

1 | *Introduction*

It might have been a town plaza somewhere in Mexico. Hundreds of Latinos gathered in the shady park on an afternoon in late July, speaking Spanish, listening to Mexican music, eating tamales, dancing in *cumbia* and *duranguense* contests. Children jumped in the bounce house, had their faces painted, watched a clown perform, and played games, vying for the prizes donated by local merchants. A large group of women demonstrated Zumba, the Colombian dance fitness program. Off to the side of the main stage, a man in cowboy boots and a cowboy hat performed lasso tricks.

Here and there, one could spot someone who appeared Anglo, or overhear two people speaking English to each other. They gathered around the table where hand-sewn crafts were being sold, taking comfort in the familiar act of purchasing. A few Anglos with children participated in the activities, but most stayed on the periphery. One of these Anglos was none other than Sioux County Sheriff Dan Altena, who up to this time—July 29, 2012—was widely perceived to be hostile to Latinos. The sheriff's office has a reputation for cooperation with immigration officials, resulting in the deportation of many people, most likely family members of some of the people gathered here at Central Park in Sioux Center. Yet here was Altena, dressed in his street clothes, attending

the *carnaval* with his wife at the invitation of the Latino Health Coalition. The coalition is a group of local Latinas who organized the fair to raise money and to create a space where Anglos and Latinos might interact and Anglos might learn something about Latino culture. They were hoping many more Anglos would attend, and they invited Altena after he came to one of their meetings and said he wanted to understand their concerns, to know if they were afraid to call the police, and to find out what he could do to build trust between the Latino community and law enforcement.¹

The *carnaval* offers a snapshot of the current conditions in north-west Iowa as these two cultures come together. The Latino population that started moving here twenty years ago is now becoming a community: organizing their own events and running their own businesses. Driving down main street on the way to the park, one sees Olivia's, a Mexican bakery that sells *pastel tres leches*, tamales, *flanes*, *pastes*; the San Jose *tienda* that sells everything from cowboy boots to *chicharrones* to Mexican music CDs; and the Tortilleria Saucedo that sells fresh tortillas. In town, there is also a large Spanish-language Catholic church as well as a combined Anglo/Latino Protestant church, Amistad Cristiana. The elementary school in this town of 7,000 is now 30 percent Latino. An adult soccer league with almost all Latino teams and a couple of Anglo teams draws large crowds all spring and summer. The schedule for May 24, 2012, was as follows: Dutchmen versus Club Deportivo, Marquessa versus Panteras, Sevilla versus Lobos #1, Prins versus Santos.

The Latino Health Coalition also recognizes the factors that inhibit Latinos from getting involved in community building. The hand-sewn crafts being sold at the *carnaval* were made by undocumented women, organized by one of the coalition's leaders, Susy Romero, who explains the principle: Even though "not having a social security number limits your ability to work, you are still very important" and can still make money. This collective self-sufficiency is a powerful response to the vulnerability and fear generated by the local police, as represented at the *carnaval* in the person of Sheriff Altena—and in the two police cars that circle the park. Yet Altena is not interested in law enforcement today, or at least not in arresting anybody. He wants to learn something about Latino culture; he is one of the relatively few Anglos to actually seek a face-to-face encounter. In fact, he is trying to figure out how, under the

auspices of the Obama administration's Secure Communities Act, he can both cooperate with immigration officials in apprehending "criminal threats" and ensure Latinos that he sees them as neighbors who are just as deserving of community status as anyone else. He is tired of being called a racist, say people who have met with him.²

Anglos and Latinos are co-existing, often without interacting. A survey taken by students at Northwestern College found that of the 200 people interviewed (191 of whom were Anglo and 99 percent of whom identified as Christian), about 75 percent said Sioux County is generally a welcoming place to immigrants, and 70 percent said immigrants "strengthen the community." However, "87.8 percent said they have no Hispanic friends outside of the workplace" (Hacker). Yet in a small town, encounters are inevitable. Everyday spaces, such as parks, schools, businesses, and churches, are the sites of these encounters, and invariably, inexorably, the possibility arises that one might actually experience a singular encounter with a person of another race.

