

Spectral Materialisms:
Colonial Complexes and the Insurgent Acts of Chicana/o Cultural Production

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Dedication

I can't stop loving you

I've made up my mind

—Ray Charles

For *mis abuelos* Josephine Merla Martin and Ty Harold Martin who have taught me how to love generously and how we love *despite...*

Abstract

This dissertation uses an interdisciplinary lens to theorize the multiple ways in which contemporary forms of Chicana/o cultural production disturb and extend beyond specific “colonial complexes” or seemingly ossified compounds of time and space. Specifically, I examine how Chicana feminist theory in conjunction with Marxian and poststructuralist theory; the literary work of Bárbara Renaud González and Sandra Cisneros; the folklore of La Llorona; the urban legend and social performance of San Antonio’s Ghost Tracks; and the visual art of the collaborative Project MASA (MeChicana/o Alliance of Space Artists) disrupt, redistribute, and surge beyond colonial cartographies, re-imagining and enacting alternative horizons of possibility or decolonial imaginaries. I ground my study in San Antonio, Texas, whose Chicana/o cultural production and neo-colonial geography has received scant scholarly attention, to bring to the fore both the specificity of colonial legacies and to connect these legacies to larger neo-colonial (trans)national geographies.

I engage and extend diverse theorizations of the ghostly—or, that is, the contingent and ephemeral structures of desire, difference, history, lived experience, and memory—to bring into purview how colonial legacies inhere in the present and collectively enunciate what I term a “spectral materialism”: that which is profoundly felt and experienced, but not necessarily visible or intelligible through language. I further argue that although this spectral materialism is animated by particular cultural and socio-spatial logics, it also gestures toward a more general embodied form of knowledge production that acknowledges the ways in which the ostensibly immaterial always already imbues the material world. This dissertation, finally, intervenes in

Chicana/o, Latina/o, and American Studies through critiquing the dialectic (a dominant analytic for ascertaining meaning from cultural production) as a binary colonialist ontology that severs the material from the immaterial, as well as articulates a more supple, complex, and inductive analytic for understanding how Chicana/o cultural production generates meaning through lived experience and indexes the potential for other postcolonial futures.

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Introduction

The Socially Spectral and Chicana/o Cultural Production

“To write stories concerning exclusions is to write ghost stories.” —Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*

It is the late 1960s in El Toro, California and my *abuelita* lies fast asleep, just miles away from the U.S. Marine base that employed my grandfather who was stationed at Thirty Nine Palms just north in the high desert. She hears the dog in the backyard cry and whimper and scuffle—and then nothing. As quick as the flashing light in the backyard appears, a paralysis saturates her body like an invisible stranglehold. She could not move, could not speak. Words and body held in abeyance, she could only force her eyes open to bear witness through *a film of blue* to alien figures that seemed to linger and float just beyond her window in the backyard against the backdrop of some strange spacecraft. What for her seemed an eternity, the grasp finally relented, bright lights faded, strange figures receded, and she was able to scream, to hear her own voice that called for her adolescent daughter, my mother, who, in trying to be calm and rational, surmised that perhaps it was just a burglary. And although my *abuelita*, who is so certain of what she has seen with her own eyes and experienced through her crawling flesh, her own choked throat and stiff limbs, tells the police a another version, one more palatable coming from a brown woman: someone must have tried to break in while she was fast asleep and consequently scared her. However, as much as the police diligently search the backyard for traces, any clue of misdemeanor, they find nothing to help them file an official report.

My grandmother, along with the chorus of other women of my family, has taught me about ghosts, marginal figures that are never content to remain on the edges, but invisibly animate and disturb the center. And while I know that my *abuelita*'s strange stories, populated by ghosts, aliens, the otherworldly, do not make sense within registers of true and false, those spectral figures who reside somewhere in between make the hair on the back of my neck stand up, my chest tight, and give me *susto*. I know her ghosts mean something, not fully articulated, but on the threshold enunciation—yet tangible. She tells other ghost stories too, like those about being poor, brown, and ashamed growing up in the 1930s and 40s in San Antonio, Texas. These spectral lived experiences, and her transmission of them, connect us within a complex web of meaning, history, and space. Her visions of aliens and ghost stories become mine (but never mine wholly or mine alone), pulsate in my blood, and vivify this dissertation project.

To write the least, knowledge production, how it is we come to understand and engage the world around us, is *complex*, that is, contingently composed of various constituent elements, material and immaterial. Challenging as well as building upon interdisciplinary conversations concerning the ghostly or specterly, this dissertation articulates through various forms of Chicana/o cultural production from San Antonio, Texas, a “spectral materialism” that is both culturally and spatially specific as well as names the way in which the material world is always already haunted and invisibly, yet palpably, animated by the so-called immaterial: what is not immediately legible to the empirical eye. While I attempt to release knowledge production from its putative

ontological moorings, I also acknowledge how knowledge production is real, profoundly felt or affectively known, and rooted in particular historical and socio-political spaces. It is through this tension between fact and fiction, true and false, this liminal space, this Borderlands, that ghosts, my *abuelita*'s aliens, manifest and make themselves known, albeit only partially legibly.

Specifically, utilizing interdisciplinary and even anti-disciplinary methodologies, this dissertation mines the overlapping imaginative and material terrains of Chicana/o cultural production, including literature, folklore and urban legend, social performance, and visual art, to bring to the fore the diverse lived experiences of specific colonial legacies haunting the San Antonio, Texas, and the larger Southwest as well as to unearth the very “coloniality of power,” a totalizing, proprietary, closed, and colonial way of knowing. I argue, further, that this creative corpus works to pierce through this coloniality of knowledge production through its collective articulation of a culturally specific “spectral materialism” that critically bridges the sacred and profane, the embodied and ghostly, the past, present and futures—as well as deluges and dissolves these putative borders.

I critique and extend the diverse work of Avery Gordon, Gloria Anzaldúa, Jacques Derrida, Laura Pérez, Edward Soja, and Walter D. Mignolo, among others in ethnic, feminist, and postcolonial studies, whose collective work theorizes, I argue, the multiple ways in which the colonial past meaningfully inflects or haunts the neo-colonial present by exigently signaling the need to generate a more complex account of materiality and

materialism that makes space for that which may exceed normative frames of understanding and experience—that is, the ghostly. This dissertation thus extends in productive ways the recent “material turn” in critical theory, conversations concerning the valorization of “lived experience” and “post-positivist realism” in ethnic and cultural studies, as well as intervenes more generally in historical materialism and radical social theory.

The analytic framework of spectral materialism, moreover, intervenes in and offers an alternative critical lens to the dialectic within Chicana/o cultural and literary studies, one that is more supple and open so as to comprehend, although sometimes only *partially*, the complex and variegated relationships between text, identity, history, meaning, social transformation, and knowledge production. Specifically, I critique the dialectic as a hermeneutic that forecloses in advance the very possibility of the ghostly, of other possible materialities or lived experiences, through its emphasis on binaries, an epistemological mechanism of “divide and conquer.” In its stead, to reiterate, I offer here a more pliable and complex analysis of lived experience in relationship to social transformation that makes visible, without wholly consuming, the immaterial aspects of history, memory, space, and ethnic identity.

Spectral Materialism: Toward a New Historical (Im)Materialism

Placing into conversation diverse scholarship on the ghostly or socially spectral, I assert that spectral materialism, which, to reiterate, announces the ways in which the material is always already imbued with the immaterial, or, conversely, the ways in

which the immaterial is material, is both particular and “universal,” thereby refusing the certainty of and undermining these very categories. Unlike dialectical and historical materialisms, which strive toward singular and unified narratives, spectral materialism refuses Truth claims and underscores the specific cultural and spatial logics of knowledge production (or the production of history and literature), while also signaling how knowledge production is always to some extent uncertain and contestable, shadowed and disturbed by its specters. Through the diverse scholarship of Avery Gordon (1997), Kathleen Brogan (1998), and Jacques Derrida (1994, 1999), I assemble a general theory of the ghostly or a spectral materialism that attends modern social life. Through this scholarship I highlight how the ghostly is both de- and re-constructive—and may significantly function as a figure of hope and futurity. I then proceed to dialogue this scholarship with that of Chicana/o Studies in order to draw out and expand Chicana/o Studies’s grammar of haunting as well as to indicate how the ghostly is informed by particular histories, desires, and bodies. What this collective body of scholarship attests to, I contend, is how modern social life and its “ghostly matters” exceeds the putative parameters of historical materialism and the dialectic. The ghostly is excessive, unruly, and partial. Spectral materialism, as I argue in the last section, provides a partial, and therefore uncomfortable, as well as a complex and contingent reading practice or “third space” methodology, a mode of making sense, of affectively knowing, the ghostly. The ghostly insists, consequently, that we push and pressure the limits of our own knowledge production, of the lifeworlds we tenant and call home.

In her pivotal text *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, sociologist Avery Gordon (1997) valorizes the figure of the ghost or “ghostly matters” as a legitimate “object” or topic for sociological analysis, particularly in literature. Gordon writes, “Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it” (7). Haunting is that which is not easily recognizable or intelligible through language or the critical vocabulary of the social sciences. But it is not merely absence or a reactionary “return of the oppressed.” Gordon elaborates that

the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as transformative recognition. (8)

The figure of the ghost thus elides binaries of subject and object, material and immaterial. It invisibly contours lived experience. And to experience and embody this ghostly knowledge—that is, to incorporate and factor it into the complex and variegated processes of knowledge production or how it is we come to know, experience, and *be* in the world as well as how we understand ourselves in relationship to others--comprises “transformative recognition.” Understanding and accounting for how the visible world

is animated by unseen forces, or that may never be wholly assimilable and knowable, instantiates a “principle of uncertainty” (Said 1993) or the tenet that we cannot ever wholly or absolutely know the past, but that we certainly get glimpses of it through revelatory flashes or “transformative recognition.”

The ghostly, the seemingly immaterial, then, is in fact profoundly material, and shakes up our most sacred ontological moorings. Although seemingly incorporeal and insubstantial, Gordon argues further that ghostly matters are not simply epiphenomenal of ‘objective material conditions,’ but rather “is itself a historical materialism with its own particular mode of causality that does not usually look very much like context, influence, reflection. It looks like a structure of feeling” (198). Williams’s “structures of feeling,” Gordon continues, addresses “three problems with our most common modes of social and cultural analysis” (198) through foregrounding how lived experience is processual rather than “fixed”; the “social nature” or “texture” of subjective experience (199); and the liminal or not fully-formed or “articulate” quality of the “living present” or the material “tangle” (200) between the personal and the social. Gordon thus concludes that Williams’s structure of feeling functions as “sensuous knowledge” of historical materialism or “the historical materiality of the tangle” (200). In other words, recognizing that the subjective and personal as well as the objective and social are not mutually exclusive and cannot be confined to the parameters of the past, but rather must be approached through the ongoing process of the present allows for the analysis of the “tangle” wherein the personal and social are always already implicated in one another.

As well, the ghostly, in Gordon's formulation, indexes the way in which context is ghostly: complex and inorganic, contingently composed.

The analytic of the tangle or what Gordon also terms "complex personhood" thus refutes knowledge as static and always readily accessible but instead as mutable, contestable, and contradictory. Literary studies scholar Kathleen Brogan (1998) similarly argues in her study of "cultural haunting" in U.S. ethnic literature that "the stories in haunted literature...tend to be tacit, multiple, conflicting, or unfinished; meaning and identity are not established securely and transparently" (18). Both Gordon and Brogan thus highlight not only the spectral quality of identity and lived experience but also more generally the immaterial aspects of what we usually consider material and ontological.

In *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and The New International* Derrida (1994) also presents a challenge to traditional historical materialism that reifies the present and treats knowledge or ontology as absolute or objective through his playful analytic of "hauntology." In his tactical refusal to outright define and delimit "hauntology," the "spectral logic" of haunting, Derrida suggests that it might be approached as a methodology of learning to live with ghosts, phantasmal presences that haunt and deconstruct the "one and the many," and signal, rather, "*more than one/no more one*" (xx). Derrida conceives of hauntology through limning out the specterly or deconstructive aspects of Marxism, such as his use of abstraction that is central to concepts ranging from the revolution to come in addition to use-value and

exchange-value as well as the commodity-form and fetishization. Derrida expounds:

But if the commodity-form is *not, presently*, use-value, and even if it is not *actually present*, it affects *in advance* the use-value of the wooden table. It affects and bereaves it in advance, like the ghost it will become, but this is precisely where haunting begins. And its time, and the untimeliness of its present, of its being “out of joint.” To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology. (161)

Strangely, then, what “Marxist ontology,” “the discourse of Being of all beings,” performs is an ontology *in advance*, the coming of an event, and by doing so, “exorcises” its ghosts, or eliminates other possible beings, forecloses the possibility of radical multiplicity. Hauntology, on the other hand, recognizes ontology’s totalizing structure, its very “science,” and, concomitantly, the way in which ontology performs a particular future, or “the visor effect,” and therefore announces the “inherent” exclusions or specters of ontology.

Significantly for Derrida, specters arise from and signal a space of difference or “*differance*,” where, or when, “the disjointed now,” the other becomes possible (3). It is an open and unsaturated space of “not-knowing,” not in the sense of ignorance, but rather a receptive, porous space that refuses to know and to grasp completely or wholly the future *in advance*, thereby foreclosing other possible ways of knowing and modes of being in the future. By pronouncing in advance particular futures, according to Derrida’s “logic of haunting,” the future prematurely comes back to haunt the present, the future strangely becomes the “memory” of the present. Ghosts, though, are not unified, homogenized, or discretely gathered together within this space of difference.

And nor is this space classifiable in terms of readymade oppositions between “presence and non-presence, actuality and non-actuality, life and non-life, of thinking the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility” (12). It is instead non-dialectical, heterogeneous, and disjunctural, “without *certain* conjunction,” so as to open up to the possibility, the incalculability, of the other, or the “possibility of a step beyond repression” (17, emphasis mine). This irreducible and ruptural space of the other is never merely an empty void, a space to be filled, but full of possibility through its radical heterogeneity. In this way it functions as a subjunctive space, “a radical experience of the *perhaps*, in which multiple, and not necessarily contradicting, futures begin to enter registers of intelligibility and formulate responsibility and action” (35).

Hauntology and ghostly matters, moreover, announce the possibility of the other, the immaterial and partial aspects of knowledge production and historical materialism through what, to reiterate, queer performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz calls “disidentification.” What you see is not necessarily what you get—there is no direct and concretized link between representation and the real. And yet, as Ferguson notes in his elaboration of the function of a “queer of color analysis”: “to disidentify is not to necessarily discard,” (5) but instead to make space for uncovering silences, how “Marx’s critique of capitalist property relations is haunted by silences that make racial, gender, and sexual ideologies and discourse commensurate with reality and suitable with universal ideals” (5). Hauntology and ghostly matters, a simultaneously de- and re-constructive methodology or way of knowing, bring to the fore the particularity of

ghosts and hauntings. Yet, they also importantly trouble and exceed these categories, bringing into purview their relational and contingent, and sometimes ephemeral, aspects.

