This Bridge That Never Dissipates: 
Recreations of *This Bridge Called My Back*, 1981 - 2015

by

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“As one might suspect, this study owes much to suggestions from the various audiences who participated in its development. To everyone, my deep gratitude and my performative thanks.”

-Gérard Genette, Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation

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“Every generation that reads This Bridge rewrites it.”

Gloria Anzaldúa, This Bridge Called My Back, 2002
Introduction: ¿Qué haré de aquí, y cómo? / What Will I Do From Here, and How?

The Source / La Fuente

At the 2014 American Studies Association Conference in Los Angeles, I visited a roundtable discussion called “This Bridge We Call Cyberspace: The Radical Potential of Digital Scholarship.” Six women of color shared their digital feminist projects, such as an online archive of Chicana feminist sources, a dissertation on the first Latino radio station in America, and a database of films by women of color. Armed with a notebook and a healthy dose of undergraduate energy, I asked each of the contributors during the question and answer period if they could reflect on how This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color influenced their current projects. One presenter, Dr. Michelle Habell-Pallán, referenced the Earth, Wind, and Fire song “I’ll Write A Song For You” in her answer: “Earlier, we heard that ‘sounds never dissipate, they only recreate in another place,’” she told me. “That’s how I feel about This Bridge. It never dissipates, it only recreates in another place.”

This thesis tracks the recreations of This Bridge Called My Back into seven different anthologies from 1981 to 2015 to describe its contributions to feminist and literary discourse. First published in 1981, This Bridge Called My Back represents a watershed moment in feminist history. Women of color had previously produced important collections such as The Black Woman: An Anthology (1970), the newspaper Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc (1971), the anthology Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature (1979) and the special edition of the journal Conditions, Conditions: Five (1979). However, This Bridge was one of the first works to unite women of different races and ethnicities
under the term “women of color,” a phrase which indicates solidarity across the color lines.

Gloria Anzaldúa conceived of *This Bridge* as a graduate student at the University of Texas, Austin. While she was compiling readings for a course entitled “La Mujer Chicana,” Anzaldúa realized that there was a dearth of sources that synthesized an analysis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class. As she told Linda Smuckler in a 1982 interview, “I realized that we needed this kind of book” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 55). Anzaldúa put out a call for submissions in February 1979, and later that year she recruited Cherríe Moraga as a co-editor. Anzaldúa convinced Moraga to collaborate with her due to her faith in the book’s importance. As she shared with Smuckler, “I said, ‘This book, if we do it, is going to change your life; it’s going to change my life’” (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 59). Indeed, this work put both Moraga and Anzaldúa on the map as Chicana feminist theorists, and sparked discourse in many activist circles immediately after its publication.

*This Bridge* was first published in 1981 by Persephone Press, and has now been republished three times by three different publishers. Moreover, Moraga and Anzaldúa each produced new anthologies modeled after the original text, such as the Spanish edition *Esta puente, mi espalda* (Moraga 1988), as well as *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (Anzaldúa 1990) and *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (Anzaldúa 2002). As such, it is clear that there are a number of spaces in which this work has been recreated. With the latest iteration of *This Bridge* in its fourth edition, published in March of 2015 by SUNY Press, we see that *This Bridge* has enjoyed a long and influential afterlife for the last four decades. However, the

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1 I will refer to the work as *This Bridge* from this point forward. All citations are from the 1983 edition.
anthology did not easily become as an invaluable source for all feminists, activists, or ethnic studies students. Instead, *This Bridge* has survived four different publications, discriminatory reviews, long periods of obscurity, and the untimely death of Gloria Anzaldúa, the woman who first dreamed it into being. There are almost twenty years between the second and third iterations, and thirteen between the third and the fourth. That repetition and variation suggests that *This Bridge* continues to be a relevant and provocative theoretical model for feminist of different generations. Its critique of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia are certainly relevant today in an age when Americans must be reminded that “black lives matter.” While a great deal of the work about *This Bridge* analyzes the anthology in depth, to this day there has not been a historical study of the text that unites all of its iterations in one analysis. My thesis attempts to fill this gap in the scholarship.

*My Critical Interventions/Mis interpretaciones críticas*

My contributions to the body of literature about *This Bridge Called My Back* are historical, situational, and coalitional. I undertook this project in order to draw attention to an extraordinary woman of color feminist text. Out of all of the anthologies of its kind that were produced in the 1980s and 1990s, this is the only book that has been republished multiple times. I want to draw attention to its long lifespan as a text and to illuminate how it produced theory from its inception. In doing so, I highlight alternative epistemologies at work in the text and perform a holistic reading of the anthology, taking into account its materiality, its publication history, and the gaps in its lifespan when it was out of print. I privilege the recreated body of this book just as the women who contributed to it relied on their own bodies as founts of knowledge.
In the first chapter, “This Bridge/Esta Puente: The Subject, Audience, and Central Metaphors of the 1981 and 1983 Editions,” I draw attention to the historical trajectory of This Bridge, and position it as an outgrowth of black feminist thought since the Civil War. I use Sojourner Truth’s speech “Ain’t I a Woman,” excerpts from Toni Morrison’s Beloved, and Patricia Hill Collins’ book Black Feminist Thought to identify the black feminist epistemologies at work in the text. In doing so, I wish to dispel a commonly held assertion that This Bridge was written solely in response to second wave white feminist discourse. I read it instead as “a statement of what feminist means to us,” as Anzaldúa and Moraga declared in their original joint introduction (This Bridge, 1983, xxiii), and offer my own ideas as to the subjects and audiences of the first two editions. Moreover, I perform a close reading of key materials in the 1981 and 1983 versions such as the cover image, title, and publication history, as well as an in-depth analysis of Toni Cade Bambara’s Foreword and Kate Rushin’s “The Bridge Poem.” In my analysis of these materials, I use vocabulary from Gérard Genette’s Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation.

In the second chapter, “Called/Llamada: Critical Engagements with This Bridge,” I discuss This Bridge’s critical reception and its place in the history of feminist anthologies. I use Cynthia Franklin’s Writing Women’s Communities to establish its contribution to the genre of anthology, and then incorporate an analysis of epitextual material such as critical reviews, authorial interviews, and secondary articles. In doing so, I elaborate the discourse surrounding This Bridge that the editors may have been attuned to when they compiled their subsequent anthologies. Moreover, I locate This Bridge within the scholarly debates about the nature of theory in the 1980s, synthesizing its theoretical interventions with the work of black literary scholar Barbara Christian, Italian feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis, and Chicana feminist theorist Norma Alarcón.
In the following chapters, I repeat my material analysis that I performed in the first chapter on four different anthologies. In the third chapter, “My Back/Mi Espalda: The Foundations of Variation,” I analyze the Spanish edition, *Esta puente, mi espalda* (1988) in conversation with *Making Face, Making Home/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (1990). In the fourth chapter, “We Call Home/Que Llamamos la Casa: Twenty-First Century Iterations,” I compare the third edition of *This Bridge* (2002) with *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (2002). The coda, “The Bridge to the Future/La Puente al Futuro,” discusses the newly published fourth edition of *This Bridge* (2015). What courses throughout each of the chapters is an analysis of new materials as cover images, titles, publication information, prefaces, forewords, and introductions. I do so in order to draw conclusions about the changing subjects and audiences of each iteration, which allows me to consider each version’s relationship to a changing woman of color feminist paradigm.

In bringing these seven texts in conversation with one another, I view my analysis as a situational contribution to the literature on *This Bridge*, as I have not yet come across a study that analyzes the entire corpus of works based off of *This Bridge*. While there are works that discuss changes between the first and second anthologies, as well as comparative readings of the third edition of *This Bridge* (2002) and *this bridge we call home* (2002), this thesis brings together all of the works by Moraga and Anzaldúa related to *This Bridge*, drawing attention to this anthology’s diverse iterations over thirty-four years. Moreover, I bring the Spanish edition *Esta puente, mi espalda* into conversation with the other works, as it is often mentioned in studies of *This Bridge* but rarely analyzed. In situating all of these works together, I argue for a reading of *This Bridge* not as a singular text but instead as a collection of “variations on a theme.”
I am indebted in this regard to black theorist James A. Snead’s conception of the importance of “repetition as a figure of black culture,” which I use in the third chapter to elaborate my idea of “variations on a theme.” In his 1984 essay, Snead describes how European and black cultures reconcile repetition in different ways: “In European culture, repetition must be seen to be not just circulation and flow but accumulation and growth. In black culture, the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is ‘there for you to pick it up when you come back to it’” (69). Snead describes the role of repetition in the rituals of enslaved African peoples that laid the foundation for jazz music, the blues, oratory in the black church, and black literature. He points out that figures, refrains, and tropes necessarily repeat in black art forms without being categorized as progression or regression. Bridging from Snead, I explore the repeating elements from the original text of This Bridge in each of the related anthologies, conceiving of the entire collection as “variations on a theme,” focusing on the repeating and changing elements in each iteration. This analysis allows me to sketch how, as Michelle Habell-Pallán told me in Los Angeles, “This Bridge never dissipates, it only recreates in another place,” and how these variations on the themes of This Bridge are related to changes within the women of color feminist paradigm.

By thinking with French literary theory, black feminist thought, and queer of color critique, I perform the coalitional work that the editors and contributors of This Bridge envisioned. I utilize some of the French critic Gérard Genette’s vocabulary from Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation to define the materials I analyze. Also, in these pages, I draw from Patricia Hill Collins, Cynthia Franklin, Barbara Christian, Norma Alarcón, James A. Snead, and José Esteban Muñoz. I synthesize the works of black women, white women, Latinas, queer black men, and queer Latinos with This Bridge. Particularly, in the
fourth chapter, I describe the connections between *This Bridge* and two essays by Muñoz to outline the coalitional possibilities between queer people of color that Muñoz, Moraga and Anzaldúa envisioned. In doing so, I agree with Gloria Anzaldúa’s assertion in her 2001 foreword to *This Bridge*: “Bridge has multicultural roots and it is not ‘owned’ solely by mujeres de color, or even by women. Like knowledge, Bridge cannot be possessed by a person or group. It’s public; it’s communal” (*This Bridge*, xxxvi). I draw on these sources to enrich my reading of *This Bridge*, to demonstrate the text’s relevance to many different groups in solidarity, and to predict the text’s utility for a new generation of coalitional feminists of color.

**Methodology/ Metodología**

Though much of the original content remains unchanged in each edition, I examine the variations on the original theme of *This Bridge* by closely reading what Gérard Genette would term “the paratext.” In the introduction to *Paratexts*, Genette distinguishes between the two categories of the paratext, the peritext and the epitext. The former is all of the work in or on the material book that is not the actual text, and the latter is material relating to the text that is not contained within or in its covers (4-5). By analyzing the cover images, prefaces, forewords, and introductions, as well as publication histories, reviews, and interviews relating to the texts, I consider both the peritext and the epitext in my work.

I found Genette’s work useful to my study in two regards. Firstly, Genette clarifies that the paratext is a critical bridge between the reader and the author: “[T]he paratext is … as Phillipe Lejeune put it, ‘a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text’” (*Paratexts* 2). Thus, Genette makes it clear that the paratexts, especially those that appear before the text itself, are highly influential in
the reading experience. Also, Genette suggests a process of interpretation of the paratext, and I have attempted to identify many of the details that he enumerates in my analysis:

> [D]efining a paratextual element consists of determining its location (the quest *where*?); the date of its appearance and, if need be, its disappearance (*when*?); its mode of existence, verbal or other (*how*?); the characteristics of its situation of communication – its sender and addressee (*from whom? to whom*?); and the functions that its message aims to fulfill (*to do what*?). *Paratexts 4*

In each chapter, I look at paratexts with different locations, dates of appearance, senders, addressees, and functions. I combine peritextual and epitextual materials from diverse time periods as well as diverse senders. I feel that it is important that I do so because *This Bridge* is a multiple-voiced anthology. As the paratexts originate from different allographic and authorial sources, I aim to outline the multiple interpretations of “what feminism means to us” in each anthology.

The word “paratexts” is a useful term to define the materials that are essential to my work, and Genette’s book is also helpful in clarifying the specific roles of certain elements such as titles, formats, publication information, and prefatory materials. However, though I continue to use the term “paratexts” out of convenience, I come to a different understanding of the paratexts in the third chapter. Genette’s definition of paratexts is founded upon the assumption that these materials are “dedicated to the service” to the text that they surround (*Paratexts 12*). But, the cover images, titles, and prefatory materials that I track from the first edition are often the most cited elements from *This Bridge*. They are at times the more fertile sites of variation than the text itself.
Thus, though Genette defines these materials as servile, I understand the paratexts as important in their own right. I offer not only a different conception of the paratext but also a variation of how books are made: I insist on authors, publishers, editors, readers, and critics who are gendered female, and who use not just pen and paper to create books, but bring their materially embodied experience to every page of the text.

Yet, perhaps a more important question than how I undertake this project is why I chose to devote nine months of my life to the study of *This Bridge*. Throughout the course of this thesis, I was haunted by Gloria Anzaldúa’s question at the beginning of her preface to the Second Edition: “Qué hacer de aquí y cómo? / *What to do from here and bow?*” (*This Bridge*, 1983, np). As I worked throughout the year on this thesis, I realized I had found the answer to her question in the very text I loved. Before she died in 2004, Anzaldúa noted in her preface to *this bridge we call home*, “Every generation that reads *This Bridge Called My Back* rewrites it” (2002, 2). I am now three generations removed from the first edition of *This Bridge*, but this anthology was the one of the first books that I read that compellingly articulated how it felt to live in my skin. As a Latina, I had never read a text that specifically addressed the experience of growing up passing for white, and Moraga’s essay “La Güera” reminded me that I was not alone. Similarly, Anzaldúa’s work in *This Bridge* showed me how to playfully write in Spanglish, my mother tongue. This book has altered my feminist practices for the better by encouraging me to educate myself about those who are different from me, and by helping me express my solidarity with people who have very different life experiences than I. I have a vested interest in making sure this text does not dissipate from feminist discourse. Here, then, is my humble attempt at rewriting *This Bridge*. 
CHAPTER ONE: This Bridge/Esta Puente
The Subject, Audience, and Central Metaphors of the 1981 and 1983 Editions

This chapter is a close analysis of the “paratexts” in the first edition (1981) of This Bridge Called My Back. If the paratext, as Philippe Lejeune writes, “in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text” (qtd. in Genette 2), then these materials will influence how the reader interprets the significance of the bridge metaphor. The authorial paratext will also inform the reader as to the editors’ conceptions of the book’s subject and audience. But before I address these materials, I begin with a reading of historical epitextual material to describe the elements of black feminist thought in This Bridge. I draw from Frances M. Beal, Patricia Hill Collins, Sojourner Truth, and Toni Morrison to serve two purposes. Firstly, I would like to situate This Bridge with a history of black feminist thought, resisting the reading that it was produced solely in response to second wave white feminist discourse. Also, I identify elements of black feminist thought within the anthology so that it is clear that it is a woman of color feminist work, a coalitional project started by two Chicanas that relies heavily on black feminist traditions. With this thesis, I contribute to the epitextual materials surrounding the anthology, creating a paratext that directs the readers of this thesis as to how I would like them to read This Bridge.

After setting up a genealogy of woman of color feminist thought for This Bridge, I will delve into my analysis of the anthology. I discuss the paratextual elements in this chapter in the same order that the reader would encounter them, assuming that the text is read in a linear fashion. Genette uses this same format in Paratexts. Moreover, he writes that in analyzing a paratextual element, one should determine “the function that its message aims to fulfill,” which will be my central question as I approach each element
Lastly, I discuss some paratextual materials of the second edition (1983) that differ from the first edition in order to begin my analysis of the variations in each iteration upon the original themes of *This Bridge*.

*This Bridge Called My Back* was written partially as a challenge to hegemonic feminist thought. Feminist theory at the time often centered gender as the most important axis of oppression. Many white, straight, upper-class women organized around the philosophy of “sisterhood,” believing that most women experienced oppression in the same manner based on their sex. However, many women of color felt that theorizing solely about sex did not adequately represent their experience as women. Their lives were mediated by their reality as raced, classed, sexualized and gendered bodies, and the rhetoric of “sisterhood” failed to take these interlocking factors into account. During the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, or what is known as the second wave of the feminist movement, women of color feminists articulated a need for new paradigms that spoke to the specificity of black and brown women’s conditions.

Frances M. Beal, a SNCC coordinator and feminist activist, was one of the first women in the second wave to assert the specificity of black and brown women’s experiences. In her 1969 pamphlet “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” Beal noted that black women’s experience differed from black men’s because they were subjected to economic, gendered, and sexual oppression (7). For example, she details how black women were the lowest wage earning demographic, were subjected to restricted and conservative gender politics in their marriages, and were targets for forced sterilization. Black women clearly faced different challenges than black males. In addition, Beal wrote that the white women’s movement often did not speak for black
women as it failed to analyze these economic and racial axes of oppression. She details the experience of “double jeopardy” as follows:

Any white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology has absolutely nothing in common with the black women’s struggle. In fact, some groups come to the incorrect conclusion that their oppression is due simply to male chauvinism … Another major differentiation is that the white women’s liberation movement is basically middle-class. Very few of these women suffer the extreme economic exploitation that most black women are subjected to day by day. It is not an intellectual persecution alone; the movement is not a psychological outburst for us; it is quite real. (10)

Beal points out that white feminist analysis ignored the role of economic oppression and racism in black women’s lives. Her comment “not a psychological outburst” is probably a reference to Betty Friedan’s “the problem that has no name” from *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). It was not that black women suffered from a mysterious malaise; in fact, they could easily put a name to the problem. The interlocking factors of racism, sexism, and classism (among others) were the burden of every black woman at that time.

To describe the specificity of black women’s experiences, Beal appeals to her personal knowledge. Though she also draws from statistics and historical narratives, Beale describes the ordinary life experiences of black women in America to articulate the condition of “double jeopardy.” Today, “double jeopardy” might be more accurately described as “intersectionality,” which Kimberlé Crenshaw defined in 1989 as a series of interlocking, inseparable factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality (among others) that affect a person’s lived experience (154).
According to sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, black women in the United States have built an alternate epistemology throughout history in order to theorize about their intersectional experiences, even before “double jeopardy” or “intersectionality” was named. In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins outlines the principles of black feminist epistemology, in which black women have historically relied upon alternative methods of knowledge production and validation to describe their intersectional experiences. Beal’s conception of “double jeopardy” exemplifies a system of thought in which, as Collins writes, “lived experience as a criterion for eligibility frequently is invoked” (257). Thus, in a black feminist epistemology, the people who are most qualified to theorize about the black female experience are black women. Specifically, black women can use their bodies as a site of knowledge instead of relying on abstraction as a method of theoretical production. This is related to what Collins terms “the ethics of caring,” in which “personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process” (263). Though traditional methods of knowledge production would require objectivity, statistical data, and academic expertise in order to generate knowledge, black feminist epistemology relies upon personal subjectivity as a source of wisdom.

It is important to describe the principles of black feminist epistemology because Moraga and Anzaldúa rely upon this method of knowledge production to describe their experiences in *This Bridge*. Moraga calls her epistemology “theory in the flesh,” a system in which “the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born of necessity” (25). This system of knowledge based on “physical realities” of the experience of flesh shares key principles with black feminist epistemology. It is important that Moraga terms the book’s
analysis as “theory in the flesh” because the invocation of the word “flesh” allows the writers to specifically theorize about race. In her essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” literary theorist Hortense Spillers defines the word “flesh” as follows: “[B]efore the body there is the flesh, that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography … The flesh is the concentration of ‘ethnicity’” (67). Though flesh makes up the body, Spillers importantly says that it “does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse.” Thus, when analyses are grounded in flesh, they necessarily pay attention to race, and can also synthesize gender, class, and sexuality to create an intersectional analysis.

Before I address the text itself, I describe a historical example and a fictional invocation of black feminist epistemology to invoke analyses based in flesh, in order to position This Bridge within a system of woman of color feminist thought. In doing so, I insist that this text is an outgrowth of black feminist theory since the Civil War, and cannot be read solely as a directed response to second wave white feminist discourse.