These dynamics exist, in different permutations, across the United States, yet Sioux Center is perhaps unique in that, until the early 1990s, it was almost entirely Anglo, Dutch, and Reformed. Tucked into the northwest corner of Iowa, both Sioux Center and Orange City, ten miles down the road, have served as "capitals" of Dutch culture and the Reformed Church faith since their founding by Dutch immigrants around 1870. They have flourished as agricultural centers, with the pork packing plant and many dairy farms managing to avoid large corporate buyouts and the economy prospering, with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.³ They have also historically been Republican strongholds; Sioux County has the highest percentage of Republican voters of any county in the United States, and Rep. Steve King, the virulent anti-immigrant congressman in Washington, has represented this area for ten years. Although not Dutch and not Reformed, King espouses a similar kind of Christian conservatism; he has been seen wearing a T-shirt that says "Who Would Jesus Deport?" For him the answer is obvious: all "illegal aliens."

As Latinos slowly started moving into the county and staying, Sioux Center began its soul searching. Would the town "welcome the stranger," as religious denominations across the country who argue for immigration reform say Jesus exhorted? Or would it enforce the "rule

of law,” maintaining its reliance on the imbrication of church, business, and state (the same trio that administered apartheid in South Africa)? This is an area, after all, that historically has believed that its Republican politics are sanctioned by God. These linkages were seen in an August 2010 town forum in which Carl Zylstra, the president of Dordt, the Christian Reformed Church college in Sioux Center, welcomed the guest speaker, Steve King, with this comment, “While many of us may have ideas about how to run the government, you’re the one who serves in the name of the Lord.”

This imbrication is no longer taken for granted. It is being questioned by Anglo activists in the town who have taken a strong position in support of the newcomers and by Latinos, some of whom have taken on leadership roles and begun their own organizing, such as the Latino Health Coalition. Yet major obstacles inhibit the unmediated face-to-face encounter, most prominently the fact that the majority of Latinos are undocumented, which restricts their movement into various public spaces and causes some Anglos to oppose their integration. Legal status is linked to work, and many of the employers want this low-wage labor force and have criticized law enforcement for racial profiling that leads to the deportation of their employees. The central question, says Gianni Gracia, minister at the Amistad Cristiana church, is whether Latinos will be able to claim a belonging *not* based purely on their identity as workers—or as beneficiaries of Christian benevolence—both of which deny their agency. The struggle is a political one, he says, because although many Anglos here “have a good heart and try to be good Christians, when they pass through the structures, it’s a different story.” These structures are both economic and political. For example, Gracia says, “people vote for Steve King yet send money to Amistad” without apparently seeing the contradictions between, for example, a xenophobic congressman and a congregation of immigrants, or between the belief in capitalist free enterprise and economic justice for those on the margins. Gracia puts it succinctly: “How do you combine the American dream with the Kingdom of God?”⁴

Sioux Center’s story is unusual, insofar as there is no other place in the world that has been constituted by this particular, somewhat unusual set of circumstances. However, it also stands as a representative account of our contemporary world, illustrating the histories, complex-

ities, and possibilities of transnational migrations. *Intimate Encounters* considers these dynamics at a seemingly contradictory moment in terms of Latinos and Latin Americans in the United States. On the one hand, this is a time of intensified deportations,⁵ border militarization, and state and local attempts to regulate immigration, as has been demonstrated most dramatically in the passage of anti-immigration laws in the states of Arizona and Alabama. The undocumented immigrant is no longer the anonymous dishwasher or nanny but rather appears as the highly publicized face of the “illegal alien.”

On the other hand, this is a time of increased integration of Latinos—both indigenous to the U.S. and newly arrived from Latin America—in parts of the country that have never before had a Latino population. Between 2000 and 2010, while the overall Latino population in the United States grew by 43 percent, the Latino population in the Midwest increased by 49 percent, more than twelve times the growth of the total population in the Midwest; the South’s Latino population increased by 57 percent, four times the growth of the total population. In Iowa, the Latino population grew by 84 percent between 2000 and 2010. Much of this population increase has occurred in rural areas, marking a significant departure from prior years in which the majority of U.S. immigrants settled in urban areas; for example, in Sioux County, the Latino population grew almost fourfold—from 808 Latinos in 2000 to 3,060 in 2011 (9.2 percent of the total).⁶ Drawn by employment opportunities in agriculture and meatpacking, Latinos have settled in small and medium-size towns across the Midwest. In some places, the transformation has been especially dramatic, as editors of the book *Apple Pie and Enchiladas* note: “Small towns such as Waterloo, Marshalltown, and Columbus Junction in Iowa; Lexington, Nebraska; and Garden City, Kansas, located in the midst of hog and cattle country, have seen their Latino population grow from about 4 percent to upwards of 50 percent in less than ten years” (Chapa et al. 47).