A mode of disidentification from historical materialism, ghostly matters take on the particularity of various relational and spatailized differences of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation, among other analytic categories. There is a rich body of scholarship in Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies, moreover, that argues how Chicana/os, Mexicana/os, or Latina/os are haunted by or materially impacted by sexist, racist, and nationalist imaginaries or representation in popular culture, images that have been naturalized to the extent that their problematic origins have been erased whereby enacting a kind of historical amnesia. William Nericcio (2007), for example, deconstructs representations of Latina/os, such as through the Disney cartoon character “Speedy Gonzales” or the 1930’s actress or “phantom” Lupe Vélez (“Rita Hayworth”), and how these images have sedimented the abjection (that is, the expelling of “vomit” from a body/social body) of Mexican Americans within the U.S. national imaginary. Nericcio asks, “Where did these ghosts come from?” (24). It is through the deconstruction and slicing through words and images that enables Nericcio to conclude with a hopeful note—that Latina/os can reckon with these ghosts or phantoms through critical self-representation.

In a similar vein, Rosa Linda Fregoso (2003) argues that Chicanas and Mexicanas or “MeXicanas” are haunted by their “symbolic roles” in dominant U.S. popular culture. She excavates how the eroticized representations of the MeXicana in effect

materially renders them “disposable” as evidenced in the globalized economy, as horrifically evidenced in the ongoing “femicide” in Juárez. Fregoso, utilizing Toni Morrison’s (1992) notion of the invisibilized “Africanist presence,” traces what she terms the “Mexicanist presence” to examine not only the complicated career trajectory of Lupe Vélez but also the film in the *Lone Star* (Dir. John Sayles, 1996), which has been overly celebrated in regard to its portrayal of a multicultural south Texas, in order to demonstrate how it actually enacts “a white patriarchal visual economy” through the film’s fixation on and “hyperinvestment in patrilineage” (64). It is only through uncovering these racist and sexist imaginaries as well as through self-representation and new social collectivities that “planetary civil society” may emerge and be realized. It is through the collective reckoning with the specters of representation--and their continued material effects—that we may imagine and represent other kinds of futures.

In addition to the nuances of various forms of difference that animate the ghostly, the ghostly is also inflected by cultural or spiritual beliefs. In *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, repudiating the way in which spirituality is often relegated to the domain the primitive or folkloric, Laura Pérez (2007) foregrounds the way in which spirituality operates as a material practice, or, that is, “spirit work” in Chicana art. Addressing the Chicana art she includes in her study, she asserts that

the “spiritual” is not an abstract or romantic notion, reproducing the idea of a binary split between a baser material, physical, and social reality and a nobler, separate realm of spirit, ideals, and intellect. For some, the references to the spiritual function as a metaphor of that which is spectral, neither fully present, nor absent, such as memory, or marginal social being. Chicana artists whose work with the intersections of the spiritual, the political, and the aesthetic call attention

both to what counts as respectable religion and to the more ghostly status of egalitarian forms of spirituality in U.S. culture. (20)

Pérez proceeds to argue that much of this work enacts a politics of memory that often defies institutionalized and patriarchal forms of religions and instead involves recuperating elements from pre-Columbian Mesoamerican as well as African diasporic spiritualities, such as the belief that living and dead coexist as evident in the altars to commemorate El Día de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead), so as to render more feminist and holistic perspective and practice that works to personally and politically heal what colonialism and neocolonialism has torn asunder. In parallel to how Alicia Gaspar de Alba's (1998) concept of an "*alter-Native*" culture at work in Chicano art in the traveling exhibition in the early 1990s *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985* or "CARA," which is "both indigenous and alien to the United States" (15), Pérez's notion of spiritual "altarity" indexes the way in which this spirituality is in excess of dominant or colonial U.S. imaginaries bridges the personal and communal as well as past, present, and future.

Finally, what the various formulations of "ghostly matters," "hauntology," or "altarity" collectively enunciate is the way in which the material and the immaterial mutually animate one another as well as the culturally and spatially specific aspects of haunting . The analytic of the specter, then, calls for new ways of conceptualizing the material world as well as, concomitantly, ontology or absolute worldviews. To that end, the ghostly matters of Chicana/o cultural production may function to build upon and extend, perhaps ironically, the work of The Future of Minority Studies project's

collaborative theorization of a “post-positivist realism,” which has been used in service of valorizing and making relevant identity politics beyond mere relativism or “strategic essentialism.” According to Paula Moya (2000), post-positivist realism maintains that “(1) all observation and knowledge are theory mediated and that (2) a theory-mediated objective knowledge is both possible and desirable” (12). Post-positivist realism intentionally blurs the objective and subjective in order to call attention to the socially constructed nature of knowledge production while also accounting for the way in which it materially shapes lived experience, particularly those of people of color. Using post-positivist realism to reframe identity or identity politics enables people of color to use this category of analysis as a platform for effective social collectivity and action.

Incorporating the spectral into post-positivist realism further enhances this theorization by bringing to the fore the way in which the “objective” is always already haunted by its other(s) or that which is not fully articulate, but profoundly felt, and in a sense, “known,” what I call a spectral materialism or historical (im)materialism. The dialectic, then, a dominant analytical paradigm in Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies for understanding cultural production, which depends on and is overdetermined by direct access into the “text” and its “context,” and their attendant, and presumably legible, ideologies, proves inadequate to capture and make intelligible, even partially, the socially spectral.

In Excess of the Dialectic: Chicana/o Cultural Studies

In the early 1990s Chicana/o cultural and literary studies adopted the dialectic as

its primary mechanism for understanding the way in which Chicana/o cultural production is embedded within and challenges particular socio-historical conditions of the Southwest and the Americas. Stemming largely from the work of José and Ramón Saldivar, who draw upon the Marxian theories of Fredric Jameson to understand the “socially symbolic” within literary texts, this paradigm seeks to address the material and ideological conditions from which Chicana/o literature arises, and how this literature functions to oppose, expand, and render more inclusive traditional pan-American literary canon. The production of meaning, these scholars contend, is never constructed solely through a literary text, but rather through the interplay between the discursive realm of text and the social and material domains. And while the dialectic has undoubtedly been a powerful and exacting tool for understanding the social or ideological (de)construction of aesthetics and canon, I argue here that the dialectic delimits *in advance* what composes meaning, or what can be gathered, albeit “oppositionally,” within the proper home of canon. This binary mode of understanding fails to reflect and explore what cannot be fully grasped through language—that which is embodied and structures affect.

In the early 1990s José and Ramón Saldivar, inspired by New Historicism’s emphasis on the way in which expressive acts, including texts, are embedded within a network of material practices, drew upon Marxian theories to critique as well as to pry open and gain leverage within North American literary canon by foregrounding the ways in which Chicana/o literary texts were in conversation with their respective socio-

historical contexts. In this way, texts were no longer valued or included within the purview of canon due to esoteric principles of taste and aesthetics, but rather through the material practices of texts or the dialectical relationship between text and context that actively produces meaning. Reconceptualizing these texts as such, like all texts, must be read and assessed in their own right. This “dialectical” or “dialogical” approach to literature has been since largely taken up within the field of Chicana/o-Latina/o Literary and Cultural Studies.

Both José Saldívar (1991) and Ramón Saldívar (1990), in their respective scholarly monographs, argue that the meaning is gleaned from Chicano and Latino narratives through a dialectical relationship to particular socio-political and cultural histories. Apprehending this cultural production through this dialectical or dialogical interaction brings to the fore the way in which this body of work does not passively mirror or reflect particular social conditions, but rather actively engages and transforms them, producing novel syntheses or meanings that exceed both the text and its social conditions. While José Saldívar argues in *The Dialectics of Our America: Geneology, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* for situating American literary canon within a more cosmopolitan scale of the Americas, or within a “dialectic of our America,” through incorporating the work of Cuban poets and revolutionaries, namely José Martí and Roberto Fernández Retamar, within this revised canon, Ramón Saldívar similarly argues in *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* that Chicano narratives must be apprehended through the specific space of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, these

narratives “imaginative universe,” so as to tease out their “unique borderland quality” that stems from “folk-base origins” (25). In a related essay from *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology*, Ramón Saldívar (1991) further explains how dominant literature functions as ideology that naturalizes, reifies, and universalizes particular worldviews. Narratives, dominant or marginal, are never innocent or immune from the social contexts out which they emerge:

Narratives, in sum, are preeminently and rigorously dialectical. Like the ideologies that they articulate, narratives both figure and are determined by their social context (Jameson 1971, 4-10). Read dialectically, narratives indicate that language and discourse do affect human life in determining ways, ways that are themselves shaped by social history. Giving rise to questions concerning language itself, the sovereignty of our identity, and the laws that govern our behavior, narratives reveal the heterogeneous systems that resist the formation of a unitary base of truth. (13)

Quite simply, language and narrative *matter* as well as figure or determine lived experience. Narrative frames out direct insight into the “ideological formations that concrete situations have produced” (16).

José Saldívar and Ramón Saldívar’s focus on the dialectical processes of “narrativization,” moreover, is informed by Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), in which he attempts to bridge literary theory and history through dialectical materialism, arguing that literary texts are “socially symbolic acts” that emerge from particular ideologies and contexts, informing Jameson’s imperative: “Always historicize!” (9). Literature, in other words, is not a passive text, but rather an active mechanism that mediates the Real, and they must therefore be recognized as allegorical to reveal ideological contradictions and

tensions within the real world. Calling upon psychoanalytic theory, Jameson proposes that identifying contradictions within the formal elements of text etches out a temporary window into an underlying political unconscious, “the unity of a single great collective story” (19). Jameson writes: Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surrounding utterly alien to it. This mystery can be reenacted only if the human adventure is one” (19). However, not only does Jameson reduce and essentialize all history to that of a singular and homogenous class struggle, but also, in doing so, assumes that once “long-dead issues” that return to and haunt the present, or the “intangible historicity of concepts and categories” (9), are “always already” immediately legible and accessible through language. Jameson dangerously reinscribes the very silences he seeks to dislodge, and it is precisely this reinscription that Chicana/o literary and cultural studies has also unintentionally reinforced, as evident in the paradigmatic collective work of José and Ramón Saldívar whose dialectical materialism relies on intelligibility and immediate availability through language or narrative. It is this desire for unity and wholeness that drive José Saldívar and Ramón Saldívar to solidify a “*truly* integrated American literary history” (20; emphasis added).

This analytical mode of the dialectic in Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies has additionally been taken up by more recent scholarship concerning the relationship among space, difference, history, and ethnic identity, and consequently omits and

ignores that which is not immediately available through language, but profoundly felt and experience—that which haunts. For example, Raúl Homero Villa (2000) in *Barrio-Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* understands the space of the *barrio* in Los Angeles through what he calls “barrio-logos,” a way of knowing that is produced through a dialectical interplay “between socially deforming (barrioizing) and culturally affirming (barriological) spatial practices—which together produce the form and meaning of the barrio” (8). And while this theoretical approach powerfully brings to light the way in which Chicana/o cultural practices may challenge, exceed, and transform L.A.’s colonizing Spanish fantasy heritage in conjunction with the “spatial fix” of capital, this analytic prematurely forecloses the possibility of “talking with ghosts” (Gordon 1997), enacting a kind of double bind that silences the already silenced. Although Villa observes “the ubiquitous imagery of ghost, specters, palimpsests, and other phantom presences that haunt contemporary Chicano narratives of urban deterritorialization” (31), his analysis of these “present absences” fails to go beyond the ghostly as “social death,” obscuring the multiple and complex ways that the specterly figure hope and futurity *in addition* to deterritorialization and loss. Villa’s constricted formulation of these “phantom presences” thus unintentionally resuscitates a Eurocentric of “the return of the repressed,” casting the ghost as lack or mere traumatic absence returning from the past to haunt the present.

And while I do not intend here to throw out the proverbial baby out with the bathwater and acknowledge the immense contribution of the analytical tool of the

dialectic as well as the collective work of José and Ramón Saldívar to Chicana/o and Latina/o Literary and Cultural Studies, particularly in critiquing the ostensible universality of aesthetics and the related valorization of Chicana/o cultural production, what is necessitated at this critical juncture is a more supple and affective methodology for addressing that which is not readily available through language: that is, “structures of feeling”¹ or the “affective histories”² of colonialism, to borrow from Raymond Williams (1978) and Ann Laura Stoler (2006), respectively, that sometimes reside beyond enunciation within narrative, but exist through other forms, gestures, or movements of meaning-making, that elide binaries of thesis/antithesis. The dialectic, which archives and preserves an Enlightenment positivist notion of time, assumes a closed or discrete trajectory, foreclosing in advance the possibility of the other, that which can never be wholly contained and measured, fully articulated within the register of inclusion. By its very definition, then, the dialectic is an inadequate conceptual tool to understand difference, as made (in)apparent in the (i)logical extreme of “ghostly matters.”

The dialectic is also an inadequate analytic for making sense of the complex interrelations between time, space, identity, and Chicana/o cultural production within the context of colonialism and colonial legacies in that its deployment unintentionally reinforces that which it seeks to dismantle and disavow: that is, positivist, totalizing, and closed ways of conceptualizing and seeing the world. In other words, the dialectic dovetails with colonialist ontologies, precluding and crystallizing the other, ossifying

those troubling relations of power. In her excavation of the “spatial urgency” embedded within Chicana literature, Mary Pat Brady (2002) highlights the this particular sedimentation of colonial power, which functions to occlude the complexity of colonized space:

The production of the ‘Americas’ coincided with the solidification of the Cartesian subject as subject of the state, as holder of property, as ‘cogito ergo sum’ and its unspoken corollary, “I conquer.” The emergence of the Cartesian subject resulted in a process that ‘de-spaced’ peoples, depriving them of access to their means of subsistence, repressing the Cartesian subject’s tophophilia (the centrality of property to subjectivity); at the same time, it turned some people into subjects or citizens and other peoples into slaves, juridical non-existent. In this sense the colonization process, an obviously spatial process, has had ongoing ramifications, and Chicano/as have felt and observed them to this day. (9)

The experience of colonialism is one of violent division, exclusion, and alienation, the sundering (and ontologizing) of subject and object in the name of conquest, lacerating people’s ties to land, their respective spaces of community, history, identity, and meaning. Cuts so deep they cannot be forgotten, what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) revisions as “*una herida abierta*” (3) or an “open wound.”

Deploying dialectical materialism in critical readings of Chicana/o narrative, moreover, further obscures the movement of the socially spectral: that is, forms of “disidentification” from historical materialism, from seemingly overdetermining colonial legacies. More than just unearthing previously excluded silences, though, disidentification also importantly refuses transparency and ready legibility. What Chicana/o Literary and Cultural Studies warrants is a disidentification with dialectical materialism, a mode of producing knowledge that is intimately caught up with the

“coloniality” of power as developed by Latin American postcolonial scholars Anibal Quijano (1971) and Walter Mignolo (2000). To recognize the way in which the dialectic participates in the coloniality of knowledge is also a methodology for learning to speak to the socially spectral that haunts Chicana/o cultural production.