One important predecessor to This Bridge, whom Beal, Crenshaw and Collins all quote, is Sojourner Truth, specifically her 1851 speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” As she delivers this oratory at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, Truth ensures that the white audience understood that she speaks from a specific racialized, classed, and gendered body. Collins cites her speech as follows: “Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman?” (258). By theorizing through her lived experience, Truth “deconstructed the prevailing notions of woman” (Collins 258) by using her flesh and body as a site of knowledge. For example, when Truth says, “Look at my arm,” she shows that her body differs from the
standard conventions of white feminine beauty. Instead of being slender, delicate, and pale, Truth’s arm was likely more muscular and attested to her years of fieldwork in slavery. In her next sentence, “I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me!” Truth appeals to her lived experience as a criterion of knowledge. She acknowledges her years of physical labor and puts them into a feminist context with the claim “no man could head me,” which can be interpreted as “work harder than I.” When Truth concludes “And ain’t I a woman?” she questions why black women are not treated in the same manner as white women. I am a woman, she affirms, but my race, age, and socioeconomic status influence how others view me. Truth insists that her subjective bodily experiences can be used to theorize on a broader scale. The “theory in the flesh” in Truth’s famous speech helps to clarify the theoretical intervention of This Bridge. Given that a lot of feminist theory at the time presumed that “woman” meant “straight, white, upper-middle class woman,” Anzaldúa and Moraga might as well have asked “Are we still not women?” Just as Sojourner Truth demands, “Look at my arm,” the editors exhort the reader to “look at our backs.” By drawing from these two parts of the body, both metaphors emphasize the role of labor.

Black feminist epistemology is also present in fiction such as Toni Morrison’s 1987 novel Beloved, demonstrating that it can be effectively deployed in literature as well as in oratory. When she preaches in the clearing, Baby Suggs uses a synecdoche equating “flesh” with “the bodies of freed slaves.” She theorizes about self-love as a form of resistance: “This is flesh I’m talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance, backs that need support, shoulders that need arms … And O my people, out yonder, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, stroke it and hold it up” (89). When Baby Suggs invokes flesh,
which is necessarily racialized, she recognizes the prejudiced discourses that converge on black bodies at that time. Like Truth, Baby Suggs uses bodily metaphors and theorizes through lived experience, and her words ring through the ages. When Morrison employs black feminist epistemology in literature, her work strengthens Moraga and Anzaldúa’s claims in *This Bridge* that literature is an effective genre for theorization.

The resonances between Collins, Spillers, Truth, Morrison and the editors of *This Bridge* demonstrate how this text, though two Chicanas created it, is truly a collaborative women of color project. Now, I will move from backs that bridged before the Civil War to 1980, when the metaphor “this bridge called my back” was created. Moraga and Barbara Smith, a prominent black feminist organizer in the Combahee River Collective, coined the book’s title during a personal conversation. This conversation is an example of what Genette would term a “prior paratext,” related material that appeared before the text itself (*Paratexts*, 5). As Anzaldúa and Moraga were compiling the book, Moraga attended a feminist conference in Boston with Smith. They were both appalled at how they were treated, which Moraga describes in the Preface to the 1981 edition:²

> Another meeting. Again walking into a room filled with white women, a splattering of women of color around the room. The issue on the table, Racism. The dread and terror in the room lay like a thick immovable paste above all our shoulders, white and colored alike. We, Third World Women in the room, thinking back to square one, again.

> *How can we – this time – not use our bodies to be thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap?* Barbara says last night: “A bridge gets walked over.”

> Yes, over and over again. (*This Bridge* xv)

² Though the Preface that documents this discussion is *This Bridge*, I consider this conversation as part of the “prior paratext,” as it took place before the book was finished.
Rhetorically, Smith equates the body of a “Third World Woman” with a bridge, the object that is “thrown over a river of tormented history” and “gets walked over.” This metaphor is produced through the perceived reality of embodied experience. Moraga and Smith feel that they have been repeatedly called upon to connect two disparate groups due to their experiences living as women of color, interpreting the bridge metaphor as a painful position. They want to develop a feminism that feels better, that will not wrack their joints and arch their backs into making a connection with those who refused to understand their position. They use their subjective bodily experiences as a source for theorization, building on the legacy of Sojourner Truth. Furthermore, they create a flexible metaphor that can convey multiple affective registers.

Moraga and Anzaldúa altered Smith’s phrase when they decided on the title of the book. Recalling that Smith’s original expression is “a bridge gets walked over,” this sentence changed when it became the book’s title: This Bridge Called My Back. The insertion of “called” implies that there is not an exact relationship between the bodies of women of color and bridges. An external subject asks them to stretch, to accommodate, and to join disparate communities. By choosing this title, I argue Anzaldúa and Moraga further protested the demands placed on feminists of color by demonstrating that backs are not naturally bridges.

The subtitle has a different function than the title because it directs the reader to consider the subjects of this text. With the phrase “writings by radical women of color,” Moraga and Anzaldúa utilized a relatively new term. As historian Benita Roth points out in her book Separate Roads to Feminism, while black and Chicana feminist organizations had existed since the Civil Rights Movement, they often did not work together in coalition (11). While many black feminist organizations derived from Civil Rights
organizing groups, such as SNCC and the Black Liberationists, many Latina feminist organizations grew out of nationalist organizations such as La Raza. Due to their different origins and despite their shared opposition to hegemonic feminist practices, early Black and Latina feminist groups often did not collaborate. Roth offers some explanations: “[F]orming coalitions can come at the expense of internal resources of time and energy aimed at mobilizing one’s own base … Given the ethos of organizing one’s own, the making of coalitions across racial/ethnic divides was not a priority” (220). It seems that many Black and Chicana feminist organizations had to do the necessary work of defining their own groups before creating alliances. However, by the time This Bridge was published, more feminists were starting to work together, organizing under the umbrella term “women of color.” In using this phrase in the subtitle, Moraga and Anzaldúa make it clear that this is a coalitionist text. They refine the term “women of color” in the anthology so that it is a phrase that invokes solidarity without collapsing differences between women.

The cover illustration, whose author is unknown, also answers questions about the subject of the text and suggests an affective interpretation in line with Smith’s rendition. On the front of the book, a woman is on her hands and knees. The words “CALLED” and “BACK” are on both sides of her spine. There is no expression on her face, though her head is pointing downward. One arm is outstretched and the other is pointing downwards, as if she has been captured walking on her hands and knees. Given this vulnerable physical position, and the blood-colored background, this image does not evoke joy, but rather pain and discomfort. As this image lacks flesh, it does not specify any particular racial affiliation. The woman’s body is outlined, so the image could be

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3 Please refer to the Appendix to see the cover images of all of the books I discuss.
filled in with any shade of brown or black flesh. Thus, the title metaphor is a flexible device that could be used to theorize about the unique intersectional experiences of many women of color. However, the important point here is “woman,” as the cover outline is specifically drawn with breasts. Though the genitals are not detailed, one might say that this image is normatively sexed as female. Though the racial identity of the woman on the cover might vary, the sex is made clear. From this illustration, I infer that Moraga and Anzaldúa did not originally intend for the bridge metaphor to be used by white women, white men, or men of color.

Author Toni Cade Bambara’s “Foreword” is the first printed element of the paratext that the reader encounters. As an established novelist, short story writer, and anthologist, Bambara’s presence in the work helped legitimate a text edited by two relatively unknown writers. Moreover, Genette writes that prefatory materials function “to get the book read and to get the book read properly” (197), which Bambara accomplishes in her contribution. She innovates the bridge metaphor to argue that people should read this book to improve their lives: “This Bridge lays down the planks to cross over on to a new place where stooped labor cramped quartered down pressed and caged up combatants can straighten the spine and expand the lungs and make the vision manifest” (vi-vii). When she does not italicize the title of the work, Bambara animates the *This Bridge* as both an object and a text. While the element of racialized flesh is lost when the book itself is considered to be the bridge, instead of a woman’s back, Bambara’s interpretation emphasizes the role of physical work with the phrase “stooped labor cramped up quartered down pressed and caged up combatants.” Thus, her interpretation introduces a class element to the metaphor, adding a layer of intersectional analysis that may not have been evident when one considers the title image. Moreover,
she makes it clear that working class people will be moved by this text, interpellating them as an audience for the book.

Not only will *This Bridge* improve the individual lives of those who read it, but Bambara also envisions that it cause collective change. *This Bridge* becomes a material bridge, laying the groundwork for people to make connections, straighten their own spines, and form coalitions with one another. Bambara adds a new dimension to the metaphor by theorizing about a bridge between the writers and the audience. She believes that women of color will connect with each other when they learn about different intersectional experiences of oppression: “For it takes more than pique to unite our wrath … We have got to know each other better and teach other our ways, our views, if we’re to remove the scales … and get the work done. This Bridge can get us there” (vii). She emphasizes a physical process here by calling feminist activity “work.” At the end of the essay, she again animates the text as a physical connector between women: “And the personal unction we discover in the mirror, in the dreams, or on the pass across This Bridge. The work: To make revolution irresistible” (viii). With her emphasis on work, “the Afterward,” and “revolution,” Bambara expresses the hope that the anthology will serve to educate women and connect them in solidarity.

When the reader examines the table of contents, she would get a good idea about who might form the feminist coalition that connects together because of their differences. There are thirty-two different contributors to the text, many of whom had not been previously published. There are many black women, Latinas of multiple ethnicities (such as Chicanas, Puertorriqueñas, and Cubanans), as well as Asian-American women (who identify as Japanese-American and Chinese-American), Native American women, and women who identify with multiple races and ethnicities. Jewish women are
also featured. It is true that the anthology lacks the perspective of many Native American nations, as well as Muslim women and Southeast Asian women. It's interesting that some contributors speak to each other through the titles of their pieces. This call is evident in Anzaldúa’s often-quoted “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers,” Rosario Morales’ “We’re All in the Same Boat,” and doris davenport’s “The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Wimmin.” Through the titles and their selections, the contributors model the coalition building discussions that Bambara envisioned, finding commonality in their experiences without eliding their differences. The class of the contributors is evident in that many of them were not academics (Audre Lorde is a notable exception). At the time, Anzaldúa and Moraga were not yet affiliated with universities. Also, most of the pieces had not been previously published. By looking at the table of contents, readers who are young, female, of color, and working class might see themselves in this anthology.

Moraga’s Preface, which appears after the Table of Contents, functions to address a white audience on how to properly read the book (Genette 5). As I have already discussed the origins of the bridge metaphor that Moraga elaborates in the Preface, now I will delve into her beliefs about the state of the current feminist movement. She writes of her disillusionment with feminism due to some white women’s problematic politics: “[T]he deepest political tragedy I have experienced is how with such grace, such blind faith, this commitment to women in the feminist movement grew to be exclusive and reactionary. I call my white sisters on this” (xiv). By calling white women “sisters,” Moraga does not dismiss the possibility of coalition with anti-racist white women. However, she calls them to reform their exclusive politics. Moreover, she equates the experience of being the bridge with her own growing woman of color
consciousness: “I used to feel more white … But at the meeting last night, dealing with white women here on this trip, I have felt so very dark: dark with anger, with silence, with the feeling of being walked over” (xv). The daughter of a Chicana mother and an Anglo-American father, Moraga identified for many years as white. However, she equates her experience of being the bridge with a “darkening” of her skin. Thus, Moraga comes into her own brown flesh in her Preface, and addresses white readers as to how they might reflect on their actions through the anthology.

Readers are primed to consider what the contents of the anthology might be like when they encounter “The Bridge Poem,” by Kate Rushin. This is one of the most cited works in the anthology, and Rushin demonstrates how she applies the concept of “theory in the flesh” to her personal experience as a black feminist. By connecting her emotions to the bridge metaphor, Rushin offers a rendering of the title in which bridging is performed not by the spine of a book, as Bambara wrote, but by a black female body. She offers multiple interpretations of the bridge metaphor. At first, Rushin theorizes that her body connects disparate communities: “I’ve had enough/I’m sick of seeing and touching/Both sides of things/Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody” (1-4). In Rushin’s world, “being the damn bridge” involves linguistic and cultural translation. She continues:

I explain my mother to my father my father to my little sister
My little sister to my brother my brother to the white feminists
The white feminists to the Black church folks the Black church folks
To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the Black separatists the
Black separatists to the artists the artists to my friends’ parents …
Then
I’ve got to explain myself
To everybody.
I do more translating

Than the Gawdamn U.N. (“The Bridge Poem,” 13-18)

In the first stanza, Rushin omits commas or pauses between the different groups that she describes. When read aloud, these words pile up on each another without a pause between them, showing the relentless process of mediating between many different groups. The communities she names are differentiated by race, class, age, gender, and political affiliation. There is a clear divide between “the white feminists, “the Black church folks,” and “the Black separatists.” Thus, in Rushin’s world, a bridge is a connector between disparate groups that make no effort to get to know one another. Rushin makes it clear that she was not only the bridge, but also that she will no longer tolerate this position:

I’m sick of filling in your gaps
Sick of being your insurance against
The isolation of your self-imposed limitations
Sick of being the crazy one at your holiday dinners
Sick of being the odd one at your Sunday brunches
Sick of being the sole Black friend to 34 individual white people …

I will not be the bridge to your womanhood
Your manhood
Your human-ness. (“The Bridge Poem,” 21-26, 29-32)
The repetition of the word “sick” gives the piece a rhythmic quality so that each statement is like a punch. Moreover, “sick” evokes physical illness and exhaustion. Rushin’s knowledge is constructed through the subjective bodily experience of moving through the world as “bridge,” as a black feminist woman who belongs to distinct communities. Her exhaustion stems from the knowledge of what it was like to embody her flesh.

However, at the end of the poem, Rushin suggests a different interpretation of what it might mean to be a bridge. She finishes: “The bridge I must be/Is the bridge to my own power/I must translate/My own fears/Mediate/My own weaknesses/I must be the bridge to nowhere/But my own true self/And then/I will be useful” (“The Bridge Poem” 45-55). Thus, Rushin does not suggest that one should never be a bridge, but that women of color feminists have to stop translating between their divided groups. Instead, they have to think about themselves and communicate only their own fears and weaknesses. The phrase “I must be the bridge to nowhere/But my own true self” calls to mind an upright spine that connects a woman’s head to her feet, instead of an arched back that joins two disparate groups. By imagining “a bridge to my own true self,” Rushin conceives of a self with many bridged parts. In this manner, she also insists on an intersectional philosophy in which many factors come together to join the self. They cannot be divided or ranked. This final metaphor is a more hopeful interpretation than the one she previously offered, but it is still grounded in an epistemological claim of knowledge that is produced through the body.

The editors’ joint introduction follows Rushin’s poem, and it offers their iterations of the audience of the anthology. Though I outlined Moraga’s addresses to white women when I discussed her Preface, Moraga and Anzaldúa choose not to
describe their own text as a directed response. They open their introduction as follows: “What began as a reaction to the racism of white feminists soon became a positive affirmation of the commitment of women of color to our own feminism” (xxiii). Though the editors say that they started to write this anthology out of a place of anger against white women, they eventually came to view the project as a powerful manifesto for women of color. I emphasize this point because I caution readers against interpreting the text as solely a directed response to white readers. Many reviews posit the text in this manner, and it is true that Anzaldúa often describes a bad experience at a mostly white women’s retreat in 1979 as the jumping-off point for the anthology. In fact, she brings this anecdote up in the joint introduction. Describing This Bridge as solely a reaction to white hegemonic feminism ignores the women of color feminist work since the Civil War that laid the epistemological foundations of this text. In creating this book, the editors responded to white women as well as their women of color predecessors who had sounded a call for better feminist theory a century earlier.

The editors also offer their thoughts on how academics could connect to the book. First, they address the anthology’s tone: “As editors we sought out and believe we found, non-rhetorical, highly personal chronicles that present a political analysis in everyday terms” (This Bridge, xxiv). With the incorporation of the vernacular, and of different languages (primarily Spanish) often without translation, the editors wanted pieces that would sound very different from theoretical articles in academic journals. However, they also specify that they wanted This Bridge to be eventually incorporated into the academy: “We envision this book being used as a required text in most women’s studies courses. And we don’t just mean ‘special’ courses on Third World Women or

4 Or, the original Dear White People.
Racism, but also courses dealing with sexual politics, feminist thought, women’s spirituality, etc” (xxvi). It would be hyperbolic, then, to say that This Bridge was firmly anti-academic, since the editors saw a role for this book in universities. Furthermore, Moraga and Anzaldúa solicited from women’s studies programs for contributors. It seems that the academy was a possible audience for This Bridge, but it was certainly not the only audience, nor the only source of writers. It is important to define how academics fit into the conceptions of subject and audience in This Bridge because this is a facet that will change in later anthologies.

Of course, Moraga and Anzaldúa were hopeful that their book would not only reach young women of color feminists, but a generation of women before them: “tenemos la esperanza que This Bridge Called My Back will find its way back into our families’ lives. The revolution begins at home” (xxvi). In imagining the audience of This Bridge, Moraga and Anzaldúa conceive of an interracial and intergenerational group of readers who could come together in solidarity. While Smith, Bambara, Rushin, Moraga, and Anzaldúa all invoke the metaphor of “this bridge called my back,” some in very similar ways, many of these interpretations are very different from one another. This diversity in the interpretation of the central metaphor is important. With these different imaginings of the bridge, the anthology embodies a coalitional feminist movement, showing that many different women can utilize a symbol that is grounded in a shared epistemology of “theory in the flesh.” These interpretations do not have to be identical to one another for this movement to be effective. As the bridge is expressed in multiple voicings, an effective “definition of what ‘feminist’ means to us” emerges.

To finish my reading of the first edition, I consider how the publishing company might have influenced questions of the subject and audience. Genette briefly considers
the publisher’s importance, writing that materials such as “posters, advertisements, press releases and other prospectuses” are part of what he terms “the publisher’s epitemex” (347). It would make sense that Genette does not write about the people who produce the book, as his analysis focuses on textual materials. However, I include the publishers in my analysis because it is an important part of the factual paratext. It is pertinent information, just as readers are interested to know the author’s gender, race, or age when they consider questions of interpretation. The information that I provide about the publishing company of the first edition amplifies my discussion of the bridge metaphor.

Persephone Press, a white lesbian feminist collective in Watertown, Massachusetts, published the first edition of This Bridge. By incorporating This Bridge into their collection, Persephone Press linked the anthology to its audience, performing important bridging work between a woman of color text and the audience of a white lesbian feminist press. All evidence suggests that Anzaldúa and Moraga had a good relationship with their publishers. As Anzaldúa clarifies in her interview with Linda Smuckler, “Persephone did much better by the book than any of those [mainstream] publishers” because it sold 18,000 copies of the anthology and gave the editors a fair share of the royalties (Interviews/Entrevistas 62). Persephone Press distinguished itself in the industry by operating under feminist ideals, and in its eight years of operation the company “published important works that have been frontrunners of lesbian feminist thought” (Lefevour 17). This group of white women inhabited the bridge position by connecting the anthology to an audience.

The most important difference between the first and second edition is the change in publishers, which I will now detail. When Persephone Press went out of business, Kitchen Table Press, a woman of color publishing collective run by Barbara
Smith, won the rights to the anthology. This press produced the second edition in 1983. It seems that the battle to publish the second edition may have been contentious, given this note that appears on the page opposite Moraga’s “Foreword to the Second Edition” in the 1983 version:

When Persephone Press, Inc., a white women’s press of Watertown, Massachusetts, and the original publishers of This Bridge, ceased operations in the Spring of 1983, this book had already gone out of print. After many months of negotiations, the co-editors were finally able to retrieve control of their book, whereupon Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press of New York agreed to re-publish it. The following, then, is the second edition of This Bridge Called My Back, conceived of and produced entirely by women of color (n.p.).

Though white women originally played an important role in getting the book to an audience, women of color were fully responsible for its recreation in another place. When the second edition was “conceived of and produced entirely by women of color,” specifically by the multiracial, multiethnic, multigenerational collective at Kitchen Table Press, the women who made this book enacted the coalitional future that the editors of This Bridge envisioned. In fact, Moraga was part of the Kitchen Table collective, so she was able to put her ideals into practice by publishing the book.

In her article “A Press of Our Own: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press,” Smith describes how the press’s ideals were in line with the solidarity politics of This Bridge: “[A]t our initial meeting we did decide to publish all women of color … most people of color have chosen to work in their separate groups when they do media or other projects. We were saying that as women, feminists, and lesbians of color we had
experiences and work to do in common, although we also had our differences” (11).

