the elements from this network may not be reappropriated by external actors and insinuated back into it in an altered form. It is precisely this kind of activity that Anzaldua is involved in. As an "external" actor, she reappropriates the dominant language/discourse – which is also an actor – and alters it before re-insinuating it back into the same network. But this does not mean that Anzaldua is completely uninfluenced by the elements that she reappropriates. Even though she subverts ordinary expectations of genre and language, her writing is still being shaped by them to some extent. For instance, when she moves from poetry to writing an autobiographical narrative, her writing is being shaped and limited by the expectations of that genre; the movement between genres is clearly an articulation of agency, but the genre itself continues to exercise a certain amount of discipline and limits her agency. A genre is a historical, social and cultural creation, and as such it conditions the manner in which one writes. For example, an academic paper is a specific genre unto itself.

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<sup>24</sup> An actor may be easily replaced by another actor as long as he/she/it performs the same function in an adequate manner.



However, it has been shaped by a number of social, historical and cultural forces. While these factors are not always obvious, they still influence the manner in which a person writes his/her paper. Similarly, the manner in which Anzaldua moves from one language to another is a performance of agency, but the way in which she expresses herself, the words that she uses and the semiotic baggage that they carry also create certain limitations. As a tactician, Anzaldua is certainly not working alone. She is participating in a network full of actors and she acts with them in order to craft her theory of resistance.

For Anzaldua, writing is definitely a solitary act. This is evident when she explains:

When I create stories in my head, that is, allow the voices and scenes to be projected in the inner screen of my mind, I “trance.” I used to think I was going crazy or that I was having hallucinations. But now I realize it is my job, my calling, to traffic in images... But, in reconstructing the traumas behind the images. I make sense of them, and once they have “meaning” they are changed, transformed. It is then that writing heals me, brings me great joy... In the beginning it is like being in a movie theater, as pure spectator. Gradually, I become so engrossed with the activities, the conversations, that I become a participant in the drama. I have to struggle to “disengage” or escape from my ‘animated story’ ... Usually (my) narratives are the offspring of stories acted out in my head during periods of sensory deprivation (70).



From this description, it is evident that Anzaldua's writing seems to simply spring out of her head after one of these "episodes." However, if writing is inherently a "social" activity, it would be difficult to isolate its origins in one of these episodes. Instead, Anzaldua's work shows that her writing is drawn from and informed by several different social and cultural resources and therefore, it would not be incorrect to say that her "writing" began long before the moment of inscription itself; this view dismantles the notion of the Author-God and reinstates the significance of the social even in the most private acts of writing and resistance. As a writer, however, Anzaldua certainly has the agency and the ability to reassemble different cultural materials and put them back together in a manner that makes sense to her.

Latour further explains that actors in a network create their own explanations and their own frameworks. By "reassembling the social" an actor may create another viewpoint or frame of reference which adds another dimension to the network. This view is echoed by Anzaldua herself when she states: "I think those who produce new *conciementos*<sup>25</sup> have to shift the frame of reference, reframe the issue or situation being looked at, connect the disparate parts of information in news or form a perspective that's new" (*Interviews* 178). Therefore, by using the border as a tactical tool, Anzaldua also adds another point of view or theoretical lens which can be further extended or altered by other actors.

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<sup>25</sup> "Conciemento" is a term coined by Anzaldua for "an overarching theory of consciousness, of how the mind works. It's an epistemology that tries to encompass all the dimensions of life, both inner – mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms – and outer – social, political, lived experiences" (177).



Taken together, all of these views place de Certeau's theory of tactics and tacticians in the sphere of the social. A tactic is an inherently social activity and no matter how isolated or "hidden" an act of resistance might be, it is still inspired by social, cultural and historical circumstances and not just the immediate conditions. Like the act of writing, the tactic does not just "occur" in the moment of its execution. Instead, it is dictated and limited by a range of tools, forces and actors. At this stage, it would be fruitful to extend the definition of "tactical discourses" that I articulated earlier in this project. A tactical discourse is certainly any text/voice that in minor but significant ways resists and challenges the authority of dominant discourses. However, I would also argue that a tactical discourse is enabled by the same elements that it resists; it shapes and is shaped by the very discourses that it seeks to challenge. A tactical discourse is an alienable part of the same structure that it seeks to oppose. It makes its difference felt in the manner in which it reappropriates various cultural tools and reassembles/alters them before returning it to the original network. A tactical discourse provides another framework, a different point of view that somehow extends and challenges already existing interpretations and frameworks. However, no matter how significant its revisions may be, a tactical discourse can never be "closed." Instead, it must provide other actors with the means to act upon it and extend or alter the network in some manner or the other. This falls in line with de Certeau's notion that a tactic

depends on time – it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.' Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate



events in order to turn them into ‘opportunities.’ The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them. This is achieved in the propitious moments when they are able to combine heterogeneous elements; the intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form, however, not of a discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and the manner in which the opportunity is “seized” (*xix*)

De Certeau, however, does not seem to value the new “discourse” that such a “synthesis” creates, possibly because it leaves behind a “trace.” However, a tactician’s most important contribution to a network is a revision or an alteration which results in the formation of a new interpretation. As such, a tactician’s “discourse” must be both valued and attended to.

As a tactical discourse then, Gloria Anzaldua’s work constitutes an important revision of several actors/elements within the network that she is a part of. As such, her work can no longer be valued only in terms of its linguistic alterations and transgressions. Instead, the whole work must itself be seen as part of a larger network which has been fundamentally altered by the insinuation of her work into it. Anzaldua’s work is undeniably “social” and is not just a solitary act of resistance. However, her work is certainly not “closed” to other actors and, indeed, if the work of resistance is to be continued, then Anzaldua’s work must continue to be extended and not just continually interpreted or “framed.” It must inspire and allow other acts of resistance. Indeed, the present thesis might be termed a “tactical discourse,” because it not only extends de Certeau’s ideas, but also reinterprets Anzaldua’s work. As such, Anzaldua and de



Certeau's books are "actors" that I have been taken up and reappropriated in order to further my own academic agenda. While this is an illustration of a "tactic," my agenda is still mediated and informed not only by their work, but also by those others who have engaged in the task of interpretation earlier. It is also restricted and shaped by the demands of the genre of the thesis, the language of the academy, my own "inner" language and the various other tools that participated in the production of this work. Therefore, my own discourse, while performed in "isolation," is still undeniably social.

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