Coloniality, Power, and Knowledge Production

Latin American postcolonial studies brings to the fore within larger postcolonial conversations the particular epistemic aspects of colonialism, how it is that colonial knowledge invisibilizes its site of enunciation and consequently parades itself around as if it were “universal.” This scholarship additionally challenges Marxist and Marxian theories concerning colonialism and labor, which often relegate race and difference to the register of the epiphenomenal. For Quijano, Eurocentrism names this colonial mode of knowledge production, which, he argues, solidified racial or social classifications in the New World order, its constitutive racialized hierarchies and social structures. Despite the heterogeneity of time, space, and peoples, global capitalism heralded novel forms of homogenizing and enacting labor control, which included “slavery, serfdom, petty-commodity production, reciprocity, and wages” (535). These particular configurations, he observes, were not mere “extensions” of previously established labor structures, but rather were categorically new, each responding to the new needs demanded by burgeoning global markets. Global capitalism, in conjunction with the epistemic regime of Eurocentrism, which operated to designate superior and inferior, self and other, functioned to gather labor under a single unifying logic of labor control.

Mignolo additionally points out that what is often ignored in postcolonial studies is the particularity of Spanish conquest in the Americas, and how it was propelled by a logic of civilizing, enlightenment, and the general absorption of indigenous peoples by the Catholic Church and its missionary objectives, continuations of a “Holy War” rationale, demarcating in the name of a catholic or universal good. This singular, universal logic, moreover, was epistemic in nature, silencing other ways of knowing and being in the Americas. Ironically, though, according to Mignolo, it is this very totalizing epistemic aspect of the “coloniality of power” that provides the condition of possibility for colonial difference, the enunciation of an alternative way of knowing or being—what he terms “border gnosis” or “thinking”—that critiques and exceeds the seamlessness and universality of colonial epistemologies.

Marxist social theory, asserts Santiago Castro-Gómez (2008), reiterates as well a Eurocentrism that concretizes a teleological universal history whose grand narrative is inadequate and too myopic to explain the “problem” of colonialism. Drawing on the work of Argentine historian José Aricó and Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea, Castro-Gómez explains that Marx worked from the assumptions of Hegel’s *Lessons on a Philosophy of a Universal History*, which maintains that because Latin America maintained semi-feudal social hierarchies, rather than an authentic bourgeoisie, these parts of the world, which are presumed to be less “advanced,” failed to develop the proper political institutions and philosophy to catalyze “movement toward liberty characteristic of his Universal History” (262). As such, the Americas were relegated to

a no-place “outside of history” and epiphenomenal to global capitalism:

From Marx’s perspective, colonialism is not a phenomenon in and of itself, but rather it holds a distinct and separate place on the periphery of the bourgeoisie—the only class able to change the crisis in the feudal order of production. Colonialism was a collateral effect of global European expansion and was in this sense a necessary route toward the advent of communism...It is for this reason that Marx considers ethnic and racial discrimination a “precapitalist” phenomenon, limited to societies where a bourgeoisie had not yet emerged and where theological and stratified rule prevailed, and characteristic of the old regime. (263)

In other words, Latin American colonialism did not squarely fit into a dialectical relationship between the global market and industry, each reinforcing and expanding the other. The dialectical, then, remains reticent concerning “colonial difference,” the space through which particular critiques of global capitalism emerges. As Rod Ferguson (2004) and Lisa Lowe (1997) similarly argue, the universalizing tendencies of Marx’s historical materialism in regard to normative social formations, what Ferguson calls “heteropatriarchy,” always operate “in opposition to the intersecting particularities that account for material existence,” such as categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. (12). Marxian ontology, or any ontology or absolute worldview, is always predicated on and haunted by what is mutes.

And so, as Quijano and Mignolo elucidate, race was not merely an ideology produced as a byproduct of modernity and emerging global markets, but rather a discursive mechanism that made Spanish conquest possible and thinkable: that is, Spanish conquest or the colonality of power in the Americas drew upon particular epistemes, or ways of thinking about and dividing up a world, whose genealogies dated

back to the Middle Ages. These epistememes inculcated Eurocentric cultural imaginaries into indigenous systems of meaning. The coloniality of power subsumed and continues to subsume heterogeneous cultural imaginaries, affective and cognitive structures of knowing, feeling, and acting into a totalizing worldview that denies its own function as an ideological apparatus, its own constituency and contingency, how it maps out the world in accord to a particular cultural imaginary that pretends universality. A concrete example of this double bind, notes Mignolo, was colonial cartography based in modern scientific practices in the eighteenth century that utilized for the first time mathematic measurement and perspective to map out the New World. No longer could cartographic perspective be based in an ethnic center, a cultural particularity, but rather its geometric center would encompass an objective or universal view, whereby discursively erasing the fact that its perspective remained firmly entrenched within the terrain of a particular colonial imaginary. This erasure of scientific and cartographic perspective is referred to by Castro-Gómez as “the hubris of zero degrees,” a Eurocentric tragic pride or colonial attitude that refuses the specters of its own particularity.

And while Castro-Gómez alludes specifically to the epistemological function of modern scientific thought and objectivity, “the hubris of zero degrees” captures poignantly the multiple ways in which the coloniality of power more generally assumes and performs a particular ontology, a totalizing and absolute worldview that circumscribes in advance other possible ways of knowing and being. The coloniality of power therefore names, deliberately calls out how colonialism and various colonial

legacies, such as in the Americas, not only (re)present themselves as seamless, discrete, or timeless, but also, while doing so, violently severs in the pursuit of homogeneity peoples from previous subjectivities, communities, histories, knowledges, and concomitantly, other possible presents and futures. And yet, the very need for reiteration, the very “ambivalence of colonial discourse,” bespeaks an uncertain space of colonial difference where ghostly matters manifest.

Reconfiguring the Colonial Complex: Spectrality and Third Space Methodology

In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire ([1955] 2000) writes of the “dishonest equations” (33) that objectify and dehumanize various colonized populations, calculi that invisibly render human beings abject others through binaries of self and other, savage and civilized: “colonization = ‘thingification’” (42). Colonialism is thus a particular configuration and complex of power. It is also a psychological state, as Césaire and Franz Fanon argue, that is both projected onto and experienced by colonized subjects. It names displacement and loss within a particular material landscape: colonization does not place various peoples into contact, Césaire observes, but cuts vital ties among peoples, robs them of their very humanity, erasing former selves through relations of domination and subjugation. Something is plundered and lost through this configuration and complex of colonization, something not always easily translatable, tangible, or transparent—something spectral that structures feeling or affect, ineffable, and yet inheres in the everyday. But the spectral is more than mere recovery, retrieving what is lost from the past: it is also generative and fosters new

knowledge and practices. As such, this dissertation explores how various forms of Chicana/o cultural production from San Antonio, Texas, and Texas more generally, understand colonialism as a “complex” or specific assemblage, an aspect that colonialism renders invisible, and reckons with the specters of colonialism through examining the diverse and complex spaces of literature, urban legend and folklore, visual art, and critical theory. Spectral materialism, I argue, in lieu of the dialectic or colonial and binary modes of knowing, provides an alternative “third space” methodology for reading and reckoning with ghosts. This methodology, however, tactically refuses full disclosure revelation and embraces partial legibility and the uncertain and polymorphous shapes of the socially spectral. In this way, this spectral materialism, a methodology for understanding particular forms of Chicana/o cultural production, does not simply manufacture readymade solutions or teleologies, but provides ruptures in dominant narratives and experiences of complex colonial space. This methodology does not provide new beginnings either, but rather gains leverage and speed in the middle, *en media res*, *within and against* colonial complexes.

A heterogeneous process, colonialism has varied in degrees across time and space. This issue of colonization in relationship to the social position of Chicana/os in the U.S. has been a controversial one. In the 1970s and early 1980s, much debate within Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies centered on whether or not the social position of Chicana/os conformed to the internal colonial model, a theory that gained popularity in the mid-1970s that claimed that colonialism still perseveres within nation-states through

uneven development and the attendant differentiation of the metropolis and periphery. This configuration has since been critiqued on various accounts, including, for example, the way in which it homogenizes diverse lived experiences of colonialism and collapses the distinction between urban and rural. In the past decade or so, though, there has been a significant return to critically examining the complex forces of colonialism in shaping the present lived experience of Chicana/os in the U.S.

Extending this trajectory, I approach colonialism and neo-colonialism as a heterogeneous composition, a constellation of causes and strange effects—some of which are not immediately transparent, but vastly evident in what Ann Laura Stoler (2006) calls “the fierce clarity of intimacies” (1) or to be “haunted by empire” and its “tactile powers” (1). So as to attend to the silenced subtleties or nuances of colonialism’s grasp on the present (and future), I approach this complex socio-historical process as a concatenation of flashpoints that explode into the present through “moments of danger,” to borrow from Walter Benjamin. These flashpoints include, but are not necessarily limited to, the arrival of European colonizers in the Americas (ranging from the arrival of Hernán Cortés in Mexico to Spanish Franciscan monks in San Antonio, Texas); the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; as well as various crucial moments during what anthropologist Richard Flores (2002) refers to as the “Texas Modern,” the advent of barbed wire, windmills, and railroads, in addition to pivotal events under our current milieu of neoliberal capitalism or globalization. Colonialism in San Antonio and Texas at large is manifold, excessive, and slippery in that it

encompasses and saturates the interlocked lived experiences of American Indians, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans. This shared experience of colonialism is not innocent, an automatic tie among and within these diverse populations, and must be apprehended through relational and spatial categories of identity or subjectivity.

My point in examining various flashpoints of colonialism and neo-colonialism is to map out the multiple and heterogeneous ways that these processes of power vary as well as articulate the particular “intimacies” and common experience of colonization in the present day. In order to limn out and pay close attention to the particularities or intimacies of colonialism, I examine mainly spaces and attendant Chicana/o cultural production of the southwest, and pay special attention to San Antonio, Texas, which, although home to the largest constellation of missions in the U.S., receives scant critical attention within Chicana/studies, often marginalized by the popular focus on Los Angeles.

In order to trace this specterly cartography as well as reflect its complexity, I employ the rich scholarship of what might be collectively called “third space” theory and practice, particularly that arising from Chicana third space feminism. While this collective body of work is diverse and is born from various socio-political contexts and projects, together it signals not only the importance of including space in any social analysis in conjunction with time and history, bodies and memory, but also enunciates the liminal or in-between state of particular spaces, fertile ground for social transformation and other ways of knowing and being. These spaces also operate, I

argue, as sites of haunting, where ghosts emerge, spaces in which memory and history leans over the edge of enunciation, spaces of collectivity, being in common, of potential.

The lens of third space analysis also significantly challenges, dismantles, and rearranges the dialectic, which has traditionally observed the interplay between time or history and social relations. Tracing and interlinking diverse genealogies and conceptualizations of “thirdspace,” such as those of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Gloria Anzaldúa, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, postmodern geographer Edward Soja (1996) identifies a “cumulative *trialectics* that is radically open to additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge” (61). However, the trialectic is not simply an additive model based on the dialectic, but rather another radically different way of knowing that is receptive to other social dynamics that may not be immediately apparent or visible, such as social or bodily memory. Soja continues that the concept of thirdspace is not concretized or “sanctified in and of itself,” but rather: “The critique is not meant to stop at three, to construct a holy trinity, but to build further, to move on, to continuously expand the production of knowledge beyond what is previously known” (61). Finally, calling upon Lefebvre’s critique of the interpretive dyad of “real” and “imagined” space, Soja point out that the trialectic or thirdspace deconstructs this dyad, foregrounding how the real and imagined are always already overlapping and mutually reinforcing.

What third space enables, moreover, is the incorporation of lived experience—the articulation of which is not always immediately visible or legible for that matter—into

social theory or analysis. Chicana third space feminism, particularly the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Emma Pérez, and Chéla Sandoval, underscores how third space practice, then, is never easy or comfortable, but instead demands intellectual flexibility and dexterity, an act of mental and physical “bridging” between individuals and communities as well as the seen and unseen. Whereas the dialectic operates within and enacts its own constitutive closure, third space praxis pierces its own constitutive limits in order to imagine and explore other ways of being, to facilitate what María Lugones (1987) calls “world travel,” to empathetically traverse the world of others, and be wary of the ways in which you yourself might unintentionally reinforce oppressive practices of power. I thus engage the specific articulations of third space praxis of Chicana feminism so as to render the particular lived experiences as understood through race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, among other relational categories of analysis, within the socio-historically specific site of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, as well as to reflect concurrently its particular relationship to neo-colonizing global capitalism.

Third space is a vital site of colonial difference: its praxis is continually composed, brought together in a non-teleological and open process, an act that radically resists the totalizing impulses that animate the absolute grasp of colonialism. At once material and discursive, third space praxis maneuvers in the spaces between colonialism and postcolonialism, subject and object, past and present, as well as undermines these binary categories, concretized through multiple histories of Eurocentricism, of divide

and conquer. In similar fashion to Anzaldúa's (1987) re-imagining of the Aztec serpent goddess Coatlicue, cut into myriad pieces by her vengeful brother, reassembles herself, holds herself together, embodying and exceeding the seemingly contradictory, third space praxis never straightforward or homogenous, but rather shifting, protean, and heterogeneous. But third space is profoundly rooted in the lived experiences of Chicana/os and Mexicana/os occupying the fraught space of the Borderlands.

This Borderlands space cultivates another mode of knowledge production that engages and exceeds the capture of colonial legacies, slips through its grasp, through its complex, contingent, and open nature, producing what Avery Gordon calls “ghostly matters,” what Jacques Derrida playfully terms as “hauntology,” in addition to what Chicana feminist scholars Laura Pérez (2007), Alicia Gaspar de Alba (1998), and Rosa Linda Fregoso (2003) conceptualize as, respectively, “spiritual alarity,” “Alter Native knowledge,” and “MeXicana Encounters”: particular modes of knowledge production that are unflaggingly uncertain, questioning its grounds of meaning at every turn, yet demand responsibility, demands *response*, a form of reckoning that goes beyond mere reactive formulations. It is within the diverse Chicana/o cultural production that I examine in this dissertation that I locate and differentially map out this response—what I conceptualize as the excessive and “insurgent acts” of this cultural production. The multiple inflections of *insurgency* prove instructive here, particularly in relationship to the socially spectral. Like the ghostly, it is a word rife with tension and ambivalence: it signals social transformation (the state of being insurgent) while also that which is not

readily recognizable by state forms—but (absent) present nonetheless. It is an unexpected uprising, a surging forth, but at the same time, related to the Middle French *sourgir*, it connotes to “cast anchor,” to orient oneself in “the great sea” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 354). Thus, the spectral materialism articulated by this collective body of Chicana/o cultural production constitutes an insurgent act: unseen, yet palpable and embodied, surging forth through a particular colonial social body, yet pulsing beyond its own fleshy limits.

In the following chapters I explore how particular forms of Chicana/o cultural production theorize the spectral or immaterial as a vital component of the lived material world. While none of these expressive forms offer a readymade solution, they theorize knowledge production itself as ghostly, particularly through their open-ended conclusion, textual and material space rife with the potential for social transformation. In the first chapter, “The Colonial Non-sense of the The Ghost Tracks: Race, Invisible Labor, and the Altar-Performance of Memory in San Antonio, Texas,” explores folklore in relationship to space through the urban legend of San Antonio’s Ghost Tracks. Here I examine how this fraught site has been apprehended in popular culture, such as on The Science or Discovery Channels, through discourses of true and false, and consequently commit “percepticide,” disabling the way in which this site is haunted and propelled by a particular colonial legacy concerning race and labor, as well is invisibly animated by particular cultural logics or “alarity.”