In both instances—that of policing and that of belonging—subjects, Anglo and Latino, citizen and undocumented, interact intimately, creating the possibility of friendship, community, and desire, all generated by the vulnerability of face-to-face contact. Perhaps Anglo residents allow themselves the vulnerability of the face-to-face encounter that occurs in church, at school, or at a park. Perhaps Latino residents suspend,

momentarily, their expectation of racial profiling. Perhaps goodwill is enhanced by the fact that Latinos are reinvigorating the economy in many of these places. In 2000, for example, then-Governor Tom Vilsack appointed a task force to help him make Iowa the “Ellis Island of the Midwest”; the state established Diversity Welcome Centers to assist new residents and attempted, unsuccessfully, to gain status as an “immigration enterprise zone,” which would have freed it from constraints of federal immigration quotas. Latino migration to many small towns has led to economic revitalization, according to Chapa et al.: “a stable market for farmers, growth in local business, strengthening of community organizations, revitalization of local schools, and tax base expansion” (50). While acceptance has been uneven, researchers have found that rural areas do not necessarily conform to the stereotype of the “backward small town.” Younger people have been especially open to cultural changes, concluded Celeste Lay in her study of two towns in Iowa that have seen dramatic increases in the Latino population. In both Storm Lake and Perry, Lay found that “over time, native adolescents in ethnically diverse rural communities began to accept and welcome newcomers” (2).

Yet elsewhere in the United States, Latino migration has been met with rage, hatred, and xenophobia. In some places, hatred has been linked to the scapegoating of Latinos for economic woes, such as those that exist in the formerly bustling coal and railroad towns of Pennsylvania, a state that has seen a spate of anti-immigrant ordinances passed and hate crimes committed. The rage is embodied in the formation of the Minutemen paramilitary vigilante groups, who have taken it upon themselves to patrol the U.S.-Mexican border since the federal government, they say, can’t do an adequate job of enforcing “the rule of law.” The xenophobia is encoded in the passage, by hundreds of local and state governments, of ordinances that make it illegal for employers to hire and for landlords to rent to undocumented people. In 2010 and 2011 alone, 164 anti-immigration laws were passed, and in 2010 alone, five states (Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina, and Utah) passed anti-immigrant bills modeled after Arizona’s 2010 draconian law, SB 1070 (Shore). In the five years from 2003 through 2007, the number of hate crimes reported against Latinos increased nearly 40 percent, from 426 in 2003 to 595 in 2007 (“Confronting”).

Despite their obvious divergences, both compassion and rage rely on proximity and intimacy, effected through the transgression of many different kinds of boundaries. Face-to-face encounters may lead to relationships that cross and complicate the categories that are necessary to maintain the status quo: black versus white, straight versus gay, legal versus “illegal,” and so on. Consider what is happening now in the United States as a result, in part, of migration: more interracial marriages, more mixed-race children, more transracial and transnational adoptions, more family formations, in different combinations of gay, straight, trans, extended, documented, undocumented, and so forth. Migration has produced a new category of *mestizaje*: the “mixed legal status” family, most often composed of citizen children born in the United States and at least one undocumented parent. As of 2010, at least one child in ten in the United States lived in a mixed-status family; in the 6.6 million families with at least one undocumented parent, two-thirds of the children were U.S. citizens. Of these parents, 1.5 million have only U.S.-born citizen children and no children who are not U.S. citizens. And legal status cannot be divided simply into citizen and noncitizen; there are many variations, often within families, including legal permanent residents and others with different kinds of temporary legal permits.