Given that This Bridge was one of the earliest book that Kitchen Table Press published, the collective who brought it into being may have benefited not only from reading it, but from producing the book together so other women of color could read it. This Bridge continued to be one of the best-selling works in Kitchen Table Press’s collection as the years went on (Smith 12).

There are other important changes in the conceptions of subject and audience in the second edition, which are evident in Moraga and Anzaldúa’s respective forewords. Each editor expresses sentiments that are indicative of the changes they would make to later anthologies, which I will address in the third and fourth chapters. Moraga’s Foreword, entitled “Refugees Of A World on Fire,” appears first. In this section, Moraga’s tone is more weary, reflecting on the hard work that has been accomplished since 1981 and how much work is still to be done: “I feel the need to speak to what I think of the book some three years later,” she writes (This Bridge, np). “I think that were Bridge to have been conceived of in 1983, as opposed to 1979, it would speak much more directly now to the relations between women and men of color, both gay and heterosexual” (np). Moraga does not think about whom the subject of the bridge metaphor might be today, but what the subject of the whole book might be. By proposing a project about the relationship between men and women of color of all sexualities, she envisions a slightly different audience as well.

Furthermore, Moraga thinks that an anthology written in 1983 might have taken a more transnational approach:

The second major difference a 1983 version of Bridge would provide is that if would be much more international in perspective. Although the
heart of *Bridge* remains the same, the impetus to forge links with women of color from every region grows more and more urgent as the number of recently-immigrated people of color in the U.S. grows in enormous proportions, as we begin to see ourselves all as refugees of a world on fire. (np)

Incorporating the voices of “recently-immigrated people of color” might have expanded the subjectivity of the bridge metaphor. If recent immigrants from different ethnic groups had been added to the list of contributors, it would have been more explicit that a wider variety of “women of color” could successfully theorize through the bridge metaphor. It might have made sense to incorporate new essays into the second edition of *This Bridge* if the editors truly wanted it to be a more inclusive project. This transnational approach would have also created a change in the intended audience of the book. Moraga does not specify how she would have made the work “more international,” such as if that would have involved translation for a foreign audience, or perhaps a print run in different countries. While those questions were not resolved in this edition, she would later undertake a transnational version of *This Bridge* with the Spanish edition, *Esta puente, mi espalda* (1988).

Finally, Moraga reconsiders the central metaphor of the text and reaffirms its usage as a “connecting [metaphor] rather than a severing” (Sorrel 4). She writes that it is difficult to build a coalitional feminist movement, and exhorts women of color to be flexible: “We must acknowledge that to change the world, we have to change ourselves – even sometimes our most cherished block-hard convictions … If the image of the bridge can bind us together, I think it does so most powerfully in the words of Donna Kate Rushin, when she insists: ‘stretch … or die’” (np). While Moraga specified in her Preface
to the 1981 edition that “a bridge gets walked over,” here she tells women of color to “stretch … or die.” She conveys that they should build bridges to each other, emphasizing one interpretation of the metaphor. Thus, not only does the metaphor of the bridge work in multiple ways to form a woman of color feminist movement, it is also a flexible metaphor that takes on new significance over time.

Anzaldúa also contributed a Foreword to the Second Edition, which was framed by an opening question: “¿Qué hacer de aquí y cómo? / What to do from here, and how?”^5 (np). From “here,” meaning 1983, Anzaldúa proposes a new rendering of the bridge, not as the backs of women of color, but as a physical connector: “No nos podemos quedar paradas con los brazos cruzados en medio del puente/ we can’t afford to stop in the middle of the bridge with arms crossed” (np). Here, she envisions the bridge as an actual entity that people can cross, and not as a person. This is an interesting interpretation because it does not appear in any of the essays in the anthology, showing how this metaphor can take on new meaning with every edition.

Anzaldúa also comments on the shifting subject and audience of *This Bridge:* “We have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we – white black straight queer female male – are connected and interdependent. We are each accountable for what is happening down the street, south of the border, or across the sea” (*This Bridge,* np). In this manner, Anzaldúa echoes Moraga’s call for a more transnational audience with her invocation “south of the border, or across the sea.” However, her conception of the subject of the new *This Bridge* is more expansive than Moraga’s, because she includes not only white people, but also men. Anzaldúa juxtaposes binaries in a list without commas to divide the groups,

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^5 These translations are included in Anzaldúa’s “Foreword to the Second Edition.”
showing her new emphasis on interconnectivity. It may appear that she wants to expand who can take part in the feminist project of *This Bridge*. However, the definition of “We” in “We have come to realize … we are connected and interdependent” is unclear. Later in the text, Anzaldúa addresses women directly: “Mujeres, a no dejar que el peligro del viaje y la inmensidad del territorio nos asuste … *(Women, let's not let the danger of the journey and the vastness of the territory scare us)*” (*This Bridge*, np). If Anzaldúa is still writing directly to women, then it seems that “we” might still mean “mujeres,” leaving white, black, straight, or queer men outside of the target subject and audience of *This Bridge*. However, Anzaldúa will ponder the question of whom “we” includes in her later anthologies, like *this bridge we call home* (2002).

Anzaldúa’s last point in the Foreword to the Second Edition is particularly poetic. Borrowing a phrase from the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, she writes, “Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar *(Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks)*” (*This Bridge*, np). She points out that continual change and motion is required to build coalitions. Here, the subject “Caminante/Voyager” is not gendered male or female. With this ending line, Anzaldúa suggests that all people can work together to build bridges. Perhaps it is the sound of these continual forward motions that keeps *This Bridge*’s call from dissipating. In the next chapter, I will highlight the response to *This Bridge* and subsequent theoretical interventions that led to its recreation in other spaces.
CHAPTER TWO: Called/Llamada
Critical Engagements with *This Bridge Called My Back*

In her 1982 review of *This Bridge* in *Conditions: Eight*, Jan Clausen predicted that the anthology would spark conversation for generations: “Women of color will be affirming, disputing, celebrating, and supplementing its [*This Bridge’s*] varied, sometimes contradictory perspectives for a long time to come” (128). This chapter outlines the affirmations, disputes, celebrations and supplements about *This Bridge* in order to describe the discourse immediately prior to its first reiterations. As Chapter One was mainly an analysis of the peritext, Chapter Two will focus on the epitext, or paratextual material related to the book that is not located within or on its covers (Genette 344). I will review the epitextual materials in chronological order, beginning with four reviews of the first edition to demonstrate how various publications analyzed the text. Then, I will comment on the text’s challenges to the anthology genre by drawing from Cynthia Franklin’s book “Writing Women’s Communities.” Lastly, I will situate it within debates on feminist discourse by putting *This Bridge* in conversation with essays by Barbara Christian, Teresa de Lauretis, and Norma Alarcón.

*This Bridge* was reviewed by various publications. An advertisement for the book in *Conditions: Eight* features blurbs from *Essence*, *The Village Voice*, and *Ms. Magazine*. These magazines had a wider readership than publications like *Conditions*, so one can infer that *This Bridge* appealed to a larger activist community. However, lesbian feminist periodicals were the main source of positive press for the anthology. Selections from *This Bridge* were reprinted in *Sinister Wisdom*, and it was reviewed in *Conditions* as well as *off our backs*. An essential part of book reviews is identifying a potential audience for the text, and feminist reviewers often addressed that question in their articles. For example, in her
1982 review for *off our backs*, Deborah Aslan Jamieson assesses the anthology’s purpose at the beginning of her article: “This book isn’t about, as Hattie would say, ‘slamming the white girls up against the wall.’ It is about facing and seeking the solutions to the numerous paradoxes and contradictions that riddle the fabric of our lives” (6). Jamieson personally engages with the text, referring to *This Bridge* contributor Hattie Gossett by her first name. This jovial tone is natural because this review was published in *off our backs*, a publication that would give its writers the freedom to express kinship with feminist projects. Jamieson shows how the text will help women of color seek solutions for themselves instead of telling them how “slam white girls up against the wall,” which conveys the power of the personal writings in *This Bridge*.

Also, feminist reviewers were more likely than academic reviewers to recognize the text’s theoretical innovations. In her review, Jamieson credits the anthology with two feminist interventions, or as she terms it, “explodes two major myths.” “The first,” she writes, “is the myth that feminism is purely a white middle class phenomenon that women of color must assume – put on like someone else’s clothes” (6). Here, Jamieson points out that women of color can mold the feminist movement to be true to them, instead of assimilating into a movement that does not comprehensively analyze their experiences. With the verb “explode,” Jamieson marks this innovation as a major disruption in feminist thought. She also addresses the book’s ability to incite coalition building: “The second myth thrashed is that each of us – Black, Latina, Native American, etc. – is alone in our struggles. The oppression, is the same oppression, although it can manifest itself differently in our lives” (6). In using the word “thrashed,” Jamieson continues to situate *This Bridge* as an active, forceful text. While Jamieson notices that the contributors utilize an intersectional analysis to express their personal experiences with
oppression, she could have been more nuanced instead of eliding the women of colors’ experiences by calling it “the same oppression.”

Jamieson ends her review with a closing comment to a different audience, addressing white feminists directly:

> White women can use this anthology to sensitize themselves to the issues of women of color – use it as mirror. These writings reflect how you oftentimes appear to us. But don’t make the mistake of thinking that by reading this book you can bypass the work it will take in your own personal and collective experiences, it doesn’t happen that way. You can no longer tell yourselves, each other, or us that you just can’t figure out why [women of color] won’t join your organizations or care about your agendas. (6)

Thus, Jamieson instructs white feminists to engage with the text in order to reflect on their prior actions, and to educate themselves about women of color. In writing that white women can “sensitize themselves,” Jamieson agrees that the anthology can act as a bridge for white women so that women of color do not have to bend over backwards to form connections. Considering that Anzaldúa and Moraga expressed in the Introduction that they hoped the book would serve “as a consciousness-raiser for white women,” (This Bridge, xxvi), Jamieson’s interpretation of the text’s multiple audiences is in line with the editors’.

Though Jan Clausen, a white member of the editing collective at the magazine Conditions, did not personally identify with the text as Jamieson did, she also identified its theoretical innovations. In her review for Conditions: Eight (1982) Clausen writes that the anthology “embodies an emerging Third World feminism capable of immeasurably
strengthening the theory and practice of ‘women’s liberation’” (128). Though Clausen compliments This Bridge in saying it can improve “the theory and practice of ‘women’s liberation,’” she designates This Bridge as a marginal text than can affect the central movement, instead of seeing women of color feminism as a movement unto itself. I also disagree with her conception that Third World feminism is “emerging.” She elaborates that the book’s theoretical innovation is in part due to its reliance on “theory in the flesh,” which I linked in the first chapter to a black feminist epistemology:

One of the things I like best about This Bridge is its concreteness. “Theory in the Flesh,” the subtitle of one section, would have made a fitting headline for the majority of pieces, both poetry and prose. At a time when many white feminist “theorists” seem to have been seduced by the heady possibilities of fuzzy, high-flown generalization, this work is, for the most part, patient with the evidence, with experiences and emotions which defy convenient or reassuring classification. (128)

In contrast to a prevailing standard of feminist theory, which she calls “fuzzy, high-flown generalization,” Clausen sees that the book is strengthened by its attention to lived experience in which the contributors elaborate the consciousness of inhabiting raced, classed, sexed, and gendered bodies. Not all reviewers would call these writings “theoretical.” Furthermore, Clausen praises the book for including “experiences and emotions which defy convenient or reassuring classification,” expressing an appreciation for multiplicity and shifting definitions. In contrast, other critics would not be comfortable with the liminality of This Bridge, and would seem to hope for an anthology whose subject, audience, and genre are clearly delineated.
In her review, Clausen seems to have taken Jamieson’s directive to “use [This Bridge] as a mirror,” and she reflects on her own feelings in reading the text. Clausen describes how she was afraid to read the book at first because she was anxious that it would be personally vindictive towards white feminists:

For, despite the fact that I’d looked forward to its appearance, I felt intimidated when a copy arrived at my house late last May … What was I afraid of? Anger, above all. “Here’s a whole anthology by radical women of color, and they’re going to be mad at me.” It’s still hard for me to confront some of that anger. However, having survived several readings of the section on “Racism in the Women’s Movement,” I can now better see that anger is something to be learned from – while recognizing that it is an astonishingly small part of what This Bridge has to communicate.

(133)

Clausen makes two questionable assumptions before she approaches This Bridge, firstly that a text authored by women of color would necessarily be retaliatory. She buys into tired tropes in expecting women of color to be angry, and fails to realize the legitimate sources of that rage. Audre Lorde, a contributor to This Bridge, describes how women must confront rage in her speech “The Uses of Anger: Women Respond to Racism”:

“My anger is a response to racist attitudes and to the actions and presumptions that arise out of those attitudes … My fear of anger taught me nothing. Your fear of that anger will teach you nothing, also” (124). While Clausen does not specify how she improved by realizing anger about racism is justified and at times constructive, at least she

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6 As Carly Simon might say, Clausen was unfortunately vain enough to think This Bridge was about her.
acknowledges that her fears were misplaced, modeling a process in which other white readers can approach the text.

However, parts of Clausen’s statement justify Toni Cade Bambara’s prediction that “It is the Afterward [of This Bridge] that will count,” as this fragment exposes possibilities for improvement in her feminist practices. Though Clausen probably meant the phrase “having survived several readings of the section on ‘Racism in the Women’s Movement’” as a sarcastic remark, it’s still disturbing to use the word “survived” to describe the act of reading. Perusing through an anthology is not perilous, but surviving racism is. As Ms. Lauryn Hill outlined in her 2014 song “Black Rage (Sketch),” “Black rage is founded on two-thirds a person/Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens/Black human packages tied up in strings/Black rage is founded on these kinds of things.” Clausen does not recognize the long history of slavery, brutality, displacement, silencing, and oppression that the women in This Bridge protest against in their writings. What if that anger was not “an astonishingly small part” of This Bridge, as Clausen says? Would white feminists then ignore the text of fear? While Clausen’s review is helpful in that she models a process of engaging with the text, her writing also demonstrates the need for further reflection on the part of white feminists at that time.

*Conditions: Eight* also assigned Paula Gunn Allen to read the text so that it would be reviewed by a white reader and a reader who identifies as a woman of color. It’s worth noting that these reviews were published in a transitional issue of *Conditions.* Further displaying their commitment to featuring perspectives of diverse women (which they established in *Conditions: Five* (1979) which was authored entirely by black women), the editors of *Conditions: Eight* note in the introduction that they expanded their editorial collective for *Conditions: Nine.* The group would now be composed of seven women, four...
of whom were women of color. *This Bridge* contributors Cheryl Clarke and Mirtha Quintanales were among the new editing collective (*Conditions: Eight*, np), and Cherrie Moraga was the magazine’s office manager. Though the shift to a more inclusive collective had been in motion since *Conditions: Seven* (1981), it seems that some of coalitional practices that the editors of *This Bridge* envisioned were taking place in the sphere of this particular magazine.

Unlike Jamieson and Clausen, Gunn Allen personally engages with the bridge metaphor in her review. She demonstrates the flexible nature of this metaphor:

“Certainly I … can attest to the terrible pain of being a bridge. But I can also attest to the strength and clarity of commitment and vision that such a heritage engenders” (127). It is important that Gunn Allen identifies with the experience of being a bridge because she tells the readers that her heritage is Native American and Lebanese. In fact, “such a heritage engenders” that subjectivity. Though *This Bridge* lacks perspectives of Middle Eastern women, which I have established is an oversight, Gunn Allen identifies with the central experience of the book even though her specific ethnic perspective is not reflected in the work. It appears that whomever engages with the experience of being a cultural bridge may identify with the text.

Gunn Allen identifies the book’s innovation in advancing a politics of self-definition. She writes that the text will be most instructive for “us and our sisters,” and it appears that she means “women of color,” whatever that may signify:

My wish for all of us – the women whose work appears in this volume and our sisters all over the country and for myself – is that we will take strength and courage from that vision of multitudinous complexity that *This Bridge* provides, that we will produce more books like this one, that
we will insist on our rightful place in the leadership of the women’s
movement … while never losing sight of our own fundamental right to
define and determine the significance of our own work and lives. (127)

With the phrase “that we will insist on our rightful place in the leadership of the feminist
movement,” it becomes clear that Gunn Allen’s hopes are addressed to women of color.
She identifies them as the most important audience of This Bridge, and echoes her call for
the theoretical importance of self-definition. Gunn Allen praises This Bridge for its
“multitudinous complexity,” identifying the need for varied genres, discourses and
voices. However, in her criticism of “El Mundo Zurdo,” the last section of the book,
Gunn Allen importantly problematizes the term “women of color,” and advocates for
further work: “This section of the book is the weakest; but that is because radical women
of color are not yet a cohesive group accustomed to defining for ourselves who we are
… until recently we have, perforce, been defined, and that definition has been
debilitating in the extreme” (123). Gunn Allen is gentle in her criticism, and this
statement is less condescending than if a white woman had issued it. In fact, it reaffirms
the importance of This Bridge because she identifies self-definition as a radical theoretical
act. When women of color elaborate their experiences in their own terms, they push
back against assumed knowledge and introduce new epistemologies of lived experience.
By re-centering themselves from objects to subjects, the contributors of This Bridge
change feminism’s theoretical landscape.

When This Bridge was reviewed in academic journals, it was not always received as
favorably as it was in feminist publications. There were very few reviews in academic
publications, and I interpret this silence to mean this audience initially did not believe the
text was important. This lack of recognition is curious because the editors of This Bridge
had hoped that the text would be used in academic settings, as I discussed in the first chapter. I’ll detail two reviews of the first edition in which the critics assess the text as insufficiently theoretical. Instead of recognizing the long feminist history behind the text, its challenge to the genre of anthology, or its innovative feminist theory, critics questioned the book’s contribution to feminist thought.

Jennifer Pierce of the University of California, Berkeley, reviewed *This Bridge* in 1982 for the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*. She describes the anthology as a conceptually underdeveloped work in progress: “Much like the *early stages* of the white feminist movement, the writers in *This Bridge* see documentation of their oppression as women of color as a necessary step to its analysis” (my emphasis, 179). She makes the patronizing claim that women of color feminism is “behind” white feminism, and was only as intellectually sophisticated as the “early stages” of the second wave movement. However, this comment elides the long history of U.S. women of color feminism, which I outlined in the first chapter. Pierce does not recognize this genealogy, nor does she acknowledge how the book relies upon alternative feminist epistemologies. On the contrary, with the phrase “documentation … as a necessary step to this analysis,” she thereby implies that the analysis of oppression will happen after people read the book, but that the analysis is not contained within the book itself. She does not consider how what she calls “documentation” might itself be a theoretical intervention, given that the writers in *This Bridge* challenge prevailing notions of “womanhood” by intersectionally documenting their lives.

Similarly, in her 1983 review for the journal *Callaloo*, literary critic Frances Smith Foster also characterizes *This Bridge* as a work in progress. She does not believe that it is a strong contribution to the genre of feminist anthologies. In describing the structure of
the book, she writes: “The anthology assumes its unity from the careful editing of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa and from the contributors’ shared, but tenuous, self-definition as ‘radical women of color’” (132). Foster questions the text’s cohesion, writing that it is held together only through careful editing and by a common identification that she deems “tenuous.” She does not think the various parts of the anthology coalesce. Moreover, instead of recognizing the important coalitional implications of the term “radical women of color,” Foster seems to expect an anthology in which the contributors have more in common. She is similarly uncertain about the genre of This Bridge: “Neither a theoretical dissertation nor an artistic coup, it is an unfinished, a fragmented, and often, a contradictory work” (132). She views the range of genres, voices and discourses within the texts as “contradictory.” Also, she believes that the text is “unfinished and fragmented” because the paratextual materials expose the manner in which it was constructed. By her standards, editors of anthologies should not reveal their compilation process, and should select contributors who write in similar tones and genres.