The next second chapter, “(Trans)Mission Possible: Project MASA,

Chicanafuturism, and Decolonial Imaginaries,” the penultimate chapter, explores the collaborative work of Project MASA (MeChicano Alliance of Space Artists) and argues that this visual art purposely rearranges received images in order to reconstruct colonial modes of seeing, forcing the viewer to adopt a more holistic perspective that simultaneously assimilates past, present, and future. Next, “Reterritorializing La Llorona: “Spirit Work,” Chicana Lines of Flight, and the *Terriblebeautiful* Love Story of *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?* by Bárbara Renaud González,” examines how the short story “Woman Hollering Creek,” by Sandra Cisneros (1992) and *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?* by Bárbara Renaud González (2009) conceive confining or “cramped” geographies of shame and fear that reflect a particular gendered colonial legacy that is figured by La Llorona. In both works I examine how the conclusions refuse “tragedy fatigue” and create “Chicana lines of flight” through a radical acts of deterritorializing La Llorona. These works proffer, as well, anti-romantic notions of love, spirituality, and grace, refashioning them instead as embodied acts of connection, of being in touch, as well as a bridge between the material and immaterial or the subjunctive.

Finally, “Bridging Common Grounds: Metaphor, Multitude, and Chicana Third Space Feminism,” examines the exclusions or specters of radical social theory that conceptualize collective social action, particularly the separate and collaborative work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Critiquing mainly their concept of the multitude and the way it fails to account for identity or difference, I examine how this social theory might begin to more critically “bridge” across difference by placing it into conversation

with the scholarly and creative work of Gloria Anzaldúa. In my codex, “Toward a Hauntology of the Oppressed: Reflections on Engaged Pedagogy and Multicultural Literature,” calling upon my own recent teaching experience, I briefly examine the implications of teaching Multiethnic Literature through the lens of the ghostly as a form of “engaged pedagogy” that encourages students to critically connect to literary texts, while simultaneously recognizing important differences. I then conclude by revisiting and reconceptualizing Derrida’s concept of hauntology, in conjunction with the work of Augusto Boal, Paulo Freire, and Chela Sandoval, as a pedagogy and a more liberatory mode of knowledge production that rejects ontologies or absolute world views and embraces the porous and complex ways in which the material is always already haunted by the immaterial.

In sum, this dissertation underscore the ways in which particular forms of contemporary Chicana/o cultural production offer alternative spectral vehicles replete with their own cultural dynamics for understanding the complex relationships among time, space, memory, and cultural identity, or, that is, spectral metaphors or methodologies that undermine the binary compulsions of Eurocentrism. Eschewing positivist epistemologies and readymade social “solutions,” this diverse cultural productions produces instead ruptures in the everyday, the taken for granted, signaling a “timespace” in flux through which other possibilities emerge and begin to take shape and become imaginable, doable. This cultural production brings to the fore that the genesis of social transformation is never a comfortable, straightforward process, and that

reckoning with ghosts attests to what Avery Gordon so simply and yet profoundly asserts: that “life is complicated” (5).

Chapter 1

**The Colonial Non-sense of The Ghost Tracks:
Race, Invisible Labor, and the Altar-Performance of Memory
in San Antonio, Texas**

“Memory, like a heart, beats beyond our capacity to control it, a lifeline between past and future” —Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*



Figure 1. Mexican laborers standing on each side of cross-ties of the railroad between Dunlay and Medina Dam. The Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio. July 24, 1911.

Figure 2. The “Ghost Tracks,” San Antonio. October 2010.

In this first chapter I examine the fraught space of San Antonio’s “legendary” Ghost Tracks as a way of introduction to the ghostly in San Antonio and South Texas. I excavate here how the ghostly resides in that which is not immediately obvious and transparent, but murky and perhaps never wholly graspable. This is a slippery task. The ghostly, as sociologist Avery Gordon reminds us, makes its (absent) presence known through structures of feeling, the ephemeral bulwark feeling, emotion, the

affective—what has long been relegated to the “irrational” or that which does not count as a valid form of knowledge production. As this chapter demonstrates, the ghostly is subjective and complexly composed, a contingent amalgamation of time, space, bodies, and desire. While the experience of the ghostly spans various cultures and contexts, it must be apprehended within its own socio-historical and political domain in order to reckon with it, to speak with it, to make intelligible what it demands from us.

As you drive on Villamain Road toward the Southside of San Antonio, Texas, a predominately poor and working class *barrio*, you pass on your right the largest constellation of historic Spanish colonial missions in the U.S., which date as far back as to the early 1700s, and on the left, you remain parallel to the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks. Continuing south, the road ends abruptly into a dead end, and you are forced to turn left over the railroad tracks onto what becomes Shane Road and you pass between two different neighborhoods: McCreless Meadows, comprised of one-story brick homes mainly built in the 1970s and 80s, and “Heritage Oaks,” a new subdivision composed of low-cost mass-produced houses typical of urban sprawl.

Striking is the strange juxtaposition of order and disorder that inheres in this crossing before passing between these two contrasting neighborhoods. While on the one hand, the crossing is surrounded by the clean and orderly San Antonio Mission National Historic Park system and borders the well-appointed homes of two middle class neighborhoods, the crossing itself is littered with detritus and festooned with various religious paraphernalia, mainly Catholic, such as artificial yellow roses with the

Virgen de Guadalupe emblazoned across the petals. One of the trees on the southwest corners is hangs a brightly-colored plastic wreath, indicating that someone has passed away at that site, most likely from a car accident. The railroad as well as surrounding trees and road signs are marked with graffiti: “R.I.P” as well as various names and gang tags are inscribed on the tracks in pearlized black spray paint, making the letters appear luminescent, particularly at night when the paint reflects the light from vehicle headlights. Official signs reading “Railroad Crossing” and “Private Property” are also vandalized with pearlized black and green spray paint, rendering the stark black lettering barely legible, only traces of the formal signage. This uncanny assemblage of signs delimits San Antonio’s infamous Ghost Tracks. Haunting this site are competing forces of past and present, modern and archaic, public and private, order and disorder.

According to Docia Schultz Williams, creator of a local “ghost tours” company, and Reneta Byrne (1993), a San Antonio-based journalist, respectively:

The story goes that sometime in the 1940s (some accounts have even said in the ‘30s) there was a tragic accident that occurred at the crossing, which involved a freight train and a school bus. It seems odd that on that particular late fall afternoon, which was misty and cold, the old yellow bus was making its last delivery of school children from the consolidated country school that then served that section of the country. The ten children reported to have been on the bus ranged in ages from kindergarteners to teenagers. As the bus started up over the tracks, an uphill pull, it stalled. And just at that moment, a fast-running

freight train, going at a rapid rate of speed towards the unguarded crossing, came speeding down the tracks and slammed into the school bus, killing all aboard.

(31)

While accounts vary concerning exactly when this event took place, it is said that the children who tragically perished at this site now haunt the Ghost Tracks. This urban legend, which came into existence roughly thirty years ago, mandates that you sprinkle your back bumper and windshield with baby powder, and then, although against the law, turn off and shift your car into neutral while stopping on and then crossing over the Tracks. When you restart your vehicle and pull over to the right-hand side of the road, you will inevitably see the ghost children's fingerprints appear in the baby powder, visible proof that the ghosts do indeed exist. It is said, too, that the surrounding streets behind the Tracks in McCreless Meadows, such as "Shane Road," "Cindy Sue Way," or "Bobbie Allen Way," are named after these dead children—further evidence of this ostensible tragic event.

San Antonio more generally has been coined by numerous sources as one of the most haunted cities in the U.S., and one of its most popular ghostly attractions is the Ghost Tracks, which have garnered local and national attention. The Ghost Tracks have become a popular destination not only for persons from San Antonio, but also from Houston, and other nearby small towns such as Poteet and Floresville, as well as other major cities in Texas and beyond. The site's popularity has made it a desirable destination for a burgeoning industry of official "ghost tours," such as that of Docia

Williams's, author of myriad books dedicated to recounting ghost tales in Texas.

Recently, a commercial haunted house, "The 13th Floor," which is located just east of the downtown area, near the historic Sunset Station, a functioning railroad station as well as a special events center, has also capitalized on this urban legend. It advertises that according to urban legend the ghost children stayed at this hotel the night before their tragic accident. The haunted house's website further claims that the ghost children not only haunt the Tracks but also the hotel. The Ghost Tracks, in addition, are the subject of countless YouTube videos, radio shows, blogs, wikis, websites, as well as newspaper and magazine articles, and have been featured in documentaries and television shows on The History Channel and The Science Channel. In fact, the Ghost Tracks even inspired a B-movie entitled *Fingerprints*, co-starring Kristin Cavallari from the popular reality television show *The Hills*.

And yet, while some commercial enterprises are quick to capitalize upon the ghost children and the Ghost Tracks, representations of this specterly site in popular culture, such as those of The Science Channel or The History Channel, to name a few, are quick to dismiss it as "mere" urban legend, lacking the proper historical evidence to substantiate its claims, such as eye witnesses or newspaper accounts. In fact, the urban legend has often been dismissed as a generic gravity hill phenomenon, an optical illusion that makes a decline appear as an incline, as well as has been designated a "copycat" urban legend that mimics an actual train wreck involving a busload of children in Utah in 1939. The urban legend is grasped through the terms of either true or false, a polarizing

register that attempts to reveal whether or not it actually happened. I argue here, though, that significance of this urban legend or folklore extends well beyond this dichotomy of true versus false, and that this particular framing of the Ghost Tracks omits and forecloses in advance other possible social significations. Many of these portrayals, for example, fail to mention that the Ghost Tracks are frequented mainly by poor and working class Mexicana/os and Mexican Americans or Chicana/os during, most concentratedly, Halloween and *El Dia de Los Muertos* or Day of the Dead. This particular telling of the Ghost Tracks refuses to recognize the specific cultural logics and inflections. These depictions also fail to incorporate the socio-historical or spatial aspects of this fraught site, such as the significance of the proximal missions or the railroad itself, emblematic of the onslaught of modernity in Texas and the Southwest, which further crystallized the social position Mexicans and Mexican Americans as a source of cheap and available racialized labor.

In contradistinction to these popular accounts of the Ghost Tracks, I explore here meanings and “structures of feeling” that are in excess of discreet categories of true and false—that which cannot be fully quarantined by this binary or even language alone. I am thus interested in pursuing here what social, historical, and cultural forces compel the illicit crossing of the Ghost Tracks in addition to how this crossing might function as a complex act or performance of memory with its own cultural and spatial logics. To do so, I begin by examining how the Ghost Tracks have been conceived through “colonial nonsense,” or that which colonial or dominant narrative can fully tame and assimilate, in

popular culture. I do so by examining how The Science Channel portrays the Ghost Tracks through this colonial and constricted register of true versus false, begging the question “Could it be true?” I then explore what this binary register prematurely precludes: the way in which the space of the Ghost Tracks functions as a heterotopia, or what I reformulate as a “mixed” Borderlands space, that collates various other seemingly contrasting spaces.

A “crossroads in space and time” (Soja 1996, 160), I approach the Ghost Tracks not as an isolated space but rather as a colonial complex, a particular form of “heterotopia,” what Michel Foucault (1986) defines as a place of “deviance” and “crisis”: “the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us...” (23). The Ghost Tracks, I argue, is a space in excess of other spaces, a ruptural space through which other “spatial stories” and histories emerge and are enunciated that pertain to unaccounted racialized and invisibilized labor past and present, although this site refuses facile legibility. Finally, utilizing interviews and my own participatory observation of the Ghost Tracks I theorize how the enactment of this urban legend coupled with narrative transmission redistributes memory and history through the cultural aesthetic of “altarity” so as to pressure and pry open the seams of this colonial complex, carving out a space for beginning to imagine and formulate other postcolonial presents and futures.

Reconceptualizing this urban legend brings to the fore the multiple ways in

which the Ghost Tracks—that is, both the act of crossing and the physical location—conjure and make visible San Antonio’s particular colonial legacy, whose reverberations are felt beyond the register of true and false, particularly in relationship to exploited and invisibilized racialized labor. While it would be foolhardy to ascribe a singular or monolithic meaning to a complex site that refuses transparency and whole consumption, it is my intent here to articulate not only one of many possible meanings concerning the Ghost Tracks, but also how this interpretation tactically opens up space for other significations, for other postcolonial futures.

Could It be True?: Colonial Nonsense and The Science Channel

Since the early 1980s North American popular culture has experienced what literary scholar Jeffrey Weinstock (2004) has termed the “spectral turn,” a fascination with the ghostly and supernatural as evident in films such as *Poltergeist* (1982), *The Sixth Sense* (2000), *Paranormal Activity* (2007), and *The Twilight Saga* (2008, 2009, 2010) to television shows such as *The X-Files*, *The Ghost Whisperer*, or *True Blood*. More recently, though, there has also been a proliferation of television shows that feature investigations of the paranormal, including The History Channel’s *Haunted History*, The Discovery Channel’s *Ghost Lab*, or the SciFi Channel’s *Ghost Hunters*, all of which set out to verify, usually employing “scientific” equipment, such as EVPs (electronic voice recordings) and EMF (electromagnetic field) detectors, the ghosts of various haunted locations. The attention given to the Ghost Tracks, which has been the subject of television shows on The History and Science Channels, is certainly related to

the popularity of this television genre of paranormal investigation, which frame the Ghost Tracks in terms of true versus false, or, that is, an object of scientific inquiry. The plot of this television and filmic genre are driven by the scientific method, a deductive mode of inquiry that explores causal relationships in nature and that tests a hypothesis to conclude whether it is true or false.

This fascination with the ghostly or spectral in North American popular culture more generally, though, as Weinstock argues, reflects a crisis in the national imaginary that emanates from a “millennial anxiety” concerning truth and justice, as well as the desire to reckon with the past in order to forge more equitable futures. However, the ghost is never “innocent” (Gordon 1997) or independent of ideology or market forces. The figure of the ghost is never immune to being capitalized upon, co-opted, and evacuated of its historical exigency and cultural particularity. And yet, the very compulsion to reify or commodify the ghost or expropriate it to the realm of scientific inquiry underwrites various anxieties, millennial and otherwise.