Academic scholars have begun addressing these forms of intimacy and desire, arguing that migration studies should deal not just with large-scale systems—politics, economics, religion, government—and their myriad institutional forms but also with these more everyday forms of embodiment and practice. Not only are the global, national, and local intertwined—a now commonplace assertion—but so are the intimate forms of desire that are more fleeting and hard to document. Describing the emergent field of transnational sexuality studies in a special issue of *GLQ* in 1999, editors Elizabeth Povinelli and George Chauncey remark:

Whatever its current focus, globalization assaults more than the self-evident nature of the local and national. It queries the commonsense referent of the proximate and the intimate, the subject and her space and time of being, and thus her forms and practices of desire. Globalization studies asks a fundamental question: where are the intimate and proximate spaces in which persons become subjects of embodied practices and times of desire? (443)

Similarly, Svetlana Boym addresses the seemingly contradictory spatial notions of intimacy and diaspora when she posits the notion of a “diasporic intimacy,” which, she says, is “not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it” (227). Writing about Russian immigrants in the United States, Boym describes their attempt to reconstruct a home as one always defined by a complex relationship with one’s prior home and with the entire “historical topography” of both spaces: “While intimate experiences are personal and singular, the maps of intimate sites are socially recognizable; they are encoded as refuges of the individual” (228). The desire we express in our most intimate spaces is constituted by migrations and movements that are in turn determined by global forces. Yet it is important to note as well that what happens in these intimate spaces can also reconstitute, at least partially and across time, global forces.

The form of the family, for example, has been changed drastically by globalization, as family members disperse across the world to find work, often leaving children in their home countries with relatives or friends. Several scholars have written extensively about the phenomenon of transnational mothering—the practice that has emerged as mothers from many poorer countries have sought work in wealthier countries and have had to develop ways to continue to mother the children left behind. As Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo and Ernestina Avila write, “Being a transnational mother means more than being the mother to children raised in another country. It means forsaking deeply felt beliefs that biological mothers should raise their own children, and replacing that belief with new definitions of motherhood” (256). Because mothering cannot be practiced through everyday physical contact, it has to be redefined through other forms of intimacy—telephone calls, texting, and e-mails—as well as sending money, clothing, and other material necessities. The working mothers become the primary source of support, thus replacing the fathers and diluting patriarchal structures. These new forms, however, should not be romanticized, say Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, for the mothers “experience the absence of domestic family life as a deeply personal loss” (260).

Migration is also partially responsible for the growing number of mixed-race marriages and unions in the United States; one in fifteen marriages is now interracial, and the number of biracial and multiracial

children is increasing.⁷ The face of the mixed-race person is perhaps the most visible reminder that racial identity categories are disintegrating, a promising development to some and a threatening one to others. On the promising front: Barack Obama is president, the census since 2000 has allowed people to check more than one racial category, and popular culture is fascinated by the “racially ambiguous person.” In fact, in December 2003, “the *New York Times* celebrated ‘generation E.A.: Ethnically Ambiguous’ as members of society’s hip new A-list, hailing racially mixed people as ambassadors to a new world order, the fashionable imprimatur of modernity” (Elam xiii). And in 2012, the *New York Times* reported on a new twist to Obama’s biracial identity—researchers at ancestry.com had uncovered strong evidence to suggest that his mother, “in addition to her European ancestors, had at least one African forebear,” a man named John Punch, who was “one of the first African slaves” in the United States (Stolberg). In fact, “more Americans are discovering their own mixed-race heritage,” due to popular sites such as ancestry.com (Stolberg).

Despite the fact that mixed families transgress the rigid lines of identity categories, there is nothing *inherently* liberating about them, since they do not exist in a vacuum but rather in a society where many people cling to these categories. In some ways, the valorization of mixed-race people constitutes another permutation of racism against darker-skinned blacks, argues Michele Elam. And as George Sanchez says, “Racial mixing has never in itself destroyed racial privilege, as the place of Africans and natives throughout nearly all Latin American countries has proved. Moreover, new racial formations out of mixed-race people, such as the mestizos who make up the vast majority of Mexicans in this country and to the south, are ever-present possibilities that certainly change the meaning of race, but not necessarily the privilege of whiteness in our society” (279). This cautionary note notwithstanding, I hope to demonstrate that the unexpected intimacies produced through movement—intimacies that cross racial, sexual, religious, and other lines—do represent an optimistic alternative to conventional forms of family and community.

It is precisely this transformation in the domestic sphere and other places close to home that provokes such anger and xenophobia among some people, especially those for whom the “family” is the foundation of the “nation.” For example, the group Mothers Against Illegal Aliens was founded by Michelle Dallacrocce of Arizona in 2006 with the motto:

“Protect Our Children, Secure Our Borders!” In 2010, they renamed themselves Mothers Against Illegal Amnesty and have focused their campaign on so-called “anchor babies,” seeking to overturn the constitutional right of anyone born in the United States to claim citizenship. Seemingly oblivious to their racist rhetoric—or perhaps proud of it—they object to the “impure” nature of these “mixed” legal status families, and they have helped to spearhead a national campaign against automatic citizenship rights being granted to babies born on U.S. soil.