To offer a different perspective, other critics have written that that This Bridge’s multiple discourses and attention to production was an innovation within the genre of feminist anthology at that time. I do not wish to criticize Foster for not being ahead of her time, but she could have appreciated the book’s uniqueness as a challenge to a canonical format, instead of writing about how the anthology failed to satisfy the genre’s parameters. In her book Writing Women’s Communities, a survey of feminist anthologies from 1980 to 1990, Cynthia Franklin outlines This Bridge’s multiple challenges to the anthology format. Firstly, she identifies the innovation inherent in an anthology whose works are in various genres:
Contributors often use the anthologies’ multi-genre form – from journal and diary entries, letters, notes, and transcribed conversations to fiction, essays, and poetry – not only to express and unify across their differences, but also to embody an implicit critique of, and alternative to, academic feminist writing. They present themselves as non-elitist, and the editors work together to empower women without educational and economic privilege to think of themselves as writers. (12).

Franklin reviews the positive aspects of multi-genre anthologies, instead of describing these works as “unfinished and fragmented” (Foster 132). On the contrary, Franklin writes that expression in alternative genres allows contributors to freely describe their intersectional experiences, and then build coalitions. Also, these writers make feminist theory accessible for people who write and read in all genres, instead of those who are educated in styles of academic writing. They challenge the standard of anthological entries, and put their poetry, creative nonfiction, letters, interviews, and diary entries on the same level as critical essays.

Franklin also identifies the benefits of exposing an anthology’s method of production. She writes that some editors of traditional literary anthologies, such as the Norton Anthologies, the Heath Anthologies, and the Heritage Anthologies, mark their works as complete (6-7). These editors express to the readers that the entries in the anthology are chosen due to their objective merit as canonical sources, instead of detailing the process of canonicity that inherently involves the exclusion of writers of color as well as female writers. Women of color anthologies, according to Franklin, often present themselves differently: “[R]ather than proclaim their self-sufficiency and completeness, as canonical anthologies do, these anthologies mark their incompleteness,
and they call attention to and detail the process of their making” (9). The first edition of *This Bridge* clearly details its production through its prefatory materials that I previously reviewed, where Moraga and Anzaldúa describe how they solicited sources, generated the title, and unified the works into chapters. Franklin writes that in laying bare the process of compilation, editors of women of color feminist anthologies “exert pressure and arguably have a transformative effect on canonical anthologies by working to redefine literature [and] by challenging and exposing its ideological underpinnings” (8).

By emphasizing that this text was constructed, Moraga and Anzaldúa allow for the possibility that some works could have been excluded, framing their work as the beginning of a discourse. In contrast, canonical anthologies present themselves as complete because their sources have been chosen by those with authority to determine the merit of various texts within a genre, claiming to encapsulate the discourse itself.

Of course, Foster does not yet recognize this challenge. Even though she could not have predicted in 1983 how *This Bridge* would affect the genre of feminist anthologies, as Franklin does in her 1990 book, Foster could have adjusted her standards that privileged completeness. Later in her career, Foster edited the landmark anthology *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* with Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, which privileges alternative genres, writers of color, and black epistemologies, so this review might be indicative of her views in her early career that later shifted.

Another important point of criticism within her review is her characterization of the book as atheoretical. To end her review, Foster summarizes: “*This Bridge Called My Back* is not a literary gem, an intellectual challenge or even a clear communication from voices previously unheard” (134). From a professor of English, the phrase “not a literary gem” is particularly biting. Also, with the characterization “not an intellectual challenge,”
Foster does not place the anthology in the genre of feminist theory. She fails to see the theoretical value of the bridge metaphor, or of the documentation of one’s lived experience as a woman of color. As a literary critic and as a black woman, surely she would have been aware of the dearth of writing by women of color at that time. Instead of adjusting the framework of what “theory” might be and how alternative epistemologies might give rise to theoretical concepts, Foster questions its use in the classroom. It might seem, therefore, that the first edition *This Bridge* failed to appeal to one of its main audiences in its first and second publications. While the text was warmly received by lesbian feminist publications, academic journals did not review the work as favorably.

Foster’s stance is indicative of a larger trend in literary analysis and feminist thought at the time, which failed on the whole to accommodate the work of people of color. As Collins establishes in *Black Feminist Thought*, the black feminist epistemology utilized in *This Bridge*, as well as in its contemporary women of color feminist anthologies, draws on different principles of knowledge than Eurocentric theory. Moreover, the works in *This Bridge* are often expressed in different genres and registers than theory at the time. I consider these standards of literary and feminist thought, which I will outline below using Barbara Christian’s essay “The Race for Theory,” to be a part of the epitext of *This Bridge*. Moraga and Anzaldúa would respond to criticism about the book’s theoretical nature in later anthologies, so I will now situate *This Bridge* within a larger critical movement by scholars of color against hegemonic standards of theory.

In the 1970s and 1980s, as New Philosophy and New Criticism assumed greater prominence in academic circles, scholars of color sounded the alarm about the problematic elements of these theoretical paradigms. Christian’s dissent is one of the
most famous. She was a champion of black women’s literature and helped to found the African-American Studies Department at the University of California, Berkeley. In “The Race for Theory,” originally published in the 1987 edition of Cultural Critique, Christian cunningly defined academic production as “the race for theory,” and described prevailing standards of academic writing as follows:

The race for theory – with its linguistic jargon, its emphasis on quoting its prophets, its tendency towards ‘Biblical’ exegenesis, its refusal to even mention specific works of creative writers, far less contemporary ones, its preoccupations with mechanical analyses of language, graphs, and algebraic equations, its gross generalization about culture – has silenced many of us. (336)

Christian argues against a monolithic literary theory that positions itself as universal, drawing on Western canonical sources (“quoting its prophets”) that do not analyze race, class or gender as central factors to the human experience. Moreover, she writes that theory is often expressed in specialist jargon, therefore excluding many readers and writers. Christian believes that these standards “have silenced many of us,” particularly referring to readers and writers of color who ground their work in lived experience, avoid dense and unnatural language, and who do not wish to speak in abstract terms. Because of the standards that she names, Christian writes that white critics tend to dismiss work by people of color as “descriptive” instead of “theoretical,” preferring not to interrogate their epistemological principles.

In fact, Christian flips the discourse and suggests that perhaps the white hegemonic critics need to examine their writing style instead of criticizing the work of people of color: “I am appalled by the sheer ugliness of the language, its lack of clarity,
its unnecessarily complicated sentence structures … It is the kind of writing for which composition teachers would give a first-year student a resounding ‘F’” (339). In this humorous sentence, Christian claims that it is not that writers of color write “too simplistically” or “too creatively;” it is quite the opposite. She criticizes all of the facets of the predominant paradigm, including its sources, way of knowing, and style for excluding the work of people of color.

In fact, Christian writes that white French feminist theorists have thrown their hats into “the race for theory,” emulating the problematic style that she outlined above. When these women theorize about creating language through the body, which would seem to be at odds with a masculinist linguistic paradigm, Christian points out that these theories are still as exclusive as the tradition that these feminist writers claim to oppose:

In the race for theory, feminists, eager to enter the halls of power, have attempted their own prescriptions … [S]eldom do feminist theorists take into account the complexity of life – that women are of many races and ethnic backgrounds with different histories and cultures and that as a rule women belong to different classes that have different concerns. Seldom do they note these distinctions, because if they did they could not articulate a theory. (342)

Here, Christian identifies a European feminist paradigm (without naming specific authors) that claims to be grounded “in the body,” but is actually divorced from the realities of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. Writing about the body without writing about the flesh ignores what Hortense Spillers called “the concentration of ‘ethnicity,’” the place where racialized discourses converge. Naming intersectional difference was not an integral part of feminist analysis at the time, nor was writing in a
vernacular. It is no wonder, then, that critics like Pierce and Foster dismiss *This Bridge* as atheoretical because its overarching model of knowledge production through a raced, classed, and gendered body, as well as its vernacular diction, was completely at odds with the dominant model of feminist theory.

Christian’s essay is important because she suggests alternative models of theoretical production and criticism: “I think we need to read the works of our writers in our various ways and remain open to the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender in the literature. And it would help if we share our process” (337). Christian argues that texts like *This Bridge* that attempt to understand the mechanisms of interlocking experiential factors should be seen as performing theoretical work. Moreover, she thinks it is beneficial when texts are made collaboratively, and when the processes of textual production are exposed. Unlike Foster, who called *This Bridge* “unfinished and fragmented,” Christian calls for a model of criticism that appreciates heterogeneous texts and an attention to production.

Despite the academy’s originally tepid reception to *This Bridge* as well as the prevailing theoretical paradigms, some academic feminists began to engage with the text at the time when Christian was writing. To close this chapter, I will outline Teresa de Lauretis’ and Norma Alarcón’s critical engagements with *This Bridge*, which make up an important part of the epitext of the first and second editions. De Lauretis’ usage of the text is notable because she was one of the only white academic feminists to acknowledge the anthology in her work. She cited the publication of *This Bridge* as a watershed moment in feminist history in her book *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction*. By mentioning *This Bridge* in the first chapter, it seems as if de Lauretis is incorporating Christian’s alternative approach to creating theory by relying on the work
of contemporary women of color writers. In suggesting a new theory of gender while
drawing upon *This Bridge* as a source that importantly challenged conceptions of gender,
de Lauretis’ essay seems to “take into account the complexity of life” (Christian 342).
However, de Lauretis does not accurately represent the theoretical crux of *This Bridge*.
She certainly does not ignore women of color feminist thought, but she fails to
comprehensively incorporate it into her theory of gender production.

De Lauretis opens her essay with a critique of the prevailing notion of gender as
sexual difference. In saying that this dominant theory analyze the differences between
the sexes and not between actual women, de Lauretis writes “it tends to recontain or
recuperate the radical epistemological potential of feminist thought inside the walls of
the master’s house, to borrow Audre Lorde’s metaphor rather than Nietzsche’s ‘prison-
house of language’” (215). From the beginning, then, it seems that de Lauretis intends to
formulate a theory that will incorporate multiple registers of oppression, and that she will
prioritize the work of women of color, signaled by her preference for Lorde’s phrasing
over Nietzsche’s. Her intervention is to analyze the role of gender instead of sex by
conceiving of gender as “the product and process of a number of social technologies.”

However, in practice, de Lauretis shows that she fundamentally misunderstands
women of color feminist theory. While discussing the relevance of Althusser’s theory of
ideology to her conception of gender, she writes, “[G]ender is indeed a primary instance
of ideology, and obviously not only for women. Furthermore, that is so regardless of
whether particular individuals see themselves primarily defined (and oppressed) by
gender, as white cultural feminists do, or primarily defined (and oppressed) by race and
class relations, as women of color do” (220). In writing that women of color define
themselves as oppressed “primarily by race and class relations,” de Lauretis makes it
seem as if race and class are cultural apparati that do not affect white women, which is not true. Also, she portrays intersectionality as a ranking of oppressions, which is contradictory to the philosophy of *This Bridge*. In fact, in the Audre Lorde speech that de Lauretis cites in the prior quote, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” Lorde describes “the interdependence of mutual (non-dominant) differences” (*This Bridge*, 99, my emphasis). Thus, while de Lauretis cites women of color feminist work, in this passage of critique, she does not truly engage with its ideas.

To her credit, de Lauretis calls *This Bridge’s* publication a watershed moment in feminist history: “[T]he shift in feminist consciousness that has been taking place during this decade may be said to have begun (if a convenient date is needed) with 1981, the year of publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*, the collection of writings by radical women of color edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa” (221). Unlike other academic feminists, de Lauretis recognizes that *This Bridge* was an influential theoretical text. This is an improvement from the way the anthology was reviewed in 1982 and 1983, and shows how some academic feminists eventually examined the text in the later part of the 1980s.

The problems begin when de Lauretis tries to clarify the nature of *This Bridge*’s influence on feminist thought. After mentioning other women of color feminist anthologies that came after *This Bridge*, de Lauretis continues, “The shift in feminist consciousness that was initially prompted by works such as these is best characterized by the awareness and the effort to work through feminism’s complicity with ideology … and the ideology of gender in particular – that is to say, heterosexism” (221). Here, de Lauretis argues that *This Bridge’s* most important contribution to feminist thought was a critique of heterosexism. It is true that anthologies like *This Bridge* addressed the
problems of heterosexism, but its writers strove to incorporate a multifaceted critique of society. They pointed out that heterosexism went hand in hand with racism, classism, and other factors. Reducing This Bridge’s influence to a single analytical factor is a misinterpretation of the bridge metaphor and the entire theoretical crux of the anthology.

In making this argument, de Lauretis continues to centralize gender as the central analytical factor of feminist thought instead of incorporating an intersectional analysis. Thus, while it is wonderful that she includes This Bridge as a source in this essay, she fails to incorporate its ideas with nuance. Also, in describing the history of feminism in the United States, de Lauretis continues to mischaracterize This Bridge:

[W]hite and middle class women [were] the first to be forced to examine our relation to institutions, political practice, cultural apparati, and then to racism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism, classism, and so forth; for the consciousness of complicity with the gender ideologies of their particular cultures and subcultures is also emerging in the more recent writings of black women and Latinas, and of those lesbians, of whatever color, who identify themselves as feminists. (221)

De Lauretis continues to insist on gender as the only category of feminist analysis with her claim that women of color are coming to terms with “gender ideologies of their particular cultures.” Also, by calling this consciousness “emerging,” she suggests that black women and Latinas have just started to notice the workings of gender ideology in 1981. In this manner, like the academic reviewers before her, de Lauretis characterizes women of color feminism as fledgling and not fully developed, which is condescending. So, while de Lauretis makes it clear that she has read This Bridge, her work demonstrates
how some academic feminists in the late 1980s would engage with the work of women of color on a superficial level.

In response to writings from women like de Lauretis, Norma Alarcón suggests her own interpretation of how *This Bridge* can fundamentally change feminist thought in “The Theoretical Subject(s) of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism.” Nine years after the text’s initial publication, she revisits the central text and discusses how it has been used in feminist theory. Alarcón responds to writers like de Lauretis who have not adjusted their methods of analysis: “With gender as the central concept in feminist thinking, epistemology is flattened out in such a way that we lose sight of the complex and multiple ways in which the subject and object of possible experience are constituted” (361). She writes that *This Bridge's* most important innovation was the creation of a subject whose difference is fully expressed in all of its forms. The epistemology of *This Bridge* accounts for differences between women, which theories of gender do not. Thus, over the span of a decade, the anthology continued to be an important source to theorize on the subject of women of color feminism.

Alarcón engages with “The Bridge Poem” and demonstrates how the central metaphor of the poem and anthology helps develop a new theory of subjectivity:

[I]n this poem, the better ‘bridging self’ of the speaker is defeated by the overpowering notion of the unitary subject of knowledge and consciousness so prevalent in Anglo-American culture. Consciousness as a site of multiple voicings is the theoretical subject, par excellence, of *Bridge*. Concomitantly, these voicings (or thematic threads) are not viewed as necessarily originating with the subject, but as discourses that transverse consciousness and which the subject must struggle with constantly. (365)
By becoming “the better bridging self,” Alarcón writes that women of color do not see their consciousness as deriving from the unitary category of gender. Instead, when woman is portrayed as a bridge, self-knowledge cannot be so easily contained. Instead, by identifying what Alarcón calls “the multiple voicings” that make up the conception of the self, *This Bridge* imagines a pluralistic, intersectional mode of being. Importantly, by employing the phrase “discourses that transverse consciousness,” Alarcón imagines that the body is the place that these discussions converge. That point is made clearer later on in the essay, when she describes *This Bridge*’s subject as “an object of multiple indoctrinations that heretofore have collided upon her” (366). The point of collision is the body, so in this manner Alarcón insists on lived experience as a method of knowledge production. Thus, to borrow a phrase from Walt Whitman, *This Bridge*’s innovation was making the song of oneself polyphonic, consisting of multiple voices and discourses.

Interestingly, Alarcón points out that it is problematic that women of color feminism still assumes that it is possible to speak of one’s subjectivity: “It must be noted, however, that each woman of color cited here, even in her positing of a ‘plurality of self,’’ is already privileged enough to reach the moment of cognition of a situation for herself” (366). Even if the experience of consciousness proposed by women of color feminism is more comprehensive than the prior model of Anglo-American feminism, this model of knowledge production still relies on speech. In this manner, women of color feminism does not fully represent the subaltern, or what Alarcón calls “the native woman.” This turn at the end demonstrates the importance of her essay. Alarcón reconceptualizes the subject of *This Bridge* and identifies a point of improvement for later theoretical iterations. I close this chapter with Alarcón’s essay because her work proves
Jan Clausen’s point that opened this section: “women of color will be affirming, disputing, celebrating, and supplementing its [This Bridge’s] varied, sometimes contradictory perspectives for a long time to come” (128). The conversation would continue with the publication of Moraga’s Esta Puente, Mi Espalda, and Anzaldúa’s Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras (in which Alarcón’s essay first appeared), both of which I will analyze in depth in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: My Back/Mi Espalda
Variations on a Theme

Now that I have outlined the discourse about the first and second editions of *This Bridge*, I will discuss how each of the editors responded to this praise and criticism in their separate anthologies. This chapter reads Cherríe Moraga, Ana Castillo, and Norma Alarcón’s translated anthology, *Esta puente, mi espalda*, (1988) in conversation with Gloria Anzaldúa’s book *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (1990). In a similar manner to the first chapter, my analysis will concentrate on the paratexts of each anthology. Though I outlined almost all of the prefatory materials in my analysis of the 1981 version of *This Bridge*, for my comparison in this chapter, I will focus on new paratextual materials or elements that have changed from the original edition.

Genette would characterize the new introductions of *Puente*\(^7\), the first text that I will analyze, as “later paratext,” because they were added on to the new edition of a work (6). In contrast, the elements in *Haciendo Caras*\(^8\) are “original paratext” because they were created at the same time as the text. Though I have found Genette helpful in my earlier analyses, I must part ways with him in this chapter because his conception of the paratext is ultimately too limiting for this project. He writes that the paratext does not have any independent function: “[T]he paratext in all its forms is a discourse … dedicated to the service of something other than itself that constitutes its raison d’être. This something is the text” (12). In Genette’s framework, the paratexts speak only to the text that they surround. Yet, Genette does not provide a conception of how the

\(^7\) This is the abbreviation that Moraga, Alarcón, and Castillo choose in the anthology, so I will use it too.

\(^8\) I will use this abbreviation for *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*. 
paratexts relate to one another, nor does he consider that the paratext might be important in its own right.

In the later iterations of *This Bridge*, the paratextual elements are in discussion with their counterparts of the original text. Moreover, the paratext of *This Bridge* are often more cited than the text itself, and due to their lasting importance they are worth analyzing in their right. Often, they illuminate a project that is greater than the text itself. For example, Moraga’s introduction in *Puente* functions to include foreign women into the project of American women of color feminism, and not only into the audience of *This Bridge*. Similarly, Anzaldúa’s preface to *Haciendo Caras* conveys her opinions about the limitations of *This Bridge*, and the ways in which *Haciendo Caras* can respond to the debates on the nature of theory that I described in Chapter Two. By mentioning *This Bridge* in her introduction, Anzaldúa is also implicitly speaking to Moraga and to all of the people who had stakes in the project of *This Bridge*. As I move forward with my analysis, I expand Genette’s conception of paratexts in order to track these contributions and conversations in the new anthologies.

As I see it, my interventions in this chapter are twofold. First of all, I bring the rarely cited *Puente* into the discourse about *This Bridge* and its related anthologies. Though critics often mention the existence of this text, it is infrequently analyzed in English-language essays about *This Bridge*. Secondly, in order to expand Genette’s ideas about the function of the paratext, in particular the utility of the later paratext, I synthesize Genette’s ideas with the work of black cultural theorist James A. Snead. I borrow from Snead’s essay “Repetition as a Figure in Black Culture” to theorize about the repeating elements from the original anthology that appear in the later paratextual materials. I characterize the serial nature of *This Bridge*, exemplified by the repeating elements in the
paratext, as “variations on a theme.” I view the 1981 version of *This Bridge* as a living, speaking document in which the visual and physical metaphor of the bridge morphs into an echo that resounds into the present day. In this manner, there is recreation without dissipation.