The online video “Ghost Town: Ghost Train” (2009) from the internet series *The Science Channel Videos*, investigates San Antonio’s Ghost Tracks, or what they rename as the “Ghost Train.” Like most popular accounts of the Ghost Tracks, such as the ones mentioned in the introduction, this video utilizes discourses of the scientific method, the terms of cause and effect as well as true versus false, to set the definitive parameters of the this narrative. This framing, though, precludes how time or history, space, as well as bodies and categories of identity contribute meaning to and shape other

significations of the Ghost Tracks and effectively registers this complex urban legend as colonial non-sense. The video opens by providing background information, a lens through which the viewer is provided the opportunity to observe the phenomenon of the Ghost Train, albeit through a reenactment. It commences with various snapshots of the actual train tracks, and an omniscient narrator with a booming British accent who purports, “If you want to find a ghost, come to Texas, slip your pickup truck in neutral and if you’re lucky, you’ll enjoy a helpful shove in the rear from the dead children of the San Antonio Ghost Train.” The video then segues into an eerie soundtrack of British school children singing the words “accidentally falling...” from the nursery rhyme song “Ten Green Bottles,” in which each refrain subtracts one bottle “hanging on the wall” until the song concludes with zero bottles, a heavy-handed foreshadowing of the children’s impending deaths. Emphasizing the sensationalist and gruesome details of the event, the narrator proceeds to explain that the urban legend holds that in 1942 a group of school children were on their way to school and upon crossing the railroad tracks were blindsided by an oncoming train. The narrator cheekily adds, “Imagine their concern when they saw a train hurdling towards them. It was clear they’d be skipping school that day,” while we are shown a reenactment of the tragic accident depicting the oncoming train with a children’s miniature model train set coupled with flashes of screaming British children.

After the miniature train collides with and flips the school bus onto its roof, its wheels futilely spinning, the video quickly switches to “local historian” Docia Williams,

standing in the middle of the tracks, arms gesticulating emphatically informs us in a thick southern accent that “the end result was a busload of poor little innocent children killed and splattered all over the countryside here at this wonderful crossing at Shane and Villamain Road here in San Antonio, Texas.” The narrator then resumes, explaining “that the story goes” that the children now haunt the tracks, as an image of what seems to be two men being pushed across the tracks in their car is shown, as their arms extend outside the car window, as if trying to feel for a ghostly presence. The video then transitions to two working class Mexican American men, as if suggesting that these are in fact the same men who just crossed the tracks, testifying (alternating between speakers) that “a lotta kids died...and now the kids so that nothing will happen to anybody else, if a car stalls here they’ll push you across...[before the train comes and happens to...] “That’s the legend.” The narrator subsequently interjects, in a facetious tone, “That’s right!” and elaborates that if you put your car in neutral, you will receive “a little helping hand from some Ghost Train angels.”

Next, the video moves into formulating a hypothesis and constructing an experiment. To that end, the video transitions to Williams, who explains further that the children do so to help “travelers” avoid the same tragic fate, and then the narrator abruptly takes over once again to segue into an experiment “in the spirit of rigorous paranormal investigation” to “test” what seems to be the hypothesis of the ghost train. Teenaged sisters Jane and June, who appear to be white and middle class, then set out to “test” the ghost tracks (apparently with the narrator in tow in the backseat) by

placing the car in neutral twenty or so feet from the tracks, and “sure enough,” they roll over the tracks, seemingly propelled by some unseen force, inciting the narrator to playfully ask, “Could it be true?” The video then concludes with the “historian,” and now suddenly referred to by the narrator as an official “Ghost Train skeptic,” Williams, who discerns the urban legend as false. The last fifteen seconds is then dedicated to Williams cataloguing all the official sources she has checked, such as the railroad, police department, newspapers, abruptly ending with Williams catechizing, “Don’t you think it would have made the headlines in a newspaper?” The viewer is left to conclude that since there are no official records or documents to concretely substantiate this event, as repetitively underscored by Williams, self-appointed historian and “Ghost Train” authority, that the Ghost Train is indeed merely the artifice of urban legend.

What this video amply demonstrates is how this urban legend is understood as resolutely false, a dismissive position that encapsulates other popular interpretations of the Tracks, as well as, and less transparently, what is omitted from or haunts this particular framing. Positions of authority are scripted according to axes of race and class. Narrative authority is tacitly conferred upon white and presumably middle to upper class subjects in the capacity of scientists, historian, and skeptics, while the two Mexican American men are conflated with “object” of inquiry in that they seem to wholly believe and participate in the rituals of this urban legend. Their testimony and presence in the video, particularly in contradistinction to the white “rational” participants who engage the scientific method, plays out a familiar racist trope in

dominant North American popular culture in which people of color are cast as primitive, backwards, and superstitious as opposed to modern, advanced, and rational. What is more, due to the men's episodic narrative style, as opposed to the seamless and seemingly logical verbal accounts given by the narrator and Williams, the two men appear naive and picaresque, their recollections not to be taken as logical or true. The two men appear erratic, finishing one another's sentences, or trailing off and gesturing with their hands as if inviting the interviewer to partake in the completion of the oral narrative. The camera angle further cements this racialized and classed visual hierarchy of authority and truth: while the camera angles upward toward Williams and the two sisters, the camera gazes downward toward the two men, undermining and even parodying their testimony of the Ghost Tracks.

The framing of the Ghost Tracks in terms of direct and singular causal relationships as well as within the register of true versus false denies meaning to these individuals' testimony. The recounting of historical memory, though, is complex: it is embodied, warm, and excessive, surging beyond the interrelated cold calculi of scientific inquiry, official history, of true versus false. In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) in her chapter "Grandmother's Story" explores how the writing of history has separated and distinguished itself from storytelling ("or it thought it could" (119)) through the cold cataloguing of facts, making it seem as though the past has no relationship to the present or future. Minh-ha further expounds that

as long as the transformation, manipulations, or redistributions inherent in the

collecting of events are overlooked, the division continues its course, as sure of its itinerary as it certainly dreams to be. Story-writing becomes history-writing, and history quickly sets itself apart, consigning story to the realms of tale, legend, myth, fiction, literature. Then, since fictional and factual have come to a point where they mutually exclude each other, fiction, not infrequently, means lies, and fact and truth. DID IT REALLY HAPPEN? IS IT A TRUE STORY? (120)

In other words, the conflation of truth and fact as well as the attendant division of story and history robs narrative of its allegorical function, another form of truth that resides in that hazy, nebulous area situated between true and false, between “regimes of truth” and “outside the hierarchical realm of facts” (Foucault 1994, 121). As Michel Foucault elucidates, the political economy or “regime of truth” is “centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions that produce it” (Foucault 316). There is a politics or “ensemble of rules” (317), invisibly informing the process of who defines what may be parsed out and deemed as true or false, “induc[ing] regular effects of power” (316) or what constitutes the fictional or factual.

The neo-colonial framing or question of whether or not this story or urban legend could be true, then, in its attempt to fully capture the past and recover its “truth” fails to apprehend another meaning of the Ghost Tracks, as articulated by the two men, as well as resounds an anxiety and disease concerning the status of truth and “the” past. What these two men convey in their verbal testimony of the Ghost Tracks is another kind of speaking “truth” to power or a “hierarchy of credibility” (Stoler 2009). It is an

account that exceeds regimes of truth and scientific discourse: imagination as verification, not falsification (Minh-ha 1989, 121). In his discussion of Latin American *testimonio*, a genre to which we may understand these men's testimonies to be intimately related, John Beverley (2004) points out that "there is not, outside of discourse, a level of social facticity that can guarantee the truth...even the memory of the past is conjectural, relative, perishable, dependent on practice" and therefore testimony, an account of the past, is "both an art and a strategy of subaltern memory" (73). The revealing of truth or the past is not a transparent, direct, or easily legible process. The version of the truth or history, in the form of allegory or urban legend, proffered by these men "baffle," foment dis-ease, and provoke "undecidability" on the behalf of the narrator who sarcastically, yet ambivalently, asks, "Could it be true?".

This online video thus gestures toward a truth that it cannot fully pinpoint in its entirety through the scientific discourse of true versus false, fact versus fiction, although it pretends otherwise. What emerges is not only an abiding uncertainty concerning the ontological status of truth, but also simultaneously an exposé, of the socially constructed parameters of Truth and their relationship to coloniality. Binary logic as a mode of inquiry, as many have argued, is symptomatic of a colonial mode of knowing or the "coloniality" (Mignolo 2000) of knowledge production at large that fails to recognize and include other cultural logics, relegating these ways of knowing and being to the register of "colonial non-sense" or that which colonial subjectivity cannot assimilate.

Postcolonial literary scholar Homi Bhabha (1994) defines the “articulation of colonial non-sense” as “the recognition of an anxious contradictory place between the human and non-human, between sense and non-sense” (178). Calling upon early modernist colonial literature, Bhabha cites as paradigmatic of colonial non-sense Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz’s “two unworkable words, ‘the Horror, the Horror,’ which defines colonial non-sense as an “ominous silence that utters an archaic colonial ‘otherness,’ that speaks in riddles, obliterating proper names and places. It is a silence that turns imperial triumphalism into the testimony of colonial confusion and those who hear it lose their historic memories” (176). Colonial non-sense, to restate, refuses and displaces binary logic and colonial signifiers. Colonial non-sense is not merely description of the other, but rather that porous space where colonial subjectivity encounters that which is unknowable and unsayable. As Bhabha elaborates, “they are the inscriptions of an uncertain colonial silence that mocks the social performance of language,” “that baffles the communicable verities of culture with their refusal to translate” (177).

Colonial non-sense is thus what the colonial imagination endeavors to capture and enunciate, the representation of difference through “manners, words, rituals, customs, time” that are “inscribed *without* a transcendent subject” (178). Attempting to make sense of that which is inscrutable to it, colonial non-sense lingers in uncertain semantic space between the colonial signifier and the signified, the liminal space between known and unknown, true and false. As such, colonial non-sense creates a state of

undecidability, or “ambivalent signification,” (182) that elides cultural authority, such as that of anthropology and social science. It is through attempting to recognize and give intelligible shape to the “culturally unassimilable” (183) that colonial non-sense disrupts and redistributes the colonial order of language and knowing, as Bhabha contends. It is within this register of colonial non-sense that the Ghost Tracks is formulated through popular culture. Yet, it is precisely the urban legend’s inexplicability and illegitimacy that incites dominant narratives of popular culture to waver, disavow, hesitate and ask, repeatedly, *Could it be true?*, effectively “cross-cutting across sites of social significance,” (183) carving out space for subaltern knowledges to emerge.

Una Herida Abierta: A Heterotology of The Ghost Tracks

In his creative *testimonio*, *Places Left Unfinished at the Time of Creation*, John Phillip Santos (1999) writes, “San Antonio is a palimpsest of erasures, a thoroughly modern and robust Texas tourism and convention Mecca, inhabited now by a pueblo of ghosts. It is a hidden-away Mexican city where a lot of old accounts are still being settled, where blood memory runs deep” (149). The urban legend of the Ghost Tracks, I propose, is one such vital site where this blood memory pools and pulsates, what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) describes as the material and social space of the “Borderlands”: *una herida abierta*, an open wound that remembers historical injury and dislocation while also generating other possible lifeworlds and forms of connection, what colonialism has sought to sever and disconnect. The Ghost Tracks, and the various meanings it accrues, is therefore profoundly connected to the San Antonio social body

as well as informed by local and national colonial imaginaries. In this way, the Ghost Tracks function as a complex borderlands space that is imbricated within and intimately related to a composite of other spaces—it is a “mixed space” or what Foucault (1986) describes as “heterotopia.” Understanding the Ghost Tracks as heterotopia, a particular topography of the Borderlands, brings into purview how this site, when understood within a larger social and cultural landscape, is invisibly animated by issues of racialized labor in relationship to colonialism and neo-colonialism, a strange crossroads that traverses and negotiates the past, present, and future. Further, understanding the Ghost Tracks through the complex lens of heterotopia brings into relief the way in which this site is connected to a larger web of history, memory, and meaning concerning the exploitation and invisibilizing of racialized and gendered labor in relationship to late capitalism, globalization, or the neoliberalization of capital.

In a lecture delivered to a group of architects in the late 1960s in Paris, which was published subsequently in English in 1986, Foucault defines his inchoate concept of heterotopia. And although relatively underdeveloped, this concept importantly names a material or lived space, in contradiction to the abstract and homogenous space of utopia, a heterogenous or “other” space that is informed by a “set of relations” (23) that encompasses the “curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect” (24). Yet, while Foucault introduces here Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage and its associated concept of lack in relation to subjectification, he also

refigures this “virtual space” as a material one (Soja 1996, 158), a kind of “counter-site” of self-reconstitution. Foucault continues that “the mirror functions as a kind of heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at my self in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to be passed through this virtual point which is over there” (24). Melding what is with what could be, heterotopia blurs “subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and concrete, the real and imagined, the knowable and unimaginable, the repetitive and differential...everyday life and unending history” (Soja 1996, 57). Heterotopia is that which escapes binary logic and generates new connections and outgrowths, harboring “the greatest reserve of the imagination” (Foucault 1986, 27).

As Foucault (1986) outlines in his sixth principle of heterotopia, this “quite other space” (24) draws its imaginative and creative force from its occupying a third space between “two extreme poles” (27), such as spaces of perceived order and disorder, in relationship to all other proximal spaces. In this way, claims Foucault, heterotopia profoundly illuminates or render “illusory” (27) the ways in which human life is partitioned and organized. While Foucault states that heterotopias are universal, he also indicates that they encapsulate “a sort of general archive,” which follows particular cultural logics. Foucault suggests, as well, that heterotopias are informed or haunted by cultural memory in that these porous sites “presuppose a system of opening and closing” at times requiring particular rituals or to “make certain gestures” to

gain entrance or access to these liminal spaces (26).

Understanding the Ghost Tracks as heterotopia foregrounds the complex entanglement of temporalities and spaces within this single site as well as how these “timespaces” are intricately bound up in a larger colonial cartography of meaning, particularly in regard to labor, raced bodies, history, memory, and knowledge production. Understanding the Ghost Tracks as heterotopia, in other words, brings into relief how this Borderlands space is embedded and mapped within a geography or colonial order of remembering and forgetting, while also undermining, unraveling, and redistributing this colonial cartography through disorderly acts or “gestures”: illicit crossings, communing with ghosts, the intermingling of past, present, and future. The Ghost Tracks as heterotopia bring into purview, however partially, the complex ways in which Mexican and Mexican American bodies are invisibly animated and move within and against seemingly crystalized positions of power within a matrix of an entrenched colonial order in the present day. This colonial order, while rarely named as such, reverberates through the exploitation of a raced and gendered labor force that fuels San Antonio’s tourism economy.

At this critical crossroads, moreover, I suggest that the significant attention paid to the Ghost Tracks in popular culture, albeit in the register of colonial non-sense, as well as the increase in visitors in the past decade to this site additionally is informed by political economy, specifically the intensified neoliberalization of capital. In *Dancing With the Devil: Society and Cultural Politics in Mexican-American South Texas*,

anthropologist José Limón (1994) argues that the folkloric tale of “The Dancing Devil” must be assigned meaning through considering the “cultural logic of late capitalism” and “flexible accumulation” in South Texas during the late 1970s when he conducted his ethnography of this folklore. Late capitalism or globalization, Limón argues, is always already cultural or racialized in the sense that the exploitation of labor, such as the service sector, works through the particular categories of culture and race. He elaborates:

This is a new form of capitalism--late capitalism that now wages war on lower-class Mexican-Americans and that may also be threatening the politics of moderation, compromise, and negotiation with the Anglo other. We can now envision a war on a different front. It is this condition of postmodernity that already by the 1970s was becoming central to the lived experience of poor Mexican-Americans as they became either part of the “relatively high levels of ‘structural’ (as opposed to ‘frictional’) unemployment,” or, at best, members of a fluid, malleable secondary labor market by virtue of their skin color and their relative lack of appropriate skills. (106)

The cultural logics of late capitalism not only inform the cultural significations in terms of race and gender surrounding this folklore but also the cultural politics of dance itself. Limón thus repeatedly poses the question: “Why do my people dance?” (154) or, in other, words, what are the cultural poetics, the particular body politic or the embodied memories and histories that *move* Mexican Americans to dance? Dancing, he surmises, is a way of reclaiming the body, flesh and blood, according to the logics of race and/or gender, that has been alienated by postmodernization of capital. It is a corporeal mode of “artful control over the effects of negating, postmodernist climate” (166). And so, like Limón, I ask, “Why do my people cross”? What compels this invisible

choreography in the new millennium? In pursuing the tracks of this urban legend, I examine how invisible and “dead labor” in relationship to the intensification of neoliberalism and globalization in the past decade or so animates and imbues with meaning this fraught and complex site.