The legacy of anti-miscegenation laws and discourse is painfully present. For example, in Chapter 6 I recount the story of Luis Ramirez, who came from Mexico to make his home in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, where he got engaged to and had children with an Anglo woman. In July 2008, Ramirez was beaten to death by a group of local Anglo youth, who shouted at him to “go back to Mexico;” the event began when the teenagers came upon Ramirez sitting in a park with a young white woman late on a Friday night. The first comment one of them made—what started the whole attack—was a question to the young woman, “Isn’t it a little late for you to be out?” Ramirez apparently had violated the sexual code of conduct; he was acting as if there was nothing wrong with sitting on a swing in a local park with a white girl. During the beating, one of the teens said to another white woman who had arrived with her Latino husband to help Ramirez, “You tell your fucking Mexican friends to get the fuck out of Shenandoah or you’re going to be fucking laying next to him.” Although a jury in a state court acquitted all accused of murder and ethnic intimidation, two of the youth were later convicted in federal court of hate crimes, and another pled guilty to violating Ramirez’s civil rights—specifically, his right to live in the town without fear of physical violence due to his race. As the U.S. government’s prosecuting attorney said in the sentencing portion of the federal trial, “A person has a right to live in the town where they want to live, to walk around where they want to walk around, without fear that the color of their skin will somehow subject them to violence. And that’s what happened in this case. Mr. Ramirez’s race is the reason that he is dead. His race is the reason that two children are without their father” (*United States v. Piekarsky and Donchak*).

The mixed-race body, or the mixed-legal body—and those two are all too easily conflated—is too intimate for some people, too much a

visible sign of the dissolution of racial and national borders. As Elam writes, mixed-race people “represent the reference point, the very nexus of cultural collision, conflicts, and conjoinings” (54). The closeness—the “bareness,” the visceral intimacy, of the migrant face may prompt a murderous rage. The moment of the face-to-face encounter prompts a recognition of shared humanity that the xenophobe cannot tolerate or sustain—for to recognize the Other in the Self is too threatening to one’s sense of “who I am.” These reactions may be more common in places where Latinos are moving in significant numbers for the first time, especially places where the economy is floundering and longtime residents are looking for scapegoats.

Levinas uses the concept of the face-to-face encounter to articulate an ethics, which, for him, is the way to define religious faith. As he says, “I do not want to define anything through God because it is the human that I know. It is God that I can define through human relations and not the inverse” (1996, 29). Levinas rejected the ontological, the idea that religion is about a way of being acquired through one’s belief in a static and authoritarian God. Rather, for Levinas, religion is about an ethics formed out of how one relates to the other, and this “Other” does not exist as a concept or within a category but rather in his or her singularity. I shall explain this philosophy more below, linking it to the growing number of encounters produced through migration, which are, in turn, compelling institutions such as the Reformed Church to rethink their definitions of faith and their categories of the Other. What does it mean for the Reformed Church and other denominations facing similar immigration-related issues to define God not through far-flung missionary efforts but through the building of community with subjects previously considered “Other”?

I will also explore below, and throughout this book, the connection between religious faith, desire, and the body. As flows of migration intensify, the intimacy of the body of the Other—the desire for the Other—is increasingly encountered as an everyday phenomenon, still subject to regulation and exploitation but also leading to the rearticulation of identity categories. The mixtures—between races, between English and Spanish speaking, between documented and undocumented, between Protestant and Catholic—producing children of mixed race, language, religious beliefs, and legal status should be sought after, nurtured, and

sustained. In the next two sections, I will lay out this theory of intimacy, relying on the work of both Levinas and feminist theologian Grace Jantzen, who critiques the authoritarianism of Calvinism and seeks instead a faith that embraces the body's desires.

On Levinas

I want to return to the quote from Levinas I referenced in the preface: “The nudity of the face is a bareness without any cultural ornament, an absolution, a detachment from its form in the midst of the production of its form” (1996, 53). What happens in the moment of face-to-face contact—in that fleeting moment when the face is detached from the production of its form? In the case of the migrant face, the production of its form is almost always as “Other.” What, then, is the alternative to Othering that exists in the vulnerability of the face?