Snead’s essay, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” has been invaluable in analyzing this written document through a sonic lens, as he draws upon various art forms, including music and literature, to identify underlying themes in black culture. By highlighting the repetitive elements in various Black art forms, Snead moves from the sonic to the literary in a manner that is helpful for my analysis. Snead posits black culture fully acknowledges cyclical elements: “Black culture highlights the observance of such repetition, often in homage to an original generative instance or act … Repetition in black culture finds its most characteristic shape in performance: rhythm in music, dance and language” (68-70). Snead discusses slave ceremonies that emphasized cycles, such as “Ring Shouts” or “Circle Dances,” repeated phrases in black church sermons, and the role of reiteration in African music. These repeating elements do not need to be analyzed as growth or decline; rather, repetition is allowed to occur for its own sake.

Snead further explains the role of repetition in black music:

> Repetitive words and rhythms have long been recognized as a focal constituent of African music and its American descendants – slave-songs, blues, spirituals and jazz … The fact that repetition in some senses is the principle of organization shows the desire to rely upon “the thing that is there to pick up.” Progress in the sense of “avoidance of repetition” is impossible. (70)
Snead describes how blues and jazz performers rely on repeating components to structure their art form. These musical genres acknowledge their African and African-American origins by incorporating the emphasis on cyclicality present in those traditions. Moreover, performers in these genres are able to perform elaborate riffs and improvisations due to the repeating beat. Here, repetition is an essential component of the art form. Snead writes that black literature has adapted the cyclical elements of black music, writing that it has “learned from these ‘musical’ prototypes in the sense that repetition of words and phrases, rather than being overlooked, is exploited as a structural and rhythmic principle” (72). Thus, he finds repeating sonic elements in written language and describes a shared generic commitment to reiteration.

I believe that Snead’s ideas of repetition in black culture are evident in *This Bridge* and its related anthologies. One can read the iterations of *This Bridge* as homages and variations on the 1981 anthology. They acknowledge the influence of the original source material in their titles and later prefaces. The editors are able to improvise and create new renditions of the woman of color feminist paradigm through their reliance on the original text. Also, at times the paratextual elements in these anthologies reference the history of women of color feminism, linking their texts to ideas that have repeated through time. Similarly, the variations on *This Bridge* are grouped by the repeating visual bridge/back motif that morphs several times within each iteration. Though some of the editors, like Anzaldúa in *Haciendo Caras*, may have characterized their works as an improvement upon the original anthology, I believe that *This Bridge’s* iterations resist a linear reading and are better read as variations.
The most effective way to characterize this reiterating group of anthologies, in my opinion, is the term “variations on a theme.” I have chosen the term due to its sonic connotations, which is useful for my project. In characterizing This Bridge’s contributions as a call, I continue to emphasize its polyphonic nature, as different authors contribute to the paratext and define the projects from their unique intersectional perspectives. Moreover, I track how the editions speak to one another and riff off the original themes established in the first edition. “Variations on a theme” is often used in classical music to describe a series of alterations to a recurring melody. A variation does not imply a progression or an improvement upon the original melody, although a variation is often more intricate than its source. Rather, a variation signifies an adaptation or recreation that nonetheless acknowledges its origin. I track the variations of the paratexts in each anthology to analyze how those changes reflect the editors’ relation to a shifting feminist paradigm.

Also, I found it interesting to reconcile the repetitive nature of the anthologies with Snead’s analysis of “the cut.” Snead defines this facet of jazz music as “an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break (an accidental da capo) with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior series” (69). This is the moment when the performer ends one melodic sequence and returns another that was previously heard. Snead writes that “the cut” has two functions. The first is to break the sequence of the music, thus resisting a sense of linearity. The cut may be unexpected and disrupts the listener’s experience. In this rupture, the listener is reminded of the original melody, which according to Snead is the second function of the cut: “The ‘cut’ overtly insists on the repetitive nature of the

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9 This term has previously been used to synthesize Latino and Black literature. For example, in his poem “Variations on a Theme by José Montoya,” the queer Chicano poet Eduardo Corral references Robert Hayden’s poem “Theme and Variation.”
music, by abruptly skipping back to another beginning that we have already heard” (71). Though the cut is a disruptive element, it helps to reinforce the cyclical nature of black music forms.

Though Moraga and Anzaldúa pursued other projects in mid eighties after the first edition of This Bridge was published, in the late eighties and early nineties they cut back to the project that put them on the map as women of color feminist theorists. In 1983, Moraga published her book of prose, poetry, and essays, Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios. Before publishing Esta puente, mi espalda in 1988, she worked with Kitchen Table Press to publish works by other women of color. Similarly, Anzaldúa’s career took off with the publication of her collection of life writings, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza in 1987. She then began work on Haciendo Caras in 1988 and published it by 1990. The years between This Bridge’s iterations disrupt a linear trajectory of the anthology. To borrow a phrase from Snead, This Bridge “was always there for them [in this case, Moraga and Anzaldúa] to pick it up when they came back to it” (69). However, just like a jazz musician relies on the repeating beat to cut back to a previously heard melody, a continuing pulse from the original text guided Moraga and Anzaldúa in their improvisatory projects. The editors needed to respond to contemporary concerns in women of color feminist discussion, and they riffed upon the original metaphor to help them think through changes in subject and audience.

The first iteration of This Bridge that I will discuss is the Spanish edition, Esta puente, mi espalda. Though I limit my analysis here to the most pertinent paratextual materials to my argument, I discuss them in the order the reader would encounter them
as I did in the first chapter. In 1986, Moraga began to work on a Spanish translation of *This Bridge*. Ana Castillo, a Chicana poet, and Norma Alarcón, whose work I discussed in Chapter Two, served as translators. The anthology was published in 1988 by *ism press* in San Francisco. Out of all of the iterations, *Puente* is the most similar to *This Bridge* in the material sense, although there are important differences. The editors utilize the paratext not to create a carbon copy of *This Bridge* in Spanish but to help the reader imagine a transnational women of color feminist paradigm.

For example, the cover image drawn by Castillo is an improvisation that hearkens back to the original picture, but offers a different affect. Like the cover of *This Bridge*, the cover of *Puente* also features a gold line drawing of a woman but this image is on a forest green background. Because the two cover images are similar, the drawing on the cover of *Puente* is in service not just to the text beneath it, but also to the original anthology as it suggests a new interpretation of what it means to be a bridge. On the whole, this cover suggests a more hopeful interpretation of the bridge metaphor. In my interpretation, the dark green cover evokes a calming, peaceful aesthetic as opposed to the blood-colored background of *This Bridge*. Moreover, the woman on this cover raises her head and stretches out her arms, whereas the woman on the cover of *This Bridge* is on her hands and knees with her head pointed downward. These two figures are strikingly different. It seems as if the woman on the cover of *Puente* has decided, in Kate Rushin’s words, to be “the bridge to [her] own true power” (*This Bridge*, 1983, xxii).

On the back, there is another figure of a woman drawn in green on a yellow background, with her head upwards and her right arm extended. She is the mirror image of the woman on the front cover as if they create a bridge to each other. Thus, the

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10 You could say I’m cutting back to my work in the first chapter. I hope this maneuver does not grievously disrupt your linear reading of this text.
women on the front cover signal a different affective quality to the bridge subjectivity. They seem less like people who have been forced down by white feminists, as their sister in red suggests, and more like women who have decided to “lay their bodies down at the river” to make connections with one another (Moraga, *This Bridge*, xix). If one views the spine of the text as a border, the women on the cover reach across the distance to connect with one another.

The title of the work in Spanish also cuts back to the original paratext. In order to make sense of the phrase “Esta puente, mi espalda,” I must jump forward to the explanation in the translators’ note offered by Alarcón and Castillo:

> [Q]ueremos señalar que al sumarnos al espíritu radical feminista de las escritoras de *Puente*, recuperamos la acepción femenina de puente – Esta puente, mi espalda” [We want to signal that in order to join the radical feminist spirit of the writers of *This Bridge*, we recover the feminine meaning of bridge – This [feminine] bridge, my [feminine] back]11. (19i)

Like in other Romance Languages, nouns in Spanish are gendered and the corresponding articles reflect their gender. *El* is the male article; *la* is the female article. The word “puente” [bridge] in Spanish is actually gendered male, so the pronoun should be “el puente.” Instead, the translators write that they want to “recover,” not change, the gender of the noun *puente*. In choosing this verb, Castillo and Alarcón imply that the word “bridge” was once gendered female in the Spanish language. Perhaps they are cutting back not only to the original title, but also to a forgotten period in Spanish linguistic history. However, I was unable to verify that claim in my research, so it is likely that they mean to recuperate the word *puente* from its currently male gendered state.

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11 All translations of the text from *Puente* are my own. I will place them in brackets next to the Spanish text.
Regardless, the editors take a radical step that all Spanish speakers would notice in order to signal that the subjects of Puente are gendered female, without exception.

Though that change to the title is in service of the Puente text, a different edit is in conversation with the paratext of This Bridge. The word “called” has been deleted from the title. It may be that the translators changed the title to fit Spanish linguistic conventions. However, with only a comma separating the two phrases, there is more of an analogical association between “this bridge” and “my back.” This linguistic play strengthens the idea that the backs in this anthology are content to be bridges, and voluntarily assume a position as a connector between two disparate worlds. By removing a word from the original title, this paratextual element is in conversation with the paratext of This Bridge, and suggests a different affective reading of the bridge metaphor than the original title offers.

Next, the reader encounters the table of contents, which is the paratextual element that is most in service of the Puente text. The editors combine the six sections of This Bridge into three, preserving many but not all of the pieces by Latina, Black, Asian American, and Native American writers. Additionally, they included seven original works originally written in Spanish by six new Latina contributors. Puente is a smaller work than This Bridge, featuring 36 works by 30 contributors, while its predecessor includes 46 works by 29 contributors. Moreover, there are more Latina writers in this work than in This Bridge. However, not all of the women who experience Latinidad are well represented in this work. Of the sixteen Latina contributors in this book, twelve are Chicana or Mexicana, and only four women are not. Though Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Central American women are all represented in the “other” category, South American

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12 I read it as a “potato, poh-ta-to” rendering, as if the speaker says “this bridge, my back, what’s the difference?”
women are not represented at all in this anthology. Moreover, it seems that Afro-Caribbean women and Afro-Latinas are also not included. If these contributors are reaching out to their families and to kindred spirits in Latin America, then it seems that the puente is only reaching certain countries. Not all Latinas were given the chance to inhabit the puente subjectivity.

Even if the subjects of the book are put under certain constraints, it is inarguable that the editors published Puente to transmit This Bridge’s message to an international audience. One can read Puente as a literal bridge to a Spanish-speaking audience. Just as Toni Cade Bambara animated the physical text of This Bridge in her 1981 Foreword, when she wrote, “This Bridge lays down the planks to cross on over to a new place” (This Bridge vi), the bridge metaphor has the potential to describe the physical text of Puente. Other paratextual materials of this anthology support my reading of Puente as an attempt to greatly expand the audience of This Bridge. For example, the editors included a glosario (glossary) with definitions of the key terms in the essays. The terms defined include “coming out of the closet,” “Chicana,” “civil rights,” “gay,” “internalization of oppression,” and “the woman-identified woman” (13i). By including a glossary, the editors hope that this text will be read by people who are not necessarily liberal activists, and who may be unfamiliar with words like “homophobia” and concepts such as “the personal is political.”

Moreover, the appearance of the glosario in Puente highlights the lack of that paratextual element in This Bridge, which shows that perhaps This Bridge is not as accessible to a non-academic, non-activist, non-feminist audience as it claimed to be. In addition, some of the historical arguments made in the glosario of Puente would have been pertinent for This Bridge’s intended activist audience. For example, when the editors
define “the Civil Rights Movement,” they note, “También este movimiento inspiró el surgimiento del movimiento feminista y del tercermundista” [Also, this movement inspired the growth of the feminist movement and the third world movement] (13).

Given that This Bridge is often read as a response to white feminist aggression, eliding the long history of women of color feminism behind the text, readers of This Bridge would have benefited if they had been reminded of the origins of the women of color feminist movement. While Puente readers certainly need this information, I think it would have been beneficial to give this same history lesson to the readers of This Bridge.

The translators’ notes express their intent in creating the Spanish edition that is signaled by the glossary. In the section called “Apuntes de las traductoras” [Notes from the Translators] Castillo and Alarcón express, “Esta puente, mi espalda … es un intento de abrir camino e iniciar lazos entre nosotras, las mujeres de color estadounidenses y las mujeres de hispanoamérica” [This bridge, my back … is an attempt to open a pathway and make ties between ourselves, the women of color in the United States and the women of Latin America] (18). With the phrases “abrir camino e iniciar lazos,” Castillo and Alarcón signal that the bridge metaphor here functions to theorize a connection between two disparate audiences. In this manner, the editors have acted to fulfill the dream expressed by Moraga and Anzaldúa in their joint introduction to This Bridge. “Finally tenemos la esperanza que This Bridge Called My Back will find its way back into our families’ lives” (xxvi). As it lacks the mediating English text, Puente is a way for the Latina contributors to This Bridge to revisit one of the original goals of the anthology of directly reaching their Spanish-speaking family. Though fighting homophobia, colorism, classism, and sexism in their home communities was one of the themes expressed in the
paratext of *This Bridge*, the paratext in *Puente* varies on that theme and makes it the focal point of its analysis.

Clearly, the paratext in *Puente* is conversation with the paratext of *This Bridge*, which demonstrates the intertextual nature of the paratext as a genre. While the translators reference Moraga and Anzaldúa’s joint introduction to the 1981 edition in their note, Moraga borrows from her 1981 independent preface in her introduction to *Puente*. Moraga borrows from her closing paragraph of the 1981 preface to give her introduction its title: “*Introducción: En el sueño, siempre me recibe en el río*” [Introduction: In my dream, I am always met at the river].” The title derives from this passage in the 1981 preface: “Literally, for two years now, I have dreamed of a bridge … For the women in this book, I will lay my body down for that vision. *This Bridge Called My Back*. In the dream, someone always meets me at the river” (*This Bridge*, xix). Here, Moraga invokes her dream and the imagined meeting place of the river. Although this image has Christian overtones, Moraga uses her dream to express a coaltional future and a commitment to be a bridge for other women. As such, she turns the title of the book into a rallying cry.

However, when she includes these lines in her Spanish introduction, the metaphor of the river explains a collectivist interpretation of the bridge, instead of a highly personal invocation. She ends the “*Introducción*” as follows:

> Cuando nos extendemos como puente entre las diferencias nuestras, esta expresión mantiene la promesa de aliviar las heridas causadas por los siglos de nuestra separación. *Esta puente, mi espalda. En el sueño, siempre me recibe en el río.* [When we extend ourselves as a bridge between our differences, this expression maintains the promise of healing the wounds]
caused by the centuries of our separation. *This bridge, my back. In the dream, someone always meets me at the river*. (6)

The subject has changed during the Spanish translation: while Moraga earlier vowed that “I will lay my body down,” in this version she urges “nos” [us] to bend over as bridges. Moraga is thinking about how all women can be bridges, so it seems that she is not emphasizing the role that the bridge metaphor can play in articulating the intersectional self. Instead, she advocates for an interpretation of the bridge that can cross over differences, which here is figured as a wound instead of a river. Given that Moraga specifies earlier in the preface that she borrows the concept of a border as a wound from Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (6), it’s clear that her introduction is in conversation with works outside of *This Bridge*, and does not simply serve the text. Thus, the details in Moraga’s Spanish introduction highlight the heterogeneous nature of the paratext and the importance of implementing a methodology that characterizes these elements as “variations on a theme.”

Like Moraga and Anzaldúa, *Puente* and *Haciendo Caras* are contemporaries, though *Haciendo Caras* is more frequently reviewed and cited, and contains more work by well-known writers. After writing *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* in 1987, Anzaldúa cut back to a discussion of the woman of color feminist paradigm for her next project. In 1988, Anzaldúa was a doctoral student at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and she struggled to find contemporary material for her women of color feminist classes. Though Anzaldúa could have used *This Bridge* in her syllabus, she told AnaLouise Keating in a 1991 interview that she thought its original theme had been overplayed: “I couldn’t rely on teaching *This Bridge* again because people had been teaching it and people had been taking it in class. One person told me that she’d had it in four of her
undergrad and grad classes” (Interviews/Entrevistas, 153). Thus, Anzaldúa started to put together the manuscript for Haciendo Caras as a reader for her classes. It is inarguable that this anthology was born because This Bridge was so widely read; Anzaldúa recognized the need to continue the conversation about women of color feminist theory.

The title of the book, Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras, relies upon the prior title of This Bridge Called My Back, though they seem unrelated at first glance. Anzaldúa’s explanation of the title metaphor helps to clarify its meaning:

Among Chicanas/méxicanas, haciendo caras, “making faces,” means to put on a face, express feelings by distorting the face … For me, haciendo caras has the added connotation of making gestos subversivos, political subversive gestures, the piercing look that says … ‘Don’t walk all over me,’ the one that says ‘Get out of my face.’ ‘Face’ is the surface of the body that is most noticeably inscribed by social structures … We are “written” all over, or should I say, carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience. (xv)

In the same way that the head is the culmination of the spine, I argue that Anzaldúa’s “making face” metaphor stands on the shoulders of “this bridge called my back.” Like the bridge that doubles as a back, the metaphor of “haciendo caras” focuses on a part of the body where discourses converge and are evident to the rest of the world. There is a similar affective quality between “Don’t walk over me” and Kate Rushin’s line from “The Bridge Poem:” “I’m sick of being the bridge.” However, like the bridge metaphor, the phrase “haciendo caras” can convey multiple emotional states. Anzaldúa varies on the theme of the body as a site of knowledge by emphasizing the head. This metaphor is
different from the bridge because it is consonant with thought as opposed to physical labor, but they are inseparably intertwined.

Moreover, Anzaldúa envisions that her conceit will serve similar purposes to the bridge metaphor. She explains its role in the anthology later in the introduction: “Making faces’ is my metaphor for constructing one’s identity … We are also uncovering the inter-faces, the very spaces and places where our multiple-surfaced, colored, racially gendered bodies intersect and interconnect” (xvi). Thus, theorizing through “making faces” is a method for women of color to conceive of all of the parts that make up their identity. Here, Anzaldúa favors the term “multiple-surfaced” instead of “intersectional,” which is how I characterize the bridge metaphor. In writing how women will uncover the “inter-faces,” Anzaldúa loses some of the implications of “theory in the flesh.” By focusing on the face, elements such as class and sexuality may get lost when the role of the body is no longer addressed.

But, the body of *Haciendo Caras* is indebted to the corpus of its predecessor. Anzaldúa cut back to the genre of anthology in *Haciendo Caras* after moving into life writing with *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Clearly, *This Bridge* was not the first feminist anthology, nor the first woman of color feminist anthology, but it was one of the earliest coalitional texts. Though Anzaldúa pursued a single-author work that focused heavily on the Chicana experience in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she chose to return to the woman of color feminist anthology with *Haciendo Caras*. She could have created an anthology entirely by Latinas, but she riffed on the successful format of *This Bridge*. In her interview with AnaLouise Keating, Anzaldúa specifies that she created *Haciendo Caras* after she spotted a gap in the genre of woman of color feminist thought: “There wasn’t anything out there other than single anthologies of particular cultures – Native American, etc. etc”
(Interviews/Entrevistas 153). Thus, after a wave of successful women of color feminist anthologies in the early eighties, including This Bridge, All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies, and Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology, Anzaldúa returned to the anthology format again at the end of the decade. In doing so, she publishes a text that reveals its process of construction, unites diverse voices, and challenges the discourse of feminist thought.

Anzaldúa elaborates several points of departure in her introduction, “Haciendo caras, una entrada,” where she attempts to divorce the new anthology from This Bridge. Implicitly, she also is writing against the variations of the 1981 text and perhaps its most recent iteration, Puente. As I move into these points of contention, I emphasize that one does not have to denigrate the original theme in order to highlight the work done in a variation. Rather, the concept of “theme and variation” allows for the theme to serve as the baseline for improvisation in which the variation shines through on its own. As I close this chapter, I view my work as recuperative because I offer a different reading of Haciendo Caras that does not require an inaccurate critique of This Bridge, which Anzaldúa pursues. Also, I begin to track the divergences between Moraga and Anzaldúa’s work, which will become more evident in the next Chapter.