An entrepreneurial city, San Antonio’s largest source of revenue is from its tourism industry, which generated over eleven billion dollars in 2008; and yet Bexar County has one of the highest child poverty rates and highest rate of uninsured children, who are mainly Mexican American, and also ranks lowest in spending for children’s education and healthcare. Because Texas does not enforce a state income tax, limits regulation of big businesses, and is a “right-to-work” state, cities like San Antonio attract large corporations who are able to pay an already vulnerable Mexican American population lower wages than workers in other parts of the country. And while the increasing precarity of racialized labor in San Antonio is informed by the neoliberalization of capitalism beginning in the 1970s, this economic shift has additionally functioned to consolidate this city’s peculiar colonial legacy and solidify Mexican Americans’ social position within this racialized hierarchy.

San Antonio was first colonized by Spanish Franciscan monks in the early 1700s, during which time a constellation of five missions, including the infamous “Alamo,” were built to incorporate and assimilate diverse local indigenous populations in an effort to Christianize and “civilize” them. The very subsistence of the missions depended on Native Americans, who provided the backbreaking labor to support

agriculture and livestock. It was Native Americans who provided the labor that fueled a thriving economy during the colonial era and were instrumental in contributing to postcolonial development in San Antonio in the early 1800s. In contradistinction to official mission accounts, mission life was not mutually beneficial, and the racialized parasitical and asymmetrical power relations still shape the lives of these indigenous peoples today. Accounting historians Sarah A. Holmes, Sandra T. Welch, and Laura R. Knudson (2005) argue, for example, that the inculcation of Eurocentric accounting practices—based in notions of “individual” accountability—facilitated the absorption of native peoples into Spanish society, thereby enacting “exploitation and ultimate subjugation,” similar to that of native populations in Canada, Australia, and the Scottish Highlands (2-3). The missions, which are only less than a few miles away from the Ghost Tracks, therefore function as a symbolic and material economy of racialized invisible labor, what Marx refers to as the “residue of the products of labor,” or “phantom-like objectivity” (128). In other words, the concretized products of labor obscure the heterogeneity of laboring bodies and their respective genealogies. Many American Indians who were not decimated by disease in the late 1800s, were assimilated into the Mexican population.

Railroads, the steely armature of modernization in the U.S., moreover, concretize this physical exclusion as well as this congealed racialized labor. Anthropologist Richard Flores (2002) has noted that the advent of the railroad in Texas in 1875, in tandem with the introduction of barbed wire, inaugurated what he terms The Texas Modern (1880-

1920), which marks a rapid transition from a largely cattle-based society to agricultural one, further spatially entrenching the social and economic exclusion of Mexican Americans. The railroad and the resulting “spatial dissolution and displacement was a key element of political conquest, as the subsequent respatialization of conquered terrains served to fortify the norms, values, and cultural practices of the dominant [Anglo] group” (37). Flores highlights how “the arrival of the Southern Pacific and the closing of the cattle trails resulted in the displacement of local and regional markets that served as an infrastructure for the cattle driving industry” (47). Both Flores and geographer Daniel Arreola further underscore the ways in which this rapid economic restructuring not only disproportionately affected elite Mexican ranch owners, but also crystallized “residential segregation and cultural marginalization” (48), a racialized respatialization that still inheres in and racially segregates San Antonio’s cityscape, as evident in the de facto partitioning off of San Antonio’s Southside, Eastside, and Westside. Historian and urban studies scholar Char Miller observes the way in which the railroads, such as the Southern Pacific, respatialized the downtown area. He underlines not only how in the late 1880s the placing of depots on the eastern and western areas of the central core reshaped economic activity toward these areas (71-2), but also that “the increased number of visitors and commercial agents coming to San Antonio generated...a related spurt of hotel and boardinghouse construction or renovation,” (72) such as that of St. Paul Square (where the haunted house “The Thirteenth Floor” is located).

In addition to enforced physical marginalization by the siting of railroads of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Texas Modern, the construction of railroads has also directly exploited the bodies of Mexican and Mexican Americans and American Indians, such as the Yaqui. Historian Manuel Gonzalez (1999) writes, “The work was hard, dangerous, and ill-paid. Moreover there was a wage-differential that worked to their detriment: most Mexican rail workers were paid about one dollar for a ten-hour day, while Anglos received seventy-five cents more. Housing was equally dismal; oftentimes Mexican families were forced to live in box cars” (152). Gonzalez notes further that, unlike mine workers who were relatively stationary, it was extremely difficult for them to organize under a union until the turn of the century. Barbara Driscoll, in her study of the railroad bracero program after World War II, details the perilous consequences of working on the Southern Pacific:

During the course of the program, the Southern Pacific reported eighty-nine bracero deaths, of which seventy occurred while the workers were off duty. Of the eighty-nine deaths, eighty-one occurred on the Southern Pacific itself...Off-duty deaths were attributed to natural causes, train and rail accidents, drowning, suicides, fights, and alcohol. Work-related accidents were caused by train-accidents and heat prostration. (117)

Thus, the railroads spectralize labor, occluding the way in which the labor of raced bodies has accumulated in and has constructed the railroads. However, the abstraction of human labor-power, as Marx reminds us, has everything to do with the material—it leaves traces.

The exploitation of Mexican and Mexican American labor extends well beyond the railroads, however, and has effectively propelled the modernization and post-

modernization or neoliberalization of San Antonio and beyond. Beyond the perilous work of building of vital transportation infrastructure, related flashpoints concerning the exploitation of racialized and gendered labor include the hazardous working conditions inflicted on workers in the pecan factories in the 1930s. During the resulting Pecan Shellers' Strike in 1938, 12,000 pecan shellers, mainly Mexican and Mexican American women, went on strike for nearly three months. Rather than improve labor conditions, the pecan factories relocated to small towns and cities with fewer labor regulations. A harbinger of the "spatial fix" and the related "best practice" of outsourcing due to the globalization of capital, the Pecan Shellers' Strike helped to set the stage for predatory labor practices by large transnational corporations in the late 20th-century. In the early 1990s the Levis factory relocated from San Antonio to Costa Rica in order to drastically reduce its production costs despite costing thousands of jobs in San Antonio. More recently, Toyota abandoned its new factory in California where labor is more organized and the company is forced to pay workers higher salaries, and moved to San Antonio because of tax breaks and cheaper labor. While the Toyota factory promised thousands of jobs to compensate for major tax breaks, including not having to pay property taxes for schools, these jobs compensate workers barely more than minimum wage, continuing extant cycles of poverty and maintaining a pool of available surplus labor. And while the tourist industry comprises the largest source of city revenue annually, it functions to maintain a racialized and gendered hierarchy, benefiting and preserving the social position of the city's affluent elite. Unite Here, for example, has been organizing hotel

housekeepers at the Grand Hyatt to combat low wages, poor health benefits, and to implement safety regulations.

San Antonio, and particularly the white elite, is consequently ablaze with “archive fever” (Derrida 1996) further codifying and rendering invisible this deeply embedded racialized history of labor. Archive fever, according to Derrida, is the febrile compulsion to selectively cull out, store, and conserve particular perspectives of history, all the while presenting this history as seamless, natural, and universal. Revealing a deeper anxiety or “colonial ambivalence” among Anglo elites in San Antonio concerning what and who counts as valid Texas and U.S. history, this archive fever propagates a narrative that compulsively solidifies and maintains the historical memory of the elite class. Fueling San Antonio’s tourist economy, these sanctioned sites of history are firmly rooted in nationalist imaginaries of white Texas heroes and their brown Mexican and American Indian others.

In San Antonio, civic and volunteer organizations play a central role in maintaining various archives that guard and promote a monolithic vision of “pioneer” heritage and history, such as the The Sons and Daughters of the Republic of Texas (SRT and DRT), which have been and continue to be comprised mainly of elite whites. While the San Antonio Conservation Society is dedicated principally to the historic preservation of select relics and architectural styles, the expressed goals of the DRT/SRT are “to secure and memorialize all historical spots erecting markers thereon, and to cherish and preserve the unity of Texas as achieved and established by the

fathers and mothers of the Texas Revolution” (<http://www.drinfo.org/>). This civic organization is responsible for the restoration and upkeep of the Alamo, as well as is partially culpable for transforming this once dilapidated mission into a “master symbol” (Flores 2002). There is additionally the Texas Transportation Museum that through its model train exhibits in conjunction with its working passenger train “collects, preserves and displays historically significant transportation equipment and related items,” offering a sanitized and de-raced version of railroad history and the current implications of this form of transportation (<http://www.txtransportationmuseum.org/g>).

It is not surprising or incongruous with its stated mission, then, that this museum also rents out its facility for private parties or rents out antique vehicles for parades, such as those for Fiesta, a nearly two week celebration that generates hundreds of million dollars in city revenue annually. The archival impulse thus animates and maintains a colonial imaginary that is bound to a neoliberal economy and racialization of labor and effectively deadens historical memory that does not assimilate into its singular master narrative, rendering counter-memory marginal or ghostly.

And so, approaching the Ghost Tracks as a complex Borderlands space or heterotopia radically opens up this seemingly discrete space and limns out the multiple ways in which this site is in fact vitally connected to and imbricated within a larger colonial and neo-colonial cityscape, a geography that has been shaped by gendered and racialized “invisible labor.” It is through a “heterotopology” of the Ghost Tracks that we may formulate meaning concerning this complex space that extends beyond true and

false, official archives, and the cold calculus of scientific inquiry. What animates and propels the Ghost Tracks, its “ghostly matters,” that is, is not readily legible and consumable, but rather embodied, ritualized, and performed, enacting and enabling de-colonizing historical and cultural memory.

Ghostly Encounters: Redistributing Memory *Within and Against* a Colonial Complex

Perhaps because of this urban legend’s lack of official archival evidence or the way in which this urban legend has been sanitized in popular culture, there is very little scholarly work that examines or theorizes this site. Literary and folklore studies scholar, Carl Lindahl (2005), though, has argued that the crossing of the Tracks exemplifies an act of “ostension,” an mimetic act through which “people live out legend, making it real in the most palpable sense” (164). Centering his analysis on one interview he conducted with one of his Mexican American students, “Lydia,” at the University of Houston, as well as a brief one-hour visit to the Tracks in 2003, Lindahl concludes that these “legend trippers,” and particularly women, act as pilgrims who seek a “pious thrill” and who identify with the innocence of the dead children, which he attributes to the “folk Catholicism of South Texas [that] continually reinforces the special religious dimensions of motherhood, infancy, and healing” (178). And while I certainly agree that the crossing of the tracks takes on a gendered component, and I would add, particularly in relationship to child rearing and domestic labor, racialized “women’s work” that is underpaid and unacknowledged, Lindahl unintentionally

characterizes Lydia and other “legend-trippers” he encounters as picaresque or “native informants” as well as paints a partial picture of a complex landscape, obscuring and precluding how the act of crossing may be informed by multiple “timespaces.”

Glaringly absent from this account of the Ghost Tracks, moreover, is the juxtaposition of order and disorder that inhere in this site, its heterotopology that opens up space for other forms of knowledge to emerge: that is, socially spectral knowledge that elides true or false and facile, direct legibility. Foucault (1970), in *The Order of Things*, in theorizing how Borges’s Chinese encyclopaedia destroys the “common ground” (xvi) of classification and knowledge, observes: “*Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language...because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also the less apparent syntax which causes words and things...to ‘hold together’” (xviii). As such, “heterotopias...desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks...” (xviii). Heterotopias therefore “dissolve our myths,” singular or monolithic regimes of truth, and effectively reorder or reassemble terrains or grammars of knowing and knowledge. And yet, simultaneously, heterotopias permit “spatial stories” and “trajectories” to emerge, new “spatial syntaxes” that “select and link [places] together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them (de Certeau 1984, 115). What manifests at this complex site, albeit partially or illegibly, is the enunciation of counter-memory.

The production or performance of counter-memory or alternative spatial stories is

not simply a cerebral or individual act, but instead that which is embodied and communal. Memory is not simply inscribed upon the body, but an “act of transfer,” a grammatical movement that is constituted and maintained through the body (Connerton 1989). Similarly, performance studies scholar Diana Taylor (2003) argues that cultural memory is not merely limited to language or validated through official archives and narratives, but rather works in conjunction with language through “repertoire,” which “enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement...in short, all those acts that are usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge” (20). She further underscores that repertoire is never static, but instead both alive and ghostly in that it “both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning” (20). This repertoire of cultural and historical memory is performed and imbued with meaning not only through bodies but also in conjunction with time and space, a complex of constituent elements that articulate counter- or historical and cultural memory. It is through this complex matrix of bodies, language, and timespaces that we may begin to limn out how the crossing of the Ghost Tracks performs alternative spatial stories, or, more specifically, “decolonial imaginaries” (Pérez 1999), and signals the potential for postcolonial trajectories.

While I have been formally researching the Ghost Tracks since the fall of 2007 up to the fall of 2010, I will utilize an interview with my aunt as well as my own participatory observation of the Ghost Tracks from Halloween 2008. I suggest that the ritualized crossing of the Ghost Tracks be understood as performative, not as ostension,

but rather as a performance or the enacting of counter-memory, which I understand as social, cultural, and historical. This performance of counter-memory is profoundly embodied and functions to disturb and redistribute this complex site. Yet, this ritualized performance or crossing does not yield a legible, containable result or finalized product. It functions as an act of healing by being in touch or in contact with other bodies and stories, with the past, present, and future. This suturing of what colonialism and neo-colonialism has torn asunder and alienated is, significantly, a communal act of bridging *what is* with what *could be*.

This study or “ethnography” of the Ghost Tracks has in some ways been a long time in the making, a particular spectral archive of my own *encrucijada* and encounters in this fraught space. My maternal side of the family, who is Mexican/Mexican American, extends back three generations in San Antonio, beginning when my great-grandparents, who sought refuge from the rampant violence of the Revolution near the U.S.-Mexico border at the turn of the last century and waded across the Rio Grande with nothing but a goat in tow, as the story goes. Making their way up to the Westside of San Antonio, my great-grandparents planted roots, started a family, and passed on their stories. I remember first hearing tales of La Llorona, The Donkey Lady, and the Ghost Tracks while in elementary school and have since been haunted, especially by the Tracks, fragments that never neatly coalesced into a whole: children, 1970s (or earlier), Southside, bus, train, crash, cars, baby powder, fingerprints. The urban legend itself seemed like one big *choque*, a “crash” of seeming disparate elements that when taken

together, gesture toward something beyond the sum of its parts.

