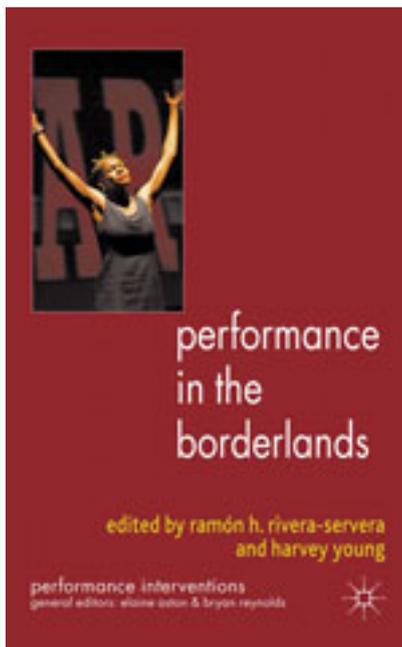


## ***Performance in the Borderlands* edited by Ramón H. Rivera-Servera and Harvey Young**

Candice Amich | Carnegie Mellon University

Rivera-Servera, Ramón H. and Harvey Young, eds. 2011. *Performance in the Borderlands*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 312 pages; \$95.00 hardcover.



An interdisciplinary gathering of theatre, literature, and cultural studies scholars, ethnomusicologists, and sociologists from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, and Puerto Rico, *Performance in the Borderlands* is itself an impressive performance in disciplinary and geographic border crossings. The collection is the product of years of collaboration across various institutions and locales, from Arizona State University where the project was originally conceived, to Northwestern University where editors Ramón H. Rivera-Servera and Harvey Young are professors in the Performance Studies and Theatre and Drama departments. In their theoretically nuanced introduction, Rivera-Servera and Young elaborate the relationship between borders, movement and embodiment, showing how performance provides an ideal lens for interrogating the complex experience of living in what Chicana feminist and poet Gloria Anzaldúa, in her groundbreaking *Borderlands/ La Frontera* (1987), theorized as a simultaneously material and psychic space of cultural collision and hybridity.

Revelatory of the experience of living and creating in the borderlands, the thematically and methodologically diverse essays that follow are united by their

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explorations of what the editors evocatively term “the border sensorium” (4). A realm in which the aesthetic and political are inseparable, “the border sensorium exceeds the artificial limits of national boundaries traveling in embodied, as well as mediatized forms, tactics, even feelings, and extending its temporality well beyond the act of crossing” (4). The border sensorium is indeed composed of a vast array of cultural forms as *Performance in the Borderlands* demonstrates in its study of sound art installations, transnational danzón competitions, balsero plays, surveillance art, spoken word poetry, lecture-performances, everyday performances, intercultural theatre, transborder dances, body art, memorial practices, migrant melodramas, and activist street theatre.

In dialogue with diaspora scholarship, the collection’s contributors establish the relevance of border theory to regions and relations beyond the U.S.-Mexico borderlands that Anzaldúa so powerfully plumbed. Elucidating the imagined and material geographies that bind and divide the U.S. and Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and Canada and its First Nations, for example, contributors examine performances of border crossing that make palpable repressed histories and gesture towards alternative futures. For instance, in his auto-ethnographic essay on intercultural dramaturgy in Toronto, Ric Knowles emphasizes the role Aboriginal cosmology played in a Kuna production in which he served as dramaturg; as a non-Native, Knowles describes the process of translation as one of manifesting a Kuna worldview that rejected Western notions of progress and of the individual as separate from nature.

Looking at border crossings both voluntary and forced, the essays demonstrate how performance makes visible and audible social realities, such as detainment and torture, which neoliberal formulations of the ‘free’ present occlude. In essays that range from the contemporary moment, such as Patrick Anderson’s article on the architecture of a Guantánamo Bay detention camp, to earlier instances of indigenous and anticolonial struggle, as in Harvey Young’s piece on the Trail of Tears and memorial practices, historical memory is activated as a force against neoliberal erasure. This extension of a borderlands approach advances the aims of hemispheric performance studies as a field that innovatively recasts colonial histories in order to gauge and transform neocolonial realities. What is made evident across the individual essays—which are reliably thick in description and dense in theoretical rigor—is the way in which a performance lens counters the abstractions of globalization discourse. From the cross-border choreographies of Minerva Tapia, whose dances embody both the trauma and pleasures of border living in José Manuel Valenzuela’s essay, to popular melodramatic forms that sentimentalize, and thus obscure, the witnessing of migrant suffering in Ana Elena Puga’s piece, these essays collectively map an alternative geography of the Americas. Refusing the historical amnesia of NAFTA, CAFTA and other free trade agreements that image an even terrain of commerce, *Performance in the Borderlands* traces the open wounds of uneven development.

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The exciting and persistent refiguring of border thinking that occurs throughout the volume is especially compelling in Patricia Ybarra's essay, in which she deftly wields borderlands theory to reposition Cuban America drama. Essays like Ybarra's implicitly argue that ethnic American literatures, rather than minority literatures confined to the borders of the U.S., are best approached as transnational texts that formally explore problems of inclusion and exclusion, alienation and dispossession, and language and migration relevant to all cultures formed under the pressures of multinational capitalism. This assertion of multicultural performance as central to our understanding of the "border sensorium," as well as the sustained focus on embodiment, make *Performance in the Borderlands* an excellent resource for courses that interrogate globalization discourse through the study of literary and/or performance texts.

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**Candice Amich** is an A.W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities at Carnegie Mellon University, where she teaches courses in transnational American studies. Her research interests include poetry and performance of the Americas, feminist studies and globalization studies. She has articles published and forthcoming in *Modern Drama*, *Theatre Research International*, and *The Global South*.