One of the first points of departure from This Bridge and implicitly from Puente in Haciendo Caras is its diction. The two latter variations are ripe for comparison due to their use of the Spanish language. Whereas Puente is written entirely in Spanish for a Spanish-speaking audience, Haciendo Caras is written not only for Latina/os but for Latino/as and their non-Latino allies. This is evident through the use of Spanish and English in the text. Anzaldúa had always incorporated Spanish and English into her writing, signaling a code switch through the use of slashes, italics, or translations in parentheses, and she
solidified this style in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Anzaldúa also writes in a hybrid/mestiza style in *Haciendo Caras*, as opposed to Moraga’s Spanish work that is primarily for Spanish speaking readers. In this comparison, it is evident that Moraga is concerned with expanding *This Bridge* for an international audience, and exploring the possibilities of transnational feminism, whereas Anzaldúa experiments within the linguistic and cultural borders of the United States. They each expand the audiences of *This Bridge*, but signal shifting interests that reflect their prior work, in Anzaldúa’s case, or in Moraga’s instance, her future work.

The most important discursive difference between *This Bridge, Puente*, and *Haciendo Caras* is its attempt to assimilate to a different theoretical register. In *Haciendo Caras*, the diction of many of the entries is quite different from the language in *This Bridge*, and Anzaldúa changes her conception of the text’s utility in the academy. As she writes in a section in the introduction entitled “*Comienzos/Origins*”: “For years I waited for someone to compile a book that would continue where *This Bridge Called My Back* left off. A book that would confront the Racism in the white women’s movement in a more thorough, personal, direct, empirical and theoretical way” (xvi). Thus, Anzaldúa frames *Haciendo Caras* as a variation of the themes established by *This Bridge*, a continuation of the foundational work. However, she assimilates the anthology into a progressive narrative by calling it “a more thorough, personal, direct, empirical and theoretical” response to racism. In this manner, she acknowledges the referential nature of the text, but has to justify her new project as an improvement upon the previous work.

Of course, now that Anzaldúa was pursuing her doctorate, she might have been less in opposition to “academie” discourse than she was when she edited *This Bridge*. She expresses her intention to create theory in the introduction: “It is *vital* that we occupy
theorizing space, that we not allow whitemen and women solely to occupy it … We need to ‘de-academize’ theory and to connect the community to the academy … We need to give up the notion that there is a correct way to write theory” (xxvi). First of all, her phrase “occupy theorizing space” is strangely colonialist as it evokes the seizure of land. Anzaldúa articulates a desire to break with the prevailing notions of theory, but in describing This Bridge as not “thorough, personal, direct, empirical, and theoretical,” she joins the chorus of voices who could not recognize its important theoretical work when it was first published. Furthermore, it’s confusing why Anzaldúa would want to produce work that was less personal and more empirical given that her previous work, Borderlands/La Frontera, is highly personal, not empirical, and richly theoretical because of its breaks with linguistic and analytical conventions.

Even though Barbara Christian’s “The Race for Theory” and Norma Alarcón’s “The Theoretical Subject(s) of This Bridge Called My Back and Anglo-American Feminism” were both republished in Haciendo Caras, I don’t think that Anzaldúa fully engages with their challenge to theoretical discourse. Cynthia Franklin problematizes Anzaldúa’s claims that Haciendo Caras is “more theoretical” in Writing Women’s Communities. In her analysis of the last section of the anthology, “‘Doing’ Theory in Other Modes of Consciousness,” she writes, “Despite the colloquialism of ‘Doing’ and the quotes that surround it, which perhaps undercut this ‘high enterprise’ … this intellectualized abstraction nevertheless marks Haciendo Caras’ departure from This Bridge and its ‘Theory in the Flesh’” (53). One of the main distinctions evident here is that This Bridge emphasized a model of “theory in the flesh,” which emphasized the role of the body in producing lived experience, whereas Haciendo Caras locates “Other Modes of Consciousness” as the site of theoretical production. If Anzaldúa privileges
“consciousness,” she returns to the same paradox that Norma Alarcón noted in her essay wherein the feminist assumes that women can speak their experience, and that identity formation can occur through language. I believe that the last section, which includes Alarcón’s essay, contains valuable work and is essential to the anthology. However, I think Anzaldúa does not consider all of the ramifications of her new commitment to theory, nor does she consider the consequences of adopting abstract language and implicitly denigrating works like *This Bridge* that aim to produce “theory in the flesh.”

As Anzaldúa considers new goals for the anthology, she also incorporates some previously maligned groups into the project of women of color feminism through the introduction. Anzaldúa expands the audience of *Haciendo Caras* in a key way that Moraga does not in *Puente*: “Besides being a testimonial of survival, I wanted a book which would teach ourselves and whites to read in nonwhite narrative traditions … *Haciendo Caras* addresses a feminist readership of all ethnicities and both genders – yes, men too” (xviii). The word “testimonial” here is interesting because it evokes the Latin American genre *testimonio*, which is a collective oral tradition that tells the stories of a group, and often challenges conventional epistemologies. Another fascinating point in that sentence is that Anzaldúa explicitly mentions men as a target audience for *Haciendo Caras*, while Moraga never states if she intends her book to be read by a male audience. Anzaldúa makes it clear that white readers and male readers are not the primary audience for the anthology, writing that the book “invites them to ‘listen in’ to women-of-color talking to each other and, in some instances, to and ‘against’ white people” (xviii). This move is a definitive change from both *This Bridge* and *Puente*, which both do not address the ideal role for prospective male readers. Though feminist texts are certainly not required to tell men
how they should read the book, nor beg for them to read the book, Anzaldúa demonstrates that she envisions coalition building and conversation between the genders as a result of her book. She will further incorporate male allies into the feminist project in her 2001 work *this bridge we call home*.

However, Anzaldúa could have spoken about her new material without denigrating the old. For example, she tells Keating that *Haciendo Caras* is aimed to women of color while *This Bridge* was not:

[I]t seemed to me that the stories, poems, and essays in *This Bridge* were being addressed to the white feminists. In *Haciendo Caras*, I wanted us to be talking to each other more … For me one of the differences is that in *Bridge* we were reacting against the white feminists’ theories and words, it was more of a reactive kind of book. *Haciendo Caras* feels to me like … we’re still bridging with white women, but a lot of that energy is just staying here. (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 155)

Here, Anzaldúa describes *This Bridge* as solely a response to the white feminists. She consistently analyzes the work in this manner, as she frequently names her bad experience at a Merlin Stone workshop as a catalyst for *This Bridge* in her interviews (*Interviews/Entrevistas* 56, 58, 153). However, as I discussed in Chapter Two, when one characterizes *This Bridge* as solely a response to white feminists, that reading elides the long history of women of color feminism behind the text. It’s especially dangerous for Anzaldúa to make this claim because she participates in the elision of black and brown feminist thought.

Moreover, when Anzaldúa claims, “we’re still bridging … but a lot of the energy is just staying here,” where is “here,” and who is “we?” In the introduction, Anzaldúa
writes that she wanted to privilege the voices of new writers in a similar fashion to *This Bridge*: “Because there is little support for our writings, I’ve made a special effort to work with women who do not consider themselves writers, or at least not yet” (*Haciendo Caras*, xvii). However, a close analysis of the table of contents reveals the possible consequences of expanding the women of color feminist project. Though there are no male-identifying writers, many contributors seem to belong to different socioeconomic classes than the contributors to *This Bridge*. As Franklin notes, “50 of the 72 entries in *Haciendo Caras* have been previously published, as compared with 9 of 46 in *This Bridge*” (45). She also notes that over half of the contributors to *Haciendo Caras* were affiliated with academic institutions (51) but only five writers in *This Bridge* mention their academic affiliations in their biographies (*This Bridge*, 246-250). Given the prevalence of academic writers as well as established writers in *Haciendo Caras*, these theorizing subjects are quite different from the ones in *This Bridge*. As Franklin puts it, “In *Haciendo Caras* the writers speak as an established community of writers, as, and largely to, academic/intellectual activists” (52).

Moreover, as reviewer Cheryl Clarke points out, this group of women may be less concerned with questions of sexuality, as only seventeen of the sixty-three contributors are associated with lesbian publications or organizations (130). Thus, the subjects of *Haciendo Caras* may be more established, less queer, and more ingrained in the academy than the subjects of *This Bridge*. Though it might be true that “a lot of the energy is staying here,” as Anzaldúa puts it, *Haciendo Caras* may lose its bridge to working class people, new writers, and queer activists through its focus on academic writers, established writers, and normatively sexual writers.
The questions of incorporation, inclusion, and exclusion will continue to be relevant in the next set of variations on *This Bridge*. Anzaldúa and Moraga both recreated *This Bridge* in the space of the new millennium in 2002. Whereas Moraga collaborated with Norma Alarcón to produce the third edition of *This Bridge*, Anzaldúa worked with AnaLouise Keating to edit *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* in that same year. In this manner, after its rebirth in the late eighties, the theories of *This Bridge*, as well as the actual text, did not dissipate in the nineties. Instead, to return to James Snead’s phrasing, it was “there for [the editors] to pick it up when they came back to it” (69). I’ll move into a reading of those two texts in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: Called Home/Que Llamamos la Casa: Twenty-First Century Iterations

On the cover of the third edition of *This Bridge* (2002), the bridge is painted in blood. The Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta’s piece *Body Tracks* graces the front cover, originally performed in 1974. According to a video recording available through the University of Texas, Austin’s Fine Arts School, Mendieta begins the performance facing a white wall. Her hands are outstretched and above her head, red blood pooling underneath. Slowly, Mendieta bends at the waist and brings her arms downwards, eventually falling to her knees so that the two lines converge near the floor. The red tracks form a yonic shape, and her bloody handprints are distinguishable at the top of the form. As Mendieta turns around to face the viewer, she reveals the bloodstained sleeves of her white shirt. Thus, Mendieta uses her hands, forearms, body, and mind to create *Body Tracks*. She quickly glances at the viewer before moving out of the frame, as Afro-Cuban drumbeats echo in the background (Cabañas 13).

Even though the resulting image of *Body Tracks* replaced the iconic cover sketch of *This Bridge*, I argue that the shape made in *Body Tracks* can be read as a bridge. Given that it is shaped like a uterus, the outline in *Body Tracks* evokes a conduit, a liminal space, and a passageway to a different world. Moreover, this image could also be read as “this bridge called my back.” Perhaps the space between the two handprints forms a pair of shoulders, and the lines slowly converge to a narrow waist. If so, this back was created through a history of violence, formed in blood.

The queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz’s work is helpful in connecting Mendieta’s work to the women of color feminist project, as well as to the third edition of *This Bridge*. In his essay “Vitalism’s Afterburn: The Sense of Ana Mendieta,” Muñoz writes, “Ana Mendieta radiates a world of brown” (197). In choosing the verb “radiate,”
Muñoz emphasizes what he terms to be an “élan vital” [vital force] shining through Mendieta’s work that expressed the particularities of her experience of brownness. Mendieta grew up in Cuba and was forcibly repatriated to the United States through Operation Peter Pan, in which the Catholic Church sent children from conservative, upper-middle class families to the United States ahead of their parents. Mendieta grew up with her siblings in Iowa, displaced from her Cuban family, and remained in the United States for the rest of her life. She came to identify as “brown” after coming of age in the United States, and rebelled against her conservative capitalist upbringing in her art. When her work engages with Afro-Caribbean imagery, indigenous practices, and music, she protests the colonization of the Caribbean, reclaims indigenous traditions, and makes visible the subjection of the brown female body. For example, in Body Tracks, she marks a feminine outline in blood to the beat of Afro-Cuban drums, locating this experience of violence and subjection within a particular Latin American culture. As Muñoz suggests, “[W]hat we might be seeing is the after trail of a vital force that is brownness encountering the actual multiplicities of studio walls” (195). Her markings in Body Tracks relay her particular experience of brownness, etching her affective reality on the white studio walls. As her body is no longer present but these two bloody trails remain, Muñoz calls Mendieta’s work a “visual echo” (193). Her message resounds through the life force evident in her image.

Mendieta’s affective renderings of brownness parallel the work of third edition of This Bridge in three ways. As I previously stated, Body Tracks can be read as a reimagining of the bridge. In addition, Muñoz writes that Mendieta’s work attempts to “share the unshareable” experience of brownness, displacement, and femininity. This Bridge is a kindred spirit to Mendieta’s work, as it was published to express “what feminism means
to us” (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983, xxiii). Through writing, the contributors aim to convey their particular experiences of blackness and brownness, calling upon their material bodies to express their feminist visions. By the publication of the third edition, one can see the élan vital that Muñoz locates in Mendieta’s work in the writings of Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, and Pat Parker. These contributors had passed away before the third book was published, yet their particular experiences of blackness remain etched onto the page. Their words ring forth after their deaths, asserting their intersectional experiences and provoking intense emotion. As Moraga writes in her Foreword to the 2001 edition, “I re-read Toni Cade Bambara’s Foreword’ in this collection and I cry” (xxx). Bambara’s dreams of true connections between diverse women remain alive through her writings. In the same way, revolution is still neither neat nor pretty nor quick, just as Parker wrote in 1980, and women of color feminists in 2002 (and today) are still wondering how to build a house without the master’s tools. The affective experience of brownness and blackness transmitted through an élan vital is present in the work of Mendieta, Bambara, Parker and Lorde. Given that a large part of this edition commemorates its fallen foremothers, Muñoz’s work on Mendieta illuminates the spirit present in the work of these women.

The editors also serve a different commemorative impulse in the third edition by placing Body Tracks on the front cover of the third edition. Celia Herrera Rodríguez, a Xicana visual and performance artist, curated the artwork for this edition and chose Mendieta’s artwork for the cover. She explains her decision in her curatorial statement “A Sacred Thing That Takes Us Home”: “My younger brother and fellow feminist, Ricardo Bracho, suggested Ana Mendieta’s work for the front cover. As he told me, ‘It is time to reclaim Ana back into the ranks of early woman of color feminist warriors’
With this change to the front cover, the third edition of *This Bridge* attempts to bring forgotten subjects into the woman of color feminist project, inviting them to join the chorus. Bracho and Herrera Rodríguez’s selection sutures Mendieta’s work onto a movement with which she is not usually connected, recognizing the feminist impulses in her work. Herrera Rodríguez’s statement above also reveals two other important additions to the third edition. First of all, Herrera Rodríguez’s collaboration with Bracho shows how queer men of color are being incorporated into the women of color feminist project. Muñoz’s citation of Mendieta also demonstrates this kinship, and I will elaborate on Muñoz’s connection to *This Bridge* at the end of this chapter. Moreover, by turning to the art world for the cover, Herrera Rodríguez shows how she imagines the recreation of *This Bridge*’s themes in genres other than literature.

Also, Mendieta’s recuperation serves as both a homage and a critique. Herrera Rodríguez adds in her statement, “I chose *Body Tracks* (1974), bloodied hand and arm tracks descending towards the ground, as a reminder that this path is dangerous and many have fallen … After all america [sic] seems to love its dead women of color, while it scorns or ignores us alive” (281). When she writes that “this path is dangerous and many have fallen,” Herrera Rodríguez reminds the readers not only of Mendieta, but of the artist Marsha Gómez, whose work is on the frontispiece, as well as Bambara, Parker, and Lorde. Herrera Rodríguez honors their lifetime of work in service of women of color, yet reminds readers that attention must be paid to those who are alive and working today. She critiques American necropolitics in which bodies carry more currency when they are dead than when they are alive.

As the cover image, *Body Tracks* establishes motifs that will vary throughout the paratext of the third edition. Mendieta’s work prompts the readers to consider themes of
loss, remembrance, recreation, and the changing woman of color feminist project. In a similar way that Mendieta’s work is a “visual echo,” the editors select the themes from the prior editions that are most resonant to them, and continue to issue the call of *This Bridge* in the twenty-first century. All of the content remains the same in this edition, except for the fact that the name of one of the contributors was changed to reflect his transition from a feminine gender identity to a masculine identity. Thus, in the new content, the editors pay homage to influential elements from *This Bridge*, or reconsider its significance in the changing world. I will consider the Publisher’s Note from Norma Alarcón, the new introductions from Moraga and Anzaldúa, and additional passages from Herrera Rodríguez’s curatorial statement for my analysis in *This Bridge*.

In 2001, Moraga and Alarcón began compiling a new edition of *This Bridge*, which had gone out of print when Kitchen Table Press folded in 1995 (Alarcón, *This Bridge*, n.p.). It is remarkable that this anthology was republished although it had not circulated for five years. The third edition was produced primarily through the work of volunteers who started the project in 2001 in order to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the first edition. As Alarcón clarifies in her Publisher’s Note, “Third Woman Press wants to acknowledge the many women of color, all of them volunteers and interns, who ensured the success of this project. No one is a full time employee, all work elsewhere, and are undergraduate and graduate students” (n.p.). Thus, this edition was produced by the collaborative efforts of women of color, which is similar to the process that produced the second edition. In this manner, the editors carry on a tradition of production in which *This Bridge* is produced by and for women of color. However, this anthology appeared in a different publishing scene than its predecessors. Alarcón notes that Third Woman Press was “virtually the only press of color surviving from that earlier
feminist activist period” (np). As many lesbian feminist magazines and presses, including the ones discussed in Chapter Two, had closed, the mediums of publication from which to sound the call for dialogue had drastically changed when this anthology was published. However, its message was still necessary. Two decades after Moraga and Anzaldúa sounded the call to clarify “what feminism means to us,” Moraga and Alarcón cut back to the original work to produce a variation that would reflect the concerns of a changing movement.

While Alarcón details the production of the third edition in her statement, Moraga echoes the themes of remembrance and loss that are first provoked by Mendieta’s cover image. In her new introduction, she pays homage to the contributors who have passed on. “In the twenty years since This Bridge Called My Back was first published, some of our hermanas as elemental to our women of color movement as corn, squash, and beans have returned to the dirt: Audre Lorde, Pat Parker, Toni Cade Bambara. Here, Moraga cites one of the most important works from the first edition, continuing the conversation between paratextual elements. Her phrasing that these “hermanas” were “as elemental … as corn, squash and beans” is a riff off a line from Bambara’s Foreword: “Sisters of the yam Sisters of the rice Sisters of the corn” (This Bridge, 1981, vi). Thus, Moraga uses intertextual practices to reiterate important themes from the first edition, and honors fallen warriors of the women of color feminist project.

What, then, should the bodies that have survived do to continue the movement? Moraga considers the audience of the book in her Foreword: “Maybe This Bridge Called My Back is a book written especially for young women. Maybe not. Maybe to the young ones, I’d say, ‘work tirelessly when you do not grow tired at night. Do not waste your
lives, your good health, strong bones and resilient muscles. Use them. Maybe I would preach these things” (xxx). Thus, Moraga repeats the call to create theory in the flesh, animating woman of color feminist action as physical labor just as Toni Cade Bambara did. She positions the older generation of readers as advisors to a new cohort of young women. With this invocation, Moraga demonstrates that the woman of color movement may have lost some of its bodies, but its epistemological soul of theory in the flesh resonates in this iteration of the text.

Moraga’s ability to “preach these things” comes from her own position in 2001. Not only is she twenty years older than she was in 1981, but she also signals a changing socioeconomic status with the title of her Foreword, “From Inside the First World.” It may be that she uses the term “First World” to reflect on the United States’ actions following September 11, 2001. She describes how she started writing the Foreword on the afternoon of September Eleventh (xiii), and she calls for solidarity and political resistance from brown people around the world. In this manner, Moraga demonstrates a commitment to international feminism like she did in her 1983 introduction and in Puente. However, the term “First World” may also reflect her own life changes, as she makes it clear in the introduction that she is in a committed relationship and has children. Thus, while many contributors in This Bridge in 1981 were concerned with the experience of being a daughter of color, Moraga reflects in this edition on the experience of mothering, positioning many of her contemporaries as maternal figures as well. The women in this iteration of This Bridge can relate the challenges of birthing and raising a movement as well as the next generation of activists. By addressing the experience of mothering, Moraga repairs a blind spot in This Bridge by analyzing a seminal experience in the lives of many women of color through an intersectional feminist lens.
In the face of death, global conflict, and twenty years of feminist activism, Moraga asserts that the goal ahead is to continue sounding the call, framing it as a movement towards “wholeness.” This concept can be viewed as either a rejection or an elaboration of the bridge metaphor. Moraga might imply that women of color should collapse all of their bridges, or she may suggest by way of Alarcón that one can express a non-unitary, intersectional subjectivity through the bridge conceit. Moraga writes, “What do we do in that movement towards wholeness? Pray. Pick up axe. Practice a fearless radicalism, all along knowing, as Audre Lorde writes, ‘we were never meant to survive.’ But survive we must and survive we will. The planet depends on it” (xxxii). Thus, Moraga paints survival and reiteration of This Bridge as a goal against a system of apparatuses that threaten to extinguish women of color feminists’ discourse and lives. The republication of this book is both a prayer and the picking up of an axe; a political move in the face of great loss.