I will focus here on two accounts of the Ghosts Tracks, including the recollection of my own Tía or “Aunt” Debbie, who is from and has lived her entire life in San Antonio, as well as my own participation observation on Halloween 2008. Upon informing my Tía Debbie, a known storyteller in my family, that I was studying the Ghost Tracks, she emailed me her own narrative account, of which I have included excerpts, detailing her first experience of this site with her sons and their neighbor’s son:

I think it was the week before Halloween in either 1998 or 1999. It was neither cold or hot and it was on a Saturday night. Alex was either 8 or 9 and Aaron was either 14 or 15 years old. All of us had been home doing various things around the house and finally finished. It wasn't quite dark since it was still daylight savings time. Uncle Roger and I have always loved Halloween. My dad instilled the joy of dressing up and getting candy in me, and Roger and I passed it on to Aaron and Alex... We thought it would be fun to take them to the infamous train tracks on San Antonio. Alex asked if he could invite his friend from across the street who is 2 years older, to go along with us...So we headed off in the Red Minivan to the south side of town...

Once we were over the bridge we were no longer in the mist and proceeded up to take a right and drive on Villamain Road. You could see the train track on the left side of the van. Within 100 feet you could see a line of cars. We were moving slowly because now there were many others also wanting to experience the train tracks. Alex's friend was beside himself. He wanted to go home NOW. We tried to calm him down by reminding him the ghosts were supposed to be children protecting others from getting hurt. They would not do any harm to him and if people were getting hurt, the police would be here making us go home...

Just before Villamain turns to the left to cross the train tracks, there is a street light which is pretty bright. As we approached the turn we could see a lot of the cars parked on the side of the road. People were checking the back of their cars for hand and fingerprints. There were a few kids sitting on the tracks with a Ouija board. Others were watching as the next car was getting ready to be "pushed" across the tracks. We drove quite a way to find the end of the line and turnaround to take our turn across the tracks...

There was quite a wait in line until we got close again to the tracks to cross. To pass time we talked about the experience of crossing the bridge through the

mist. One thing I will also mention is that there were all types of people waiting in line for their turn and it did not seem that there was anyone causing trouble. We also did not see any law enforcement. The neighbors, even though they do not like the traffic through their neighborhood this time of year, were not harassing anyone. The people in line in their cars were courteous in that they did not turnaround in driveways, drop trash or honk horns...

We watched the car in front of us to see how to do it. About 20 feet from the tracks you turn off your lights, turn off your car engine and put the car in neutral. The car very slowly starts to roll toward the tracks. It seems like you are headed down hill then right before you cross the tracks the road seems to be at an upward grade to go over the tracks. I do not care what anyone says, it looks like you go down then up and over the tracks.

It was our turn. The boys were tense. The neighbor was saying a Hail Mary. It was dead silence as Roger turned off the motor, turned off the lights and put the car in neutral. We were a complete stop. Then we slowly started to move. We could feel the momentum of the downward slope helping us increase our speed. Speed being still under 1 mile an hour. We could now see the tracks within 10 feet from us and see the upward slope of the road. We actually gained speed when we entered the upward slope. We kept going upward and could see the tracks within 2 feet from the front of the van. We crossed tracks while still going uphill and still in neutral. Once over the tracks the van kept going. We turned on the engine and drove to about 25 feet up the road pass the tracks on Villamain...

We still talk about that night with fondness, [and who knows] whether [it be] because we got to experience a San Antonio legend or because we actually had a ghostly encounter. Who knows. [personal communication, email, October 28, 2007]

At the heart of my tía's account is an interplay of order and disorder, the vital importance of transmission, and a liminal or "in-between" quality of crossing and the site itself—strange intermixing of ordinary and extraordinary, the sacred and profane. As she describes it, the weather was neither light nor dark, neither hot nor cold. It is initially misty and difficult to see. Although driving to the Ghost Tracks seems like an inconsequential and mundane task, preceded by weekend house chores, the meaning of the journey accrues more somber, sacred, and ritualized aspects as they approximate the

ghostly site. One of the boys says a Hail Mary, the Roman Catholic prayer requesting intercession from the Virgin Mary, or for many Catholic Mexican Americans, the Virgen de Guadalupe, a figure that blends Catholic and Mexican indigenous belief systems.

Crossing the Ghost Tracks also becomes a highly ritualized and precise act: my aunt notes how they were careful to observe and emulate others and includes exact measurements as if to assert narrative authority and make the story more lively (even though, of course, it would have been nearly impossible for her to take exact measurements). As my tía's story reveals, there are particular steps or rituals involved in crossing the Tracks, including sprinkling baby powder on the back bumper and windshield of the vehicle, shifting the vehicle into neutral and turning off the engine several feet before crossing, restarting the vehicle and pulling over off to the right-hand side of the road in order to search for fingerprints, which are inevitably there.

And while my aunt rationalizes that the law enforcement would intercede if the ghosts became violent or harmful in any way, she omits that it is actually illegal to turn off your vehicle (and to turn off your headlights if at night), warranting police presence in the first place, inadvertently calling attention to the way in which this site is animated by competing forces of order and disorder, elements of the carnivalesque through which the dominant order is mocked and subverted. During my participation observation on Halloween 2008, nearly ten years later after my aunt's account, I visited the Ghost Tracks with my mother, grandmother, brother, and two aunts (including Debbie), and as I was standing near the intersection, chatting with various visitors, mainly parents with

their adolescent and young children, concerning their versions of the urban legend and their personal experiences of the Ghost Tracks, two police cars with their lights flashing, sped past the serpentine line to the intersection. After abruptly parking, one officer began directing traffic while another detained an *El Camino*, which contained several Mexicanos in its back bed. Upon approaching the car on foot, the officer intrusively shone his flashlight into the eyes of those in the back, demanding identification. After verifying each and every one of their identifications, slowly and deliberately, the officer returned, handed back their identifications, and released them. And even though these men were being detained by the officer, ostensibly for illegally riding in the back bed of the vehicle as well as turning off the lights and engine, families continued to transgress this space in similar fashion, exhibiting strange defiance, despite the looming police presence. Their detention of these men made a strange spectacle against the backdrop of families who had crossed the Tracks, convening and exchanging stories.

What is often additionally omitted from accounts of the Ghost Tracks is the way in which social interaction and oral transmission is fostered, the way in which families pull over to the side of the road, step out, search for prints on the back of the vehicle, and exchange stories with one another as well as families and individuals standing next to proximal vehicles. Many families bring flashlights, such as my Tía Debbie, in order to illuminate the ghostly prints, rendering the labor of the children visible, perceptible to the living. Children and adults look on in awe, even reverence.

Many of the stories exchanged during this event center upon other previous experiences of the Ghost Tracks. During the time period that I participated in and observed the crossing of the Ghost Tracks from 2007 to 2010 during Halloween, Day of the Dead (All Souls Day), and All Saints Day, I would often causally wander up to other cars and strike up conversation about the prints on their vehicles and their versions of the Ghost Tracks, which ranged from the 1930s to the 1980s, particularly depending on the age of the person. For most, however, the date and the particular details of the crash were simply an aside, and people largely zeroed in on their own particular personal and familial experiences of the Tracks concerning the uncanny sensation of crossing the Tracks, of being pushed over to safety. While many find the perceived sensation eerie, many simultaneously recognized this strange experience as a labor of love or care for the passengers inside the vehicle, effectively preventing the passengers from meeting the same tragic fate.

Narrative thus becomes a vehicle for the transmission of embodied knowledge, a mode of recovery and reconnection to that which racialized labor has severed, alienated, and exploited. While ghostly matters are never “innocent” or wholly and directly recoverable, storytelling, the exchange of personal narratives, functions also as a ritualized act in tandem with other rituals that comprise crossing the Tracks. These performative acts collectively connect a community to an invisible, yet tangible past wherein their labor has been and continues to be expropriated not only in service of constructing the railroad, a paradigmatic master symbol of the onslaught of so-called

modernity and progress in Texas and the U.S., but also in the ongoing proliferation of San Antonio's exploitive tourist economy in which a Spanish or European Fantasy Heritage or "authentic" Mexican culture is capitalized upon at the expense of actual poor and working class Mexican and Mexican American bodies. Narrative, in this case, does not remain within the register of true and false, but surges and operates beyond it, forging vital connective tissue between the past, present, and future, between the visible and invisible, the disembodied and embodied, as well as the Ghost Tracks to a larger social and political geography of San Antonio. This transmission of historical and cultural knowledge names not only loss, the inheritance of reification and usurpation of living labor, but also gestures toward other horizons of possibility.

Unlike ostensive play, as suggested by Lindahl (2005) or Victor Turner's (1975) notion of the universal or cross-cultural "social drama" wherein a social event that arises from "conflict situations" unfolds in four successive stages--breach, crisis, regressive action, and reintegration or schism--crossing the Ghost Tracks and the exchange of narratives do not comply with readymade stages or forms of legibility. As well, the complex crossing of the Ghost Tracks in addition to the oral narratives thereafter escapes binary logic—they neither mold to reintegration nor schism, but rather blur the two, operating as a continual ruptural process, enacting not merely disorder, but a perform the work of "dissensus" through which a "multiplicity of small ruptures" manifest instead totalizing acts of subversion (Rancière 2004). Elaborating the taut relationship between political statements and aesthetics, French philosopher Jacques

Rancière (2004) states that regimes of the sensible

draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies...they widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations...They reconfigure the map of the sensible by interfering with the functionality of gestures and rhythms [63] adapted to the natural cycles of production, reproduction, and submission. (39)

Narrative, a constituent element of the performativity of the Ghost Tracks, effectively redistributes the field of the sensible or visible, disturbs “natural” neo-colonial orders and rhythms, opening up possibilities for other modes of knowing to manifest and leave their powdery imprints.

And so my tía’s story thus has no clearly discernible point or trajectory, and the “truth” of her story does not rely on precise measurements enumerated in “feet” or the veracity of her thick description. What my aunt’s narrative unveils is the complex *act* of narrative--that is, the transmission of historical and cultural knowledge, a small rupture within a dominant or colonial narrative framed within discourse of true and false. Throughout her narrative, my Tía Debbie is cognizant of the relationship among memory, story, ritual, and the Ghost Tracks. She emphasizes both the desire to and pleasure in passing on and acting out or participating in this urban legend--with no direct link to the significance of the actual children who apparently perished in some unbeknownst decade, but rather the act of being in touch, in common, with the living and dead, an act that fuses the sacred and profane, revealing the heterotopology of this space. As my tía implicitly suggests, facts are beside the point, peripheral to the act of

connecting to her past, present, and future through this physical and narrative act involved in crossing the Tracks, and in doing so inadvertently speaks truth to power:

Who knows?

Toward Spatial Justice: In the Ghost Tracks of Postcolonial Futures

“Real social change requires the gestation, production, and refinement of an imagination well beyond what is usual or socially acceptable, and the requires generous time and space.” --Avery Gordon, *Keeping Good Time: Reflections on Knowledge, Power, and People*

On that Halloween 2008, as the traffic dissipated due to police presence, with notebook in hand, I cautiously approached the police officer who stood directing traffic and informed him that I was researching the Ghost Tracks. He smirked and asked me if I had done my background research on the urban legend, because, according to him, the event never happened, implying, of course, that a “true” historian would have checked her facts. Like popular accounts of the Ghost Tracks, this so-called urban legend does not register within the domains of fact and fiction, true and false, and manifests consequently within dominant or popular discourse as colonial nonsense that continually and ambivalently questions the story’s veracity, its origins.

In her pivotal essay, “Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of ‘the’ Native Woman,” Chicana scholar Norma Alarcón (1999) unearths the multiple ways in which the term “Chicana/o” has by no means encapsulated a definitive culture but rather a “subject-in-process” that “has become a critical site of political, ideological, and

discursive struggle through which the notion of ‘definitiveness’ and hegemonic and tendencies are placed into question” (184). “The” native woman upon whom Chicana identity is constructed functions as critical site of ongoing deconstruction and dislocation in that “it provides the position for multiple cultural critiques between and within, inside and outside, centers and margins” (184). For example, claiming Chicana identity is to refuse and dislodge the Mexican nationalist project of *mestizaje*, which promotes a heteronormative patriarchal order as well as to potentially forge solidarity with *mestizas* in Mexico whose bodies and casual labor are the “source of cheap labor in the field, the canneries, the maquiladora border industries, and domestic service” (185). Instructive here is how Alarcón brings into purview not only how the search for a single origin of Chicana/o is rooted a colonial “discovery” narratives, but also how its use is never innocent but always already underpinned by ideological or hegemonic moorings. To fail to acknowledge and reckon with these differences, or what she terms “differends,” borrowing from Lyotard, concerning “tracks” or “origins” is to obfuscate and naturalize a particular order of power or field of visibility, and, conversely, invisibility.

In the same way, to apprehend the “true” origins of the Ghost Tracks or to reveal the true “tracks” of this urban legend is to naturalize and further sediment a particular colonial order, one that invisibilizes the alienation of racialized and gendered labor as well as occludes the way this site is “mixed,” animated by and connected to a larger neo-colonial cartography of San Antonio’s cityscape. The question of whether or

not “it could be true” does not register the multiple significations, embodied and otherwise, of this complex site, and instead echoes the ambivalent and anxious grammar of colonial nonsense. However, when approached as a heterotopia, a particular cultural logics and a richer, more complex composition of the Ghost Tracks emerge: that of “altarity” (Pérez 2007).

In *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, Pérez (2007) examines how Chicana feminist art during 1970s through the 90s deploy and redefine the spiritual as not only, paradoxically, a material practice, but also that which bridges the material and immaterial worlds. The spiritual aspects of this rich corpus of aesthetic production, Pérez elaborates, “is not some abstract or romantic notion, reproducing the idea of a binary split between a baser material, physical, and social reality and a nobler, separate realm of spirit, ideas, and intellect” (20). This “spirit work” thus endeavors to dismantle Eurocentric binaries of modern and primitive or developed and underdeveloped cultures, signaling the socially spectral or “marginal social being” as well as drawing attention to “what counts as respectable religion and to the more ghostly status of egalitarian forms of spirituality in U.S. culture” (20). Pérez’s neologism “altarity,” a pun on alterity and *altar*, a Mexican and Mexican American religious or spiritual shrine, not only identifies this spirit work as a culturally specific form of difference that exceeds Eurocentric binaries, but also brings together seemingly disparate elements to forge new significations to pay homage and to remember the dead. In the U.S., altars have accrued a more public and political function, as evident in much of the

aesthetic work Pérez analyzes, such as the altar work of Amalia Mesa-Bain. Altars, both as religious and/or artistic practice, exemplify the performative working class aesthetic of *rasquachismo* or “making do” through the creative recycling and recombination of what is usually discarded and regarded as waste, such as scraps of paper, string, tin, among other materials. Altarity, in Pérez’s formulation, thus articulates an inorganic or complex composition whose spiritual meaning connects individuals to one another as well as collective pasts, presents, and futures through modes that are not always immediately transparent. It is this very spirit of altarity that compels the crossing of the Ghost Tracks, I propose.