The nudity of the face exists outside of, or pre-exists, categorization. The other face *does* belong to someone distinct, different, potentially unsettling—yet this difference does not belong to an ontological category but rather, more specifically, to the intense singularity of that one person. The relationship that is made possible by the face-to-face contact is one of pure experience; that possibility is lost when one begins to think about the Other in terms of a concept, something abstract. As Levinas says, “Not only because knowledge of the other requires, outside of all curiosity, also sympathy or love, ways of being distinct from impossible contemplation, but because in our relation with the other, he does not affect us in terms of a concept” (1996, 6). Levinas acknowledges how difficult it is to achieve this realm of pure experience—yet how, nevertheless, it occurs and must be sought after, hopefully sustained for its particularity rather than for its symbolic meaning: “The person with whom I am in relation I call being, but in so calling him, I call to him. I do not only think that he is, I speak to him . . . I have spoken to him, that is to say, I have neglected the universal being that he incarnates in order to remain with the particular being he is” (1996, 7). To remain with the “particular being” is not to deny difference, but it is to deny *categories* of difference. The relationship that ensues is richer, fuller, and more embodied because it does not rely on stereotypes or assumptions but rather on the sensuality of that particular encounter.

The self is constantly produced through these interactions with others; for Levinas, there is no self outside of these relationships. The production of the self is therefore ongoing and dependent, an unsettling yet invigorating process that constantly exposes one to the pleasure of new intimacies as well as the pain that others experience. This production occurs most powerfully through the face-to-face encounter because the face is the most open and telling part of each person. To look someone directly in the face is to undermine any sense of self-certainty. Think about staring directly into someone's eyes without flinching, without pretense. Consider how difficult it is to allow that direct contact to occur, without glancing away or dissembling or changing the subject. Consider how rarely we allow these kinds of encounters to happen because we fear the consequences.

For Levinas, this lack of mediation between faces produces (though it also may lead elsewhere) an ethical response, since the face, temporarily abstracted from the rest of life, causes one to feel compelled to see the other in his or her nudity, abstracted from all protection, vulnerable to joy and pain, to life and death. And if it is pain the other is feeling, then the response should be the desire to help, for that person represents nothing threatening but rather the possibility of life itself. To deny assistance to someone in need is to deny one's own vulnerability. "To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question," Levinas says. "In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other. The ethical rapport with the face is asymmetrical in that it subordinates my existence to the other" (1986, 24).

Such vulnerability does not require comprehension of the totality of the other; in fact, it works against comprehension in the form of closure. As Jantzen says, glossing Levinas, "The face is a living face, the disclosure of another person whose manifestation can never be settled or finalized once and for all, since as long as a person lives she is always more than any definable set of manifestations, always moving beyond" (237). The key to ethics is an openness to the experiences of others, a refusal to understand them in terms of pre-existing knowledge, an embrace of the specific embodiment of each person. Because, for Levinas, again, this is the definition of God, it suggests a religious faith premised on the

everyday incarnation of God in each person. Belief in God does not derive from an intellectual awareness or a spiritual awakening but rather from a material, sensual practice of encountering the Other. As Jantzen interprets Levinas:

The epiphany of the face, then, calls for ethical response, ethical responsibility. But in that move away from ontological verities, away from creeds and beliefs (what Levinas often refers to as ‘consciousness’), I myself lose self-certainty and self-assured mastery, confronted with an Other which calls my categories into question by not fitting tidily into them: “The Other becomes my neighbour precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.” (237)

It is by calling one’s own self into question—through that “disorientation”—that new possibilities for intimacy and pleasure arise (Jantzen 237).

This book recovers some of those fleeting moments of the face-to-face encounter. It analyzes why and how they so quickly and often devastatingly dissipate and what might need to happen for them to be sustained into a more prolonged kind of intimacy. Intimacy requires the breaking down of boundaries between self and other—a breaking down made possible by the geographical crossing of boundaries. Yet questions remain: Does physically crossing one border, coming into contact with new people and possibly forming communities and relationships, challenge the structures of power that made the border crossing both difficult and necessary? And what if the people one meets are themselves partially responsible or at least complicit with the structures of power that made one move in the first place? Can intimacies still be formed? And how can differences be maintained without assuming a categorical nature?