In her foreword, Anzaldúa describes the third edition of This Bridge as both commemorative and collaborative. Since her interpretation is quite different from Moraga’s, it’s clear that this anthology is still provocative and multidimensional twenty years after its publication. Anzaldúa characterizes the text as a static home as well as a fluid space of debate:

Bridge created a reflective and passionate space for discussion by representing many of our diverse faces. It continues to be a refuge, linking us with each other, renewing old connections among women of color, and prompting alliances with the younger generation of women and with women and men of other tribes and continents …. Like a stone thrown into a pool, this book’s ripples have touched people on
numerous shores, affecting scholars and activists around the world.

.xxxiv

In comparing *This Bridge* to “a stone thrown into a pool” that causes ripples, Anzaldúa situates the anthology as an object that causes physical as well as sonic waves. Just as a stone displaces water and transmits sound through its waves, Anzaldúa writes that the original text has effected change through sound and touch. She believes that *This Bridge’s* message that has repeated over the years as a call to gather in solidarity, naming people of all generations and genders as listeners as well as allies. It’s interesting that she characterizes the text and its discussion space as “a refuge.” I think the word refuge certainly conveys a place of kindred spirits, which Anzaldúa invokes, but the ideas of home and refuge may gloss over the necessary and, at times, painful work of coalition building.

Out of all of the editors, Anzaldúa most consistently cuts back to the bridge metaphor in her prefatory remarks. She ruminates on the text’s changing faces in the new millennium, arguing that the bridge to *This Bridge* should remain open to all who are interested in the text:

Los consejos from the firing of the last two decades are many. The first counsel reminds us that *Bridge* has multicultural roots and that it is not ‘owned’ solely by mujeres de color, or even by women. Like knowledge, *Bridge* cannot be possessed by a single person or group. It’s public; it’s communal. To exclude is to close the bridge, invite separatism and hostilities. (xxxvi)

Here, Anzaldúa questions both the subject and audience of the anthology. With her statement that “*Bridge* cannot be possessed by a single person or group,” she moves from
physical ownership of the text to metaphorical possession, defining who can read and benefit from the text as well as identify with the bridge subjectivity. In this Foreword, just as she argues in her Introduction to Haciendo Caras, Anzaldúa insists that men must be incorporated into the woman of color feminist project. She will further demonstrate her commitment to a movement that includes people of both genders in her anthology with AnaLouise Keating, this bridge we call home.

At the end, she animates the bridge metaphor as a sonic metaphor to express her hopes for the future. Unlike Moraga, Anzaldúa is not as concerned with loss and survival, and instead she focuses on creating unity. She ends, “In this millennium we are called to renew and birth a more inclusive feminism … dissolve the rigid walls between us, and gather us in. May our voices proclaim the bonds of bridges” (xxxix). She theorizes that the bridge can be expressed through sound. Instead of animating the bridge as a physical movement, such as a bent spine or an extended hand, she locates solidarity as a verbal gesture. In this manner, Anzaldúa envisions that the theme of the bridge will repeat as long as those who are committed to its variation issue the call. Moreover, she echoes Moraga’s maternal language by exhorting her comrades to “birth a more inclusive feminism.” Thus, while many of the themes overlap between Anzaldúa and Moraga’s prefatory materials, each author envisions a slightly different woman of color feminist movement and employs different motifs in their essays about the past and future of This Bridge.

Though Moraga and Anzaldúa’s introductions are important in this iteration of This Bridge, Herrera Rodríguez’s curated portfolio is an important new paratextual element. In her curatorial statement, she specifies how the inclusion of artwork is a continuation of the coalition building attempts of This Bridge: “In a different ‘language,’
but with equal commitment, the art works selected here accomplished what Gloria
Anzaldúa speaks of in her foreword to the second edition … These works opened the
door to our collective history, which required collective examination, allowing us as
women of color, to make connections, learn from one another, and shape our
consciousness in the process” (281). Thus, Herrera Rodríguez specifies that the art in
This Bridge can serve to bring writers and artists of color in conversation with one
another about their shared history. Many of the specific works recuperate maligned
historical figures, such as Betye Saar’s “The Liberation of Aunt Jemima,” Yolanda M.
López’s “The Artist as the Virgen de Guadalupe,” Judith E. Baca’s “Las Tres Marias,”
and Ester Hernández’s protest against Sun Maid raisins, “Sun Mad.” By including
artwork that deals with these historical figures, Herrera Rodriguez demonstrates the
genealogy of women of color feminism. Moreover, by uniting all of the artists in a single
folio, she juxtaposes woman of color feminist artists with each other as well as with
writers who pursued a similar project through literature. Herrera Rodríguez’s nod to “a
different language” shows how the third edition varies on the themes of the first and
second by exploring the same philosophies in different mediums. Though she finds a
connection to Anzaldúa’s writing, I see her work as also in line with Bambara’s
exhortations in her Foreword, as the inclusion of art creates “a new connection [and] a
new set of recognitions” (vi). This portfolio is truly the recreation of the project of This
Bridge in a different generic space.

Herrera Rodríguez expresses that she views her work on This Bridge not as solely
recuperative but also as commemorative. She demonstrates the flexibility of this woman
of color feminist project in selecting a new cover image, but sees the text itself as a
sacred, unchanging object. Rodríguez opens her statement by reflecting on the text’s
importance: “This Bridge Called My Back has come to symbolize the coming together of
women of color. It represents the vanguard of a movement that has given voice to truths
spoken by many” (279). By using the word “vanguard,” Rodríguez situates the original
editors and contributors at the forefront of the woman of color feminist movement. It is
a reverent move by a younger woman of color activist.

Moreover, she ends her statement by suggesting that feminists have returned to
the text not to innovate it, but to preserve and honor it: “What matters to me is the way
in which we keep coming back … like water. The task, as artists, is to recognize the
sacred as familiar, as fitting into the hand. A sacred thing that takes one home” (287).
Herrera Rodríguez implies that this constant movement serves to venerate This Bridge as
a sacred yet familiar text. Moreover, she reads gestures back to This Bridge as a search for
“home.” This utopian drive is in line with Anzaldúa’s mission in this bridge we call home,
which I discuss later in this chapter. Also, Rodriguez’s repetition of us (“a sacred thing
that takes us home,” “the way in which we keep coming back”) implies that the audiences
for this text are the people who have loved it throughout the years, members of the
vanguard and their descendants. In Rodríguez’s eyes, the third edition of This Bridge
functions less to entice new readers than to serve as a space for women of color warriors
to reflect on the state of their twenty year project.

Given my emphasis on theme and variations, as well as my argument that the
text’s form and materiality is a challenge to canonical discourse, I question Rodríguez’s
characterization of the text as “a sacred thing that takes us home.” I believe the word
“sacred” invokes canonicity and I hesitate to apply that adjective to a woman of color
feminist project. I do, however, appreciate Rodríguez’s turn to the earth as a metaphor
for reiterating This Bridge: “[T]here is a root, and the seed contained within us, which
gives us the power to return again and again, to emerge triumphant, as Mendieta’s ‘body tracks’ rise up from the ground like stalks of corn” (281-2). Although Rodríguez evokes the base of a plant with the word “root,” that phrase is useful for my purposes if I turn it into a “root chord.” This Bridge, like a root chord, is the base for improvisation, the tonal element that structures a set of variations.

Anzaldúa also engages with the concept of home using This Bridge as a tonal base in her 2002 anthology, this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation.13 The title phrase contains several interesting variations on This Bridge Called My Back, which underscores the possibility for referentiality between paratexts. Anzaldúa incorporates three important elements from the original title in her new work. The variation “we call” on the phrase “called my” is important as it gives agency to the contributors of the anthology. Instead of thinking about the discourses that converge on their bodies, the contributors create the discourse around the body of the text, calling it “home.” Moreover, the subtitle “radical visions for transformation” is an intriguing departure from “writings by radical women of color.” The word “women” has been displaced and instead it is not clear who is producing these “radical visions.” It seems that the potential for radicalism no longer lies in the women’s identification as such but instead in the work that they produce.

Though home, as I will later discuss, is an anthology that aims to greatly expand the subjects of women of color feminism, incorporating men, genderqueer, and trans people into the project, I find that the displacement of the female body in the subtitle echoes in other paratextual elements. For example, the cover image designed by Mariah Corrigan is a Corbis image of a leaf in a pool of water. While this image may reference

13 Heretofore abbreviated as home.
the water underneath a bridge, invoking calm as well as fluidity, it displaces the body as
the site of theory. More explicitly, this cover image omits the feminized body for a
genderless leaf. Though the Mendieta image on the cover of the third edition is not
explicitly a bridge, it still conjured themes of materiality, embodiment, femininity, and
liminal spaces. This image does not contain any of those resonances. Instead, the cover
of this book signals to the reader that “theory in the flesh” will not be prioritized as an
epistemological strategy in this text, and that the female body will not always assume
prominence as a site of theory.

Another place that the female body is displaced is the blurbs. While the third
edition of This Bridge featured comments from Angela Davis and Chela Sandoval, the
back cover of home features a quote from its review from The New York Times. Though
the reviewer, Daisy Hernández, is a Latina, her name is omitted and her commentary is
attributed to the genderless, normative company “The New York Times.” To continue,
the publishers describe the book as follows:

Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating have painstakingly assembled
a new collection of over eighty original writings that offers a bold new
vision of women-of-color consciousness for the twenty-first century.
Written by women and men – both ‘of color’ and ‘white’ – this bridge we
call home will challenge readers to rethinking existing categories and invent
new individual and collective identities. (home, np)

This text presents itself as different from the original version because it is “written by
women and men – both ‘of color’ and ‘white.”’ While this anthology certainly might be
more inclusive in that it incorporates white women and men into the woman of color
feminist project, I do not believe that this inclusivity necessarily had to result in the elision of the female body on the cover as well as in the blurbs.

It’s important that Routledge, a major academic publisher of humanities and social science texts, published this book. Unlike Moraga and Alarcón, who explain the significance of working with a women of color press collective in the third edition of This Bridge, Anzaldúa and Keating do not elaborate on this important change to the factual paratext. As Genette defines it, the factual paratext is “a fact whose existence alone, if known to the public, provides some commentary on the text and influences how the text is received” (7). Though I have addressed factual paratextual elements earlier in this work, I want to highlight Genette’s definition here to underscore an extremely important fact: this anthology is the first variation in the Bridge series that is not published by a feminist press. The commentary on the text is clear: with Routledge behind the text, home is firmly and unapologetically situated within the academy for use in schools and universities. The audience is more likely to view home as a canonical text when a major publishing company produces it. In contrast, they would likely appreciate the nuances in This Bridge and its challenges to the genre of anthology when it comes from a grassroots publisher like Third Woman Press or Kitchen Table Press. Moreover, as home and the third edition were published in the same year, the former text may overshadow the latter due to its support from its publisher. As evidenced by the blurbs, Routledge markets the book as a “bold new vision” of This Bridge, omitting the fact that home and the third edition were published concurrently. While it’s true that different companies published This Bridge and home, and Routledge is under no obligation to acknowledge another company’s work, it’s odd that the editors never mention in their prefatory materials that an updated version of their source material is available.
Even if the publisher divorces home from its original source, Anzaldúa mediates upon the definition of the bridge metaphor in her preface, “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces.” Anzaldúa begins with a beautifully poetic meditation on the bridge, showing that she conceives of this metaphor as a flexible, permeable term:

Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Nahuatl word meaning tierra entre mundo [the land between worlds]. Change is inevitable; no bridge lasts forever. (1)

In Anzaldúa’s iteration of This Bridge, the theme is variation. Instead of calling This Bridge “a sacred thing,” she emphasizes “transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives.” By animating the central symbol as a liminal zone, she insinuates that the original anthology is also in transition, a work that can adjust over time. While Anzaldúa marks the original text as a point of departure, she is less concerned with homage and more interested in creating a renovated bridge for twenty-first century women of color feminism.

After stating that “no bridge lasts forever,” Anzaldúa positions the new anthology as the theoretical successor to This Bridge. “This bridge we call home is an attempt to continue the dialogue, rethink the old ideas, and germinate new theories” (2). Here, she defines home as an explicitly theoretical text in the temporal space of the twenty-first century. Anzaldúa assures readers, “[W]e’re not totally abandoning the old – we’re building on it. We’re reinforcing the foundations and support beams of the old puentes,

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14 My translation.
not just giving them new paint jobs” (2). Thus, she characterizes this variation in a similar way in which I frame the entire corpus of anthologies, a “building on” without “totally abandoning the old.” In comparison with the editors of the third edition, who saw their book as a veneration of the original anthology, Anzaldúa’s anthology is meant as a radically different version of This Bridge that reproduces its spirit, format, and goals. Moreover, the phrase “not just giving [the old puentes] new paint jobs” might be a sly reference to the third edition. Given that the changes to the third edition are mainly visual, and none of the original essays have been updated, it is possible that Anzaldúa views the third edition as an iteration that does not go far enough in building upon the original text. It is clear that Anzaldúa and Moraga had different visions for the future of This Bridge, and their editorial vision hinges on whether they focus on extending bridges to the past, or renovating them for future use.

Anzaldúa models the type of bridging action she envisions when she discusses the contributors to the anthology, who are presumably the “we” in this bridge we call home. She explains the identity of the contributors as follows: “In our efforts to rethink the borders of race, gender, and identity, we must guard against creating new binaries. Expanding on This Bridge Called My Back, we incorporate additional underrepresented voices such as those of transgendered people, and Arab and South Asian/Indian Americans” (3). I applaud Anzaldúa for incorporating minoritarian ethnicities that were not featured in any of the editions of This Bridge, and I think it’s especially important to include Arab women in the woman of color feminist discourse in a text published shortly after September 11, 2001. Moreover, while some works in This Bridge protest lesbian separatism, none of the articles explicitly welcomed trans and gender queer people to the feminist project. It’s important that Anzaldúa explicitly states that trans
and genderqueer people have stakes in her woman of color feminist anthology (despite her use of the problematic term “transgendered”). Though it is unreasonable to ask that a feminist project necessarily include every minoritarian identity, I appreciate that Anzaldúa welcomes people who were previously not represented in *This Bridge* to sound their messages.

Anzaldúa continually justifies her inclusionary rhetoric throughout the preface. *Home* expands the boundaries of coalition in a woman of color feminist project as it includes people who do not identify as women of color. Anzaldúa explains this maneuver: “To include whites is not an attempt to restore the privilege of white writers, scholars, and activists; it is a refusal to continue walking the color line. To include men (in this case, feminist-oriented ones) is to collapse the gender line” (4). She links her rhetoric of abandoning strict lines to the bridge metaphor: “To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others” (3). Thus, she connects the inclusion of “white” people as well as feminist men as an expansion of the bridge subjectivity. She does not view collaborating with folks who enjoy gendered or racial privilege as “being the damn bridge for everyone,” in Kate Rushin’s words (*This Bridge* xxi) and assumes that the people she is bridging to have already educated themselves to be effective allies for woman of color feminists. Anzaldúa transforms the bridge metaphor to reconceive of the subjects and audiences for the newest iteration of *This Bridge*.

To her credit, Anzaldúa engages with those who may feel enraged by the decision to incorporate white folks and feminist men into her variation of *This Bridge*. Her expanded conception of “we” threatens a space that many women call home. She writes, “I fear that many mujeres de color will not want whites or males to be contributors in our book. We risk their displeasure. Many women of color are possessive
of *This Bridge Called My Back* and view it as a safe space, as ‘home’” (3). While this comment is conciliatory, Anzaldúa evasively posits this backlash as a future event when she writes “mujeres de color will not want whites or males to be contributors in our book.” She does not reveal that some contributors to the anthology had already objected to its expanded scope as it was compiled, and this move glosses over the outrage with which her decision was met.

Her coeditor Keating reveals the nature of the disputes, which took place on the contributors’ online listserv, in an essay called “From Intersections to Interconnections” in the anthology *The Intersectional Approach*:

[A] few people reacted violently when they learned that Gloria and I would be including contributions by people who do not identify as “women of color” in the book. The anger was visceral and shocking as several contributors expressed their intense disappointment that our new book would not provide the same type of ‘safe’ women-of-color-only space as that provided by *This Bridge Called My Back*. (90)

Both Anzaldúa and Keating connect the negative reactions from a small portion of the contributors to the writers’ anxiety at the loss of a safe location for feminist discourse. These dissident writers animate the physical text as a space that was not built with “the master’s tools,” showing this text’s continued importance to many women of color feminists. It would seem, in their eyes, that *This Bridge* is not “a sacred thing that takes us home,” as Rodríguez described it in the third edition, but instead the sacred space that is home. It’s clear that for some of the contributors, the bridge metaphor has shifted between the two editions from serving a conduit to a haven to embodying the refuge itself.
When Anzaldúa and Keating include men in their women of color feminist project, they align themselves with the work of bell hooks, thus strengthening the anthology’s connection to a black feminist epistemology. Hooks’ *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, was originally released in 1984 and republished in 2000, concurrent with the second and third editions of *This Bridge*. In her often-cited essay “Men: Comrades in Struggle,” hooks argues that connecting with black feminist men is an integral part of black feminist thought:

> Anti-male sentiments have alienated many poor and working class women, particularly non-white women, from feminist movement. Their life experiences have shown them that they have more in common with men of their race and/or class group than with bourgeois white women. Men who actively struggle against sexism have a place in feminist movement. They are our comrades. (69-70, 82)

In her analysis, hooks privileges an intersectional analysis by explaining that a shared racial and class identity can help people of different genders relate to one another. These relationships come about through discourse and common intersectional conceptions of self. Historically, to return to *Beloved* for a moment, one could argue that collaboration with men has been an important part of black feminism since its inception: in the clearing, Baby Suggs preaches to men and women alike, arguing that both genders can benefit from radical self-love in the face of racial persecution. I do not mean to gloss over the sexism that women experienced in black radical movements, which of course instigated the modern black feminist movement. Rather, I wish to identify interconnectivity between the genders as a crucial part of black feminist philosophy.
When Anzaldúa adopts this approach in *home*, she strengthens the text’s relationship to black feminist thought.

The second important ramification of this expansion is that Anzaldúa and Keating complicate the nature of “home” in women of color feminist thought. When they conceive of home as an inclusive space, “this bridge we call home” transforms from a location of refuge to an act that creates community. Anzaldúa animates the bridge metaphor in her preface:

> Staying ‘home’ and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth … To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded. Effective bridging comes from knowing when to close the ranks to those outside our home, group, community, and nation – and when to keep the gates open. (3)

Here, Anzaldúa makes the source of the bridge metaphor integral to her variation. She writes that women should not only bridge to kinfolk within their own groups, but that they should take risks in connecting with people who may be different from them. Anzaldúa views the concept of “home” as a state that invariably involves fear, and she pushes her modern readers to be brave in expressing solidarity. Her ideas are perhaps most succinct in this message: “To bridge is an act of will, an act of love” (4). Now, I will move to an analysis of several epitextual engagements with *home* to demonstrate how reviewers and critics actively bridged out of love for the text, therefore expanding the discourse of *This Bridge* and its iterations.

For the most part, critics praised Anzaldúa and Keating’s editorial decisions to expand the subjects of the anthology. In her review in the *NWSA Journal*, Aurora G.
Morcillo writes, “If this volume the categories ‘white’ and ‘women of color’ are further problematized … Far from perpetuating a dyadic analysis, the 87 voices in this volume lead us down a path in which identity is a fluid concept that knows no easy categorizations” (234). She connects the inclusion of people who do not identify as women of color as a rebellion against “dyadic analysis,” which is in line with the original intentions of *This Bridge*. Just as the original contributors challenged those who wanted them to declare their loyalty to the categories of “women” or “of color,” Morcillo writes that Anzaldúa and Keating’s editorial decisions further interrogate the term that was instrumental to *This Bridge*.