The crossing of the Ghost Tracks or this haunted site itself is not easily legible in that it defies colonial optics that grasp for discreet wholes or perfect, seamless narratives and actions. While I am not offering a readymade hermeneutic for understanding “the” meaning of the Ghost Tracks, I do suggest approaching this site as a performance of altarity, a complex or multi-faceted configuration whose sum exceeds its parts and refuses facile consumption. This site functions to reconnect in provisional ways what has been rendered waste or “in excess” of the neo-colonial social body or cityscape in order to reckon with a peculiar colonial past that has cut ties between particular bodies and their labor, between individuals and a collective past. And even though the crossing of the Ghost Tracks may not subvert or dismantle San Antonio’s colonial legacy, it does indeed begin to peel back the skin to uncover capillaries and connective tissue within the neocolonial social body: *una herida abierta*, a ruptural

space wherein contradictions manifest, colonial nonsense ensues, and bodies illicitly traverse.

The Ghost Tracks is thus a space of reckoning, where decolonial imaginaries germinate, as well as a site where various forms of alienation and loss are gestured toward and performed, given sense. The performance of loss, of reckoning, and coming to terms, though, is inherently processual, incomplete, and not readily legible or consumable, much like the composition of subjectivity, although colonial discourse pretends otherwise. In *Dead Subjects: Toward a Politics of Loss in Latino Studies*, Antonio Viego (2007) refuses the “hegemony of ego and social psychology” (226) which casts ethnic and racialized subjectivity as whole, complete, and transparent, and these ascribed characteristics are “what provide racist discourse with precisely the notion of subjectivity that it needs in order to function most effectively” (227). It is this legibility and fixity of the subject that renders it calculable and functional to various forms of power, that renders it a “dead subject.” As such, in his recuperation of an emancipatory Lacanian analysis, Viego argues that we must instead understand the subject as a dynamic one “that is in direct opposition to the ego’s desire for mastery, fixity, rigidity, wholeness, and transparency,” enabling a “affectively moving species of mourning” (242). This reformulation of subjectivity thus eschews the singular, paralyzing gaze of colonialism, among other absolutist forms of power, and adopts a more contingent and flexible form of subjectivity, one that is able to articulate the social and material aspects of loss as well as carves out space for and moves toward “endless

possibility of action and intervention” (242).

And while the ritualized acts involved in crossing the Ghost Tracks express the complex and communal nature of subjectivity, they also produce a subjectivity that diverts the colonial imaginary, exceeding its narcissistic and totalizing gaze at every intersection--that is, through the crossroads of life and death, self and other, visible and invisible. This urban legend may also very well be a “copycat” or “gravity hill” phenomenon, as propagated by popular media outlets, but these explanations do not elucidate what compels crossing, why it is that poor and working class Mexicans and Mexican Americans continue to frequent this site not only during late October but also visit this junction in a steady stream all year long, all day and night. The narrative itself does not seem to “add up”: streets named after dead white children, a tragic crash whose date varies according to whom you ask, powdery remnants of the unseen. And yet, that this nonsensical calculus of this urban legend does not register within dominant discourses might be the very point: that there is not *the* singular crystallized version comprised of discreet elements, but *the many* comprised of shifting and indiscreet constituent elements—racialized bodies, invisible labor, railroads, missions—that exceed the whole. As I have tracked here, this is a complicated site of historical trauma in which the past is remembered, oral transmission occurs, and being in touch with the past and one another in the face of a legacy of colonialism as well as the attendant strategy of divide and conquer, which like the Southern Pacific Railroad Tracks, sutures and scars the earth, through which pulsates living history and “blood memory.”

Finally, conceptualizing the Ghost Tracks as a heterotopic or Borderlands space imparts a richer and more complex account of the way in which this site is orchestrated by the seen and unseen and is intimately interconnected within a larger colonial and neocolonial social body. Understanding this site as such brings into purview, without wholly consuming, the way in which the various constituent components, dead and living, articulate both the necessity and demand for “spatial justice” (Soja 2010) as well as, relatedly, a politics and practice of hope through paradoxically the indexing of loss. The site of the Ghost Tracks thus matters more than powdery imprints can fully trace: it is a “consequential” geography full of seeming contradictions that “is produced through processes that are simultaneously social and spatial, subjective and objective, concretely real and creatively imagined” (104). It not only uncovers the past in the present—a strange crossroads that signals the steely and concrete ways that so-called history impinges on the extant as well as the particular and indirect nature of remembering—but also the way in which this “mixed” space brings together and contingently links seemingly other various temporalities and spaces. In this way, this crossroads opens up and redistributes this neocolonial physical and imaginative terrain, and surges forth and beyond the conditional limits of the *could it be true?* toward the subjunctive realm of desire, en route toward potential postcolonial futures.

Chapter 2

(Trans)Mission Possible:**Project MASA, Chicanafuturism, and Decolonial Imaginaries**

of other planets I am
dreaming

of other ways of seeing

this life.

—Cherrie Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back*

In this chapter I continue to explore the ways in which particular colonial legacies impinge upon and delimit the present and future through Enlightenment categories of primitive and modern. Specifically, I analyze the visual art of Project MASA which collectively visually foregrounds the ways in which Mexicana/os and Mexican Americans or Chicana/os are symbolically conflated with the primitive and irrational, excluding them from the realm of the advanced, technological, or modern, putative domains of Progress. Project MASA, though, is not merely a project of nostalgic recovery, but disturbs the very grounds upon which this racialized binary of advanced versus primitive takes root, and in doing so, visually produce decolonial imaginaries that go beyond such categories and gesture toward novel ways of being and seeing.

Launched by artist educator Luis Valderas in response to heightened xenophobia after 9/11, Project MASA attempts to visually link Chicana/o struggles in the Borderlands with those of other third world people of color colonized by U.S. Empire through the visual exploration of outer space and the reconstruction of “modern”

mythologies. An ironic acronym for “MeChicana/o Alliance of Space Artists,”¹ Project MASA is a collaboration of diverse Chicana/o artists mainly concentrated in San Antonio, Texas, whose “mission” is “to establish an awareness of outer space as an integral part of the Chicana/o modern mythos/reality/iconography.” This collaborative consciously couples images of outer space and the technological or advanced with pre-Columbian iconography or the “primitive” (<http://projectmasa.com>) so as to blur the boundary between the two while simultaneously radically re-visioning the technological and advanced. The group’s title, Project MASA, the Spanish word “masa,” or “corn dough,” plays upon this intentional juxtaposition in that “masa” in that it brings to mind corn or maize’s significance in pre-colombian iconography as source of nourishment, physically and spiritually, for American indigenous peoples, as well as ironically evokes “NASA,” The National Aeronautics and Space Administration, located in nearby Houston, an institution that emerged to compete in the “race for space” amid Cold War paranoia and anti-communist sentiment and whose astronauts continue to “pioneer the future in space.” *Masanauts*, on the other hand, do not follow a set course, and through creative assemblages, critique positivist trajectory and imagine the “final *frontera*” not as a remote and unrealizable utopia or “no-place,” but rather as multiple “third spaces” that are animated by the particular and grounded lived experiences and histories of Chicana/os. Project MASA collaboratively works to visually deterritorialize colonial legacies of the “Mission City” as well as those experienced by Chicana/os more generally in the U.S.

¹ Sometimes “Artisans” is substituted for “Artists.”

To date, Project MASA has held three gallery shows in 2001, 2006, and most recently in 2007. While all three exhibitions shared some of the same visual art and was informed by the same objective to collectively render more equitable modern mythologies, the scope of Project MASA's vision grew to be more inclusive with each show through the increased inclusion of diverse artists, including a focused effort to include more Chicana feminist artists. The first two shows were featured in the Gallista Gallery owned by local Chicano artist Joe Lopez, on the Southside of San Antonio, a historically Mexican American barrio, and the third show was held in Centro Cultural Aztlán just Northwest of the downtown area in the Art Deco District, which was founded in the late 1970s by Chicano community organizers to promote Mexican American cultural programming and artistic production, such as poetry and visual art. These artistic venues are important sites in San Antonio for not only making vital space for Chicana/o and political art and challenging to an important extent white elite art institutions in San Antonio, but also bringing together various activist artists and Chicana/o community members in a shared space to facilitate conversations and various interactions in relationship to this deeply political visual art. These politically progressive spaces are and have been relatively rare in this military-oriented and politically conservative city. Because of significant overlap in the shows' themes, featured work, and venues in addition to the "mission" of Project MASA to create a collective vision of the past, present, and future, I will discuss the visual art in these shows as a single complex corpus that challenges San Antonio's conservative dominant social body.

Outer or “third” space does not merely function as a backdrop in the creative work of Project MASA, I argue, but rather it operates as a dynamic and indeterminate form of a “decolonial imaginary” or “third space” that indexes a more supple, anti-colonial modes of knowledge production. This decolonizing third space form, further, refuses stasis, capture, or closure through the selection and melding of supposedly incompatible images or iconography, such as the ostensibly “primitive” and modern or the particular and the universal. Propelled by the Chicana/o aesthetic or third space praxis of *rasquachismo*, Project MASA radically confronts and unravels the totalizing fabric of particular colonial legacies as well as the more pervasive “coloniality of power”: that is, the way in which power colonizes and orders knowledge through its instantiation of certain classifications, organizations, and hierarchies, as well as produces and maintains the appropriate or proper spaces in which these mechanisms occur (Mignolo 2000, 16). Project MASA’s deployment of *rasquachismo*, moreover, pressures, rearranges, and sketches out *de nuevo*², or rather, *de novo* imaginative horizons, a visual practice that emphasizes a “continual creative motion” (Anzaldúa 1987, 79-80) over finality or sedimented binaries, the bulwark of colonial ordering. In this way third space praxis, through its emphasis on process and movement, functions in this visual art as a dynamic line of flight that engages, yet elides and extends beyond, the stranglehold of certain colonial legacies.

I additionally revisit and expand here the scope Catherine Ramirez’s notion of Chicanafuturism, an artistic movement she conceptualizes to understand the work of New Mexican visual artist Marion C. Martinez, so as to include the creative work of

² Spanish for “anew,” “back,” “afresh,” again”

Project MASA and denote the visual exploration of “third space” or decolonial imaginaries in addition to the visual collapse of the ostensibly primitive and modern, the particular and the universal. And while Chicanafuturism may utilize themes of outer space and the alien, it is, in fact, primarily concerned with profoundly earthly, this lifeworld. Through its capacity to redistribute the field of the visible, Project MASA and Chicanafuturism give weight to and compel the often politically evacuated slogans that not only is “another world possible,” but also that within this t there exists “a world in which there is room for many worlds” (EZLN).

Redistributing the Visible: *Rasquachismo* as Third Space Praxis

Space is not a setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the position of things become possible.—M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*

Images of or allusions to outer space and the cosmos thematically interlink the diverse visions of Project MASA. Outer space, though, does not function as some remote utopia, divorced from earthly matter or the prosaic, but rather represents or visualizes, I suggest, a “third space” form, a “decolonial imaginary” or “differential consciousness,” that actively engages particular issues that oppress Chicana/os as well as connects these oppressions to the universal. What is more, the rendering of this third space or decolonial imaginary disrupts and exceeds colonial modes of knowledge production, effectively redistributing the visual field and collapsing the binary between the “primitive” and the modern,” etching out space for other kinds of past, presents, and futures to emerge into intelligibility. This third space is forged through the disordering Chicana/o sensibility of *rasquachismo*, a third space praxis that purposely engages with

and extends beyond “what is” through the creative recycling of the detritus of the dominant order. In contradistinction to totalizing or colonial modes of knowledge production, these third space visions do not prescribe in advance what precise shape the future will take, but instead visually index the protean shape of desire itself, what Chela Sandoval (2000) calls “the physics of love” (184).

The decolonial imaginary, according to Emma Pérez, is the ruptural timespace between the colonial and postcolonial, piercing through dominant narratives of history. It is a third space or interstice through which alternative narratives may begin to enter the register of intelligibility, and postcolonial desire manifests. Pérez elaborates,

The decolonial imaginary embodies the buried desires of the unconscious, living and breathing in between that which is colonialist and that which is colonized. Within that interstitial space, desire rubs up against colonial repressions to construct resistant, oppositional, transformative, diasporic subjectivities that erupt and move into decolonial desires... The imaginary, indelibly marked, thus follows. (110)

Inherently oppositional, the decolonial imaginary is also generative, energizing other histories and occluded forms of knowledge. Yet, the decolonial imaginary is always already in flux, propelled by hidden desires, the inchoate and latent leaning over the threshold of enunciation, paving the way for other stories or lived experiences to surge forth. As Pérez, reminds us, there is no singular History, but many histories.

Relatedly, Chela Sandoval’s “differential consciousness³,” whose very condition of possibility, in Pérez’s (1999) formulation, is the interstitial timespace of the decolonial imaginary, articulates the subjunctive, enjoining “the possible with what is—“that obtuse shimmering of signification that glances through every binary opposition”

(Sandoval 180, 182). “Differential consciousness,” Sandoval asserts, “is linked to whatever is not expressible through words. It is accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void—some no-place—to claim their due” (140). This “void,” however is not merely the negative, but a space chalk full of potential awaiting activation or signification, and as such, differential consciousness “represents a signifier without any set signifieds, unless it is in direct political engagement through one of its specific tactics” (145). Meaning is thus created *de novo* from this void, drawing upon past and present ideologies and lived experiences to compose other kinds of meanings or imaginaries. Differential consciousness or the decolonial imaginary operate as vehicles that allow the subject to “pick, graze, convert, cruise, low-ride through meanings” (145), reconfiguring the dominant colonial order. When utilized as a form of agency or “methodology of the oppressed,” “the differential mode of consciousness functions like the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power. The differential represents the varient; its presence emerges out of correlations, intensities, junctures, crises” (58). The differential, Sandoval underscores, is never easily wielded and requisites the intellectual flexibility or agility to recognize and maneuver within and beyond the dis-junctures of dominant ideological positionings. The “transmission of power” is not simply a matter of resistive force, but also an act of imagination, the engendering or uncovering of other subterranean decolonial imaginaries.

Project MASA, as well as the larger artistic movement of Chicanafuturism, utilizes the particular methodology or third space praxis of *rasquachismo*. The

Chicana/o sensibility of *rasquachismo* is the creative and irreverent recycling of “scraps” from the dominant social body. It is both resourceful and performative—it *makes do*. That is, *rasquachismo* coheres and enacts other perspectives, other possible actions. While this term in its common usage means “tacky” or “funky,” Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (1991) recuperated the word to describe a unique “Chicano sensibility” of utilizing and recycling what is available in one’s immediate surroundings to create aesthetic beauty or pleasure, ranging from Chicano yard art, personal style or self-presentation, to El Teatro Campesino and contemporary Chicano art, which “may be *rasquache* in multiple and complex ways,” such as through the “self-conscious manipulation of materials or iconography” (161). Borrowing from Celeste