In a similar manner, in his article “A New Connection, A New Set of Recognitions: From *This Bridge Called My Back* to *this bridge we call home*,” Héctor Calderón writes that “Anzaldúa and Keating decided on openness – to include voices of different colors and genders, white and male, beyond US borders” (301). It’s noteworthy that an important Chicano theorist reviewed this iteration of the text and put it into conversation with *This Bridge*. Given the academy’s lukewarm reception to the 1981 and 1983 editions of *This Bridge*, and the fact that the reviewers were all female, this review signals *This Bridge’s* changing status in the academy. Calderón affirms *This Bridge’s* innumerable contribution to ethnic studies and models a way for feminist males to engage with the newest iteration of the text.

I close this chapter with an essay by José Esteban Muñoz that highlights the coalitional possibilities between projects by queer men of color and women of color than Anzaldúa envisions in *home*. Muñoz’s essay exemplifies how men can truly be “companions in struggle,” as hooks put it, greatly expands the scope of *This Bridge* to audiences it may have not originally addressed, and is a powerful rendition of bridging as an act of will.
and love. In his 1999 essay, “Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho’s “The Sweetest Hangover (And Other STDs),” Muñoz connects Bracho’s play with This Bridge in a section titled “This Bridge Called My Crack.” “It is important to note that my punning here is meant to serve more than the general cause of irreverence,” Muñoz assures us. “I am instead interested in calling attention to the continuation of the radical women of color project by gay men of color” (73). It is apt that Muñoz reads Bracho’s work in conversation with This Bridge, as Bracho collaborated with Herrera Rodríguez to select Mendieta’s Body Tracks for the front cover of the third edition (This Bridge, 2002, 281). Bracho was clearly supportive of the women of color feminist project in This Bridge, but Muñoz makes the parallels between Bracho’s play and the anthology evident in his essay.

The Sweetest Hangover was first performed 1997 in San Francisco at the Brava Theater. As Muñoz summarizes it, the play centers on a fictional nightclub named Azlantis, which is run by a gay Chicano, Octavio Deseo. Other characters include the Salvadorian disk jockey djdj, Plum, a black female dancer who is also a student, Natasha Kinky, a trans black female performer, Miss Thing 2, a gay Filipino man, Miss Thing 1, an Afro-Caribbean gay man, and the Filipino-Chicano bouncer Samson. Simply from that cast of characters, a resonance between This Bridge and “The Sweetest Hangover” is clear. As Muñoz writes, “The Sweetest Hangover mirrors and reconstructs the composition of This Bridge Called My Back. The play offers an ensemble of racialized and ethnic characters that, like Bridge and its contributors, try to reconceptualizes the social from a vista that is not organized around relations to whiteness or the majoritarian sphere” (76). Importantly, the characters in The Sweetest Hangover come together in solidarity against the normative constraints of whiteness. In a world that rejects practices of queerness,
recreational drug use, the characters in *The Sweetest Hangover* flock to Azlantis to make a non-normative world. Muñoz argues that when these brown and black characters enact “other modes of perceiving reality and ‘feeling’ the world,” they launch the affective critique of brownness. When whiteness is figured as an affect, a certain way of moving, acting, and feeling in the world, the characters in *The Sweetest Hangover* represent alternative methods of being that are grounded in their unique intersectional experience.

Muñoz writes that *This Bridge* performed a similar affective critique: “In the same way that *Bridge* argued for modes of female being in the world that white feminism and different modalities of patriarchy rejected, *The Sweetest Hangover* makes a case for other ways of being in the world that are deemed outlaw and illicit” (76). The “other ways of being” that Muñoz views in *The Sweetest Hangover* include queer masculinities and casual drug usage, both of which are the “crack” he mentions in the subtitle “This Bridge Called My Crack.” The other forms of rebellion in *The Sweetest Hangover* include gender fluidity, participation in queer nightlife culture, and identification with multiracial kinship groups. By linking the project of *This Bridge* to *The Sweetest Hangover*, Muñoz expands the coalitional possibilities in the anthology. He is correct that *This Bridge* never defends queer men or recreational drug use (77), but he finds that *This Bridge*’s rejection of normative heteropatriarchal whiteness is akin to what is enacted in *The Sweetest Hangover*. In this manner, the text speaks to diverse groups of people eighteen years after its first publication. Moreover, he uses *This Bridge* to illuminate the role of affect in the whitewashed fields of theater and performance studies, expanding its role in the academy. Muñoz may have been the first critic to perform an affective reading of *This Bridge*, thus recreating the text in an emerging field. Through Muñoz’s work, *This Bridge* now reaches to new audiences, new causes, and new fields of study.
Muñoz anticipated Anzaldúa’s work by publishing this article in 1999, imagining a new world of solidarity between queer men and radical women of color. Moreover, his love for the text shines through as he willingly bridges between queer theater and women of color feminist thought. At the end of the essay, it’s clear that This Bridge has been personally instructive for him:

Many contributors to that volume wrote about the way in which the dominant culture made them feel crazy and wrong-minded. Part of Bridge’s project was to show that this craziness was a powerful way of being in the world, a mode of being that those in power needed to call crazy because it challenged the very tenets of their existence. Ricardo Bracho’s The Sweetest Hangover continues that project, allowing us to continue to dream of other planets and finally to make worlds. (79).

Muñoz illuminates how the alternative affective possibilities in This Bridge, such as feeling brown, feeling black, feeling like one’s back was a bridge, or feeling feminist, challenged the dominant affective modes of being. By saying that both This Bridge and The Sweetest Hangover allow “us to continue to dream,” Muñoz places himself among the people who look to these texts for inspiration. He has stakes in drawing a connection between queer people of color, and he bridges between the two texts respectfully and effectively.

Moving forward, I believe it is the responsibility of young feminists of color to enact the sorts of radical coalitions envisioned by Muñoz and Anzaldúa. More importantly, we can perform bridging work willingly and lovingly. I attempt to perform such work in the coda.
“White, rich, straight, cisgender women … don’t use their privileged platform to uplift the sisters below them. Instead they dig their heels into our shoulders, stride across the bridges we call our backs, without so much as a glance down.”


As Autostraddle.com contributor Kesiena Boom points out in the epigraph, some of our backs are still bridges. As a queer, black, mixed race woman, Boom took to Autostraddle.com to air her frustrations about white, hegemonic, upper-class feminism. As periodicals such as *Conditions, Sojourner, Sinister Wisdom,* and *off our backs* have gone out of print, and anthologies are no longer a young reader’s genre of choice, lesbian feminist discourse has largely migrated to the Internet. But even in an age where radical women of color can find each other in a single click, share one another’s work, and no longer have to “put in telecalls on the line,” as Toni Cade Bambara writes (*This Bridge,* vi), there is still a need for coalition building in the feminist community. In her post, Boom critiques mainstream feminists such as Lena Dunham, the writers at *Jezebel,* and Caitlin Moran as well as British journalists Sarah Ditum and Julie Birchill, for failing to practice intersectional feminism. She also opines that many white feminists that she has worked with do not educate themselves about the experiences of people of color, appropriate the term “intersectionality,” and do not perform meaningful work to eradicate racism in their communities. By saying that these women “stride across the bridges we call our backs,” Boom shows that this metaphor is still powerful in expressing the affective experience of women of color feminism. Moreover, in saying that they are “bridges we
call our backs,” she claims the term for an entirely new generation of radical women of color (emphasis mine).

Anzaldúa’s monumental question (as cited in my introduction) is also on Boom’s lips: “¿Qué hacer de aquí y cómo? What to do from here and how?” Boom’s answer involves both speaking and listening:

Use your voice as a privileged white woman to shout down racism wherever you see it. Be thankful that you will never know the sickening lurch that sways through your blood when your humanity is denounced and denied because of your race by women who profess to care about all women’s liberation … listen the hell up when a woman of colour calls you out!

Boom writes that white women can improve their intersectional feminist practices by calling out racist narratives, actions, and philosophies. More importantly, they must be open to critique from women of color and understand that the experience of “the sickening lurch that sways through your blood when your humanity is denounced” is unshareable. Like Sojourner Truth in 1851 and Moraga and Anzaldúa in 1981, Boom affirms her intersectional experience: you can make my back into a bridge, she writes, but I am still a woman.

Like Boom, it goes without saying that this anthology has had a major impact on my life. I am fortunate that This Bridge helped me create meaningful connections with the other Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellows as we lived together in Malcolm X House at Wesleyan this summer. Following Bambara’s advice that “We’ve got to get to know each other better and teach each other our ways, our views, if we’re to remove the scales … and get the work done” (vii), I resolved to learn as much about my peers as possible. I
tried to not assume that I understood what it felt like to live in their bodies. As I shared my work on *This Bridge* with them, watched their projects grow, and had the types of debates about feminism, capitalism, and racism that you can only have when you’re twenty-one and fiercely stubborn, I felt the bridges between us growing across racial, ethnic, class, gender, and sexual lines. But I know that I have more listening to do. If I knew what to do from here and how, I would not have written this thesis. I’ll turn to two more sources to finish this thesis: the 2015 iteration of *This Bridge*, and my personal interview with Kate Rushin, author of “The Bridge Poem.”

In case any more proof is needed that we live in a digital age, I found out about the fourth edition of *This Bridge* on Twitter. The means of publication available to feminists are not the only thing that has changed: the cover is completely different, the entire book is larger, and this edition was published by SUNY Press. In its fourth edition, *This Bridge* is situated within the academy for use in universities. In fact, AnaLouise Keating clarifies in the fourth edition this change satisfies Anzaldúa’s wishes: “Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa believed that *This Bridge* should be published by a large, mainstream press in order to give it visibility, sustainability, and a wide audience” (xxvii). With its publication by a mainstream press, featuring a generic black outline of a woman on the cover, this edition is sleeker than my coffee-stained, heavily annotated, split-apart 1983 secondhand copy. It is no longer a grassroots text assembled on the Kitchen Table of radical women of color. But it is in print after thirteen years. I am thrilled that it exists.

In her preface to the Fourth Edition, “Catching Fire,” Moraga reflects on the history of *This Bridge* and the work still to be done. She writes, “In the twenty years that

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15 The spine of my copy of *This Bridge* split apart about three weeks ago. My Bridge’s back is broken.
Bridge stayed in, and went out of publication over 100,000 copies were sold. It has also been read by thousands more … [I]t has been pirated online for two hundred dollars a copy, reprinted in university course readers (with and without permission), pdf’d and copied … Bridge has already fulfilled its original mission: to find its way into ‘every major city and hole in the wall in this country’” (xxii). After thirty-five years, Moraga can state that This Bridge has accomplished its goal of reaching a wide audience. The material book has been shared between sisters, broken down into selections, digitized, and now survives in a new edition. However, as she continues to list the events that shape and affect women of color, Moraga admits, “Still, the ‘holes in the wall’ remain wide and many and there is an abundant amount of ‘bridging’ left to be done” (xxii). In her preface, Moraga names sites in which she believes that bridging should occur. Though her title is taken from the fiery images of the Arab Spring, Moraga also mentions the events in Ferguson, conflicts on the U.S. – Mexican border, and many other domestic and international events that threaten the livelihoods of people of color. But, she assigns the difficult yet rewarding task of being a bridge to a younger generation.

While Moraga and Anzaldúa first set out in 1981 to define “what feminism means to us,” the fourth edition speaks to an audience that was not alive to see the first publication of This Bridge. Moraga continues:

Ultimately, as all people of progressive politics do, we wrote this book for you – the next generation, and the next one. Your lives are vast before you – you whom the popular culture has impassively termed “Millennials.” But I think the women of Bridge would’ve simply called you, “familia,”– our progeny, entrusting you with the legacy of our thoughts and
activisms, in order to better grow them into a flourishing planet and a just world. (xxiv)

Moraga welcomes a younger generation into the “familia” of radical women of color. Though this new edition may be for the Millennials, we must perform bridging work to understand the unique history that shaped it. In the same way that this text is strongly connected to a history of black feminist thought in the United States, it is also irrevocably tied to the affective moment of its conception: when Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Audre Lorde were just finding their pens, when “consciousness-raising” were all the rage, when people could choose to identify as “women-identified-womyn/womon/wimmin,” and when twelve black women were murdered in Boston in 1979. Yet, the élan vital of This Bridge (to borrow Muñoz’s term) can still inspire us to think through the issues of our own time. I am grateful that Moraga entrusts this book, which was written for a different generation of radical women of color, into our young hands.

If I am Moraga’s familia and progeny, what is she to me? Is she my tía? Abuela? Madre? How should I situate myself in relation to the generation that has influenced my work? I posed a similar question to Kate Rushin, the author of “The Bridge Poem,” when I met her for coffee recently. When I asked if she would like to be addressed as Kate, Ms. Rushin, or a different term, she answered and informed me:

See, I grew up in a culture, I talk about it in The Black Back-Ups, where people generally addressed people by titles. In my family, in my community where I grew up, ‘Aunt,’ ‘Uncle,’ and ‘Cousin’ were also honorific titles. I’m mostly in a culture, in circles that don’t do that.
There are certainly people, like Toni Morrison, that if I see her at a reading, I’d say, ‘Sister Toni’ to show respect and familiarity. As she tells me about the titles people used in her community to show respect, and the loss of that linguistic convention in the Northeast, I realize that I had asked her to be a bridge for me. She describes her childhood in a predominantly black community in New Jersey many years ago, an experience that I could never access. I could have read *The Black Back-Ups* (1993), her first book of poetry, before our interview to learn about her background, and instead I failed to educate myself. In 1980, Rushin first wrote in “The Bridge Poem,” “I’ve got to explain myself/To everybody,” and here I was in 2015, asking her to do the same thing.

This moment at the beginning of the interview showed me how much work is necessary to improve my intersectional feminist practices. To fix my mistake, I tried to meet her halfway: I explained how in Latin American, in my mother’s culture, adult friends of the family are easily addressed as “tía” or “tío.” You can use the titles of “aunt” and “uncle” to show respect for their age as well as to indicate kinship ties. I tried to show her that I recognized her feelings about loss of a common language, cultural displacement, and a sense of respect for one’s peers and elders. As Rushin signed my copy of *This Bridge* with the words “In the spirit,” I hope that our bridges met.

From my interview, I learned that “The Bridge Poem” was added to *This Bridge* after it was in its galley form, which is a preliminary version of a book for editors, proofreaders, and reviewers. Since it was a late addition, “The Bridge Poem” appears in the front of the book. Rushin explains that Moraga and Barbara Smith organized a reading of the text in Boston before it was published, and the two asked local writers to read the work of contributors who could not attend the event. When Smith called
Rushin, she said that she had a draft of a work called “The Bridge Poem” that she wanted to share at the reading. When Rushin read the work, Moraga came up to her afterwards and asked, “Can we have that poem?” Rushin believes that her work spoke to Moraga because it encapsulated the common feelings of many women of color at the time:

The poem reflected the experiences that were had by many, many, many, women of color who were in school, in the Ivies, working in any number of organizations, working on newspapers, women’s movement projects, lesbian/gay liberation,” she shared. “I think that’s why the poem took off. That’s why, still today, I have students come up to me and say, ‘I have that poem up on my wall when I was working on my thesis.

Rushin relays that “The Bridge Poem” grew out of her experiences working as an artist-in-residence at South Boston High, watching the schools integrate amidst fervent racist protest, and living in the greater Boston community during a time of great activism. However, this poem can still clearly speak to people who live in different but no less turbulent times.

At a recent launch event for the fourth edition of This Bridge, Rushin spoke to some students (like myself) who have scribbled the lines of “The Bridge Poem” into Word Documents and scraps of paper. She told me that she joined Moraga and This Bridge contributor Mirtha Quintanales in New York City, where they participated in a question-and-answer session: “One of the questions the student asks, which is a common question, is ‘what should we be doing now?’” she says. “Our answers were something like, still writing.” When she said that “qué hacer de aquí y cómo” was “write,” it made sense to me. Through reading, building personal bridges, and writing
about those experiences, similar to the manner in which Kesiena Boom continued the discourse about *This Bridge* on *Autostraddle*, I think that this generation can ensure that *This Bridge* is continually recreated in another space. But Rushin shares that some of the students seemed disappointed with her answer: “I realized that none of us was telling the students to join a particular group, sign this petition, start a press.” Yet, those solutions are only a small step towards building an intersectional feminist practice. Rushin believes that continuing the project of *This Bridge* requires personal connections: “I would recommend that you work on a project together. Have a meal. The personal is political, and people need to talk to each other. If people are only fighting about terms, or philosophical stances, they’re never going to get to know each other. They’re never gonna connect.”

Thirty-five years after the initial publication of *This Bridge*, I asked her about the ways in which the new edition is significant. She says, “It tells me that people are still grappling with some of the same issues and dynamics that we were grappling with back then. It reaffirms, for me, that words and stories can and do have power over time and over generations.” The publication of the fourth edition, and the fact that “The Bridge Poem” still resonates with readers, demonstrates that woman of color feminist thought is more relevant than ever. Also, the new edition reminded Rushin of the powerful moment in which *This Bridge* was created: “And, I think it also reminds me how special that time was that all the elements came together in this particular time and place. Those times and places can’t be taken for granted.” Through my interview, I gained a newfound admiration for the unique temporal and affective conditions that produced *This Bridge*. While I had mostly focused on its historical antecedents in the Civil War, or in the Civil Rights Movement, I’m afraid that I did not understand the significance of the
decade that made *This Bridge*. Though I had asked Rushin for an interview to learn about the fourth edition, I came away with a better understanding of the first.

She was, however, able to elaborate on two of her poems that were added to the fourth edition of *This Bridge*. The first, “The Tired Poem: Last Letter From a Typical (Unemployed) Black Professional Woman,” was published in *Home Girls*. It describes the often fraught relations between black men and black women, as well as the weariness of a working woman of color. Rushin says that “The Tired Poem” improved, however, when the work “To Be Continued” was published right after it. Consider the ending of “The Tired Poem” and the beginning of “To Be Continued.”

Then your voice gets loud and fills the night street.

Your bus comes, the second shift people pile on.

The night watchmen and the nurse’s aides look at you like you’re crazy. “Get on the damn bus.” He turns away.

Your bus pulls off. There is no one on the street but you.

And then, it is very quiet. (“The Tired Poem, 78-83)

You didn’t think I was going to stand on that corner by myself,

(arms and legs like boards, mouth full of cement) forever, now did you?

Got myself together and grabbed the first cab I saw.

(Blew my budget for the week). (“To Be Continued,” 1-4)

Rushin thinks these poems should be published sequentially in order to end on a more hopeful note. As we were leaving, she confided, “It took me a long time to get her off the corner.” As I left the café, I thought it would be beneficial for all women of color to get off of our corners. We have to crack the cement in our mouths that prevents us from
telling off disrespectful bus drivers. We must look out for our own safety and practice self-care, even if it means blowing your budget for the week. Also, if we stay on our corners, we remain isolated from one another. It may take us a long time to get out of these lonely places – but bridging to one another is worth it.

With this thesis, I hope to accomplish what Earth, Wind, and Fire promised after they croon that “sounds never dissipate; they only recreate in another place:” “I’ll write a song for you.” I hope that the messages of This Bridge continues to resonate in my work and in my actions. But I also must continue to read the works of historical and contemporary women of color. I must listen to my classmates who actively struggle against intersectional oppression on campus. And finally, when I’m ready, I must raise my own voice to be a loving, willing, and occasionally rebellious puente.

That’s what to do from here, and how.
APPENDIX – COVER IMAGES

This Bridge Called My Back cover image (1981, 1983), artist unknown
Esta puente, mi espalda, cover image (1988), drawing by Ana Castillo
*This Bridge Called My Back* cover image (2002), featuring Ana Mendieta’s *Body Tracks* (1974)
this bridge we call home cover image (2002)
This Bridge Called My Back
Writings by Radical Women of Color
Fourth Edition
Edited by Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldúa

This Bridge Called My Back cover image (2015), artist unknown
Appendix - Works Cited


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16 I have decided to give Toni Cade Bambara’s Foreword and Kate Rushin’s “The Bridge Poem” their own citations, as I consider them to be important texts to this analysis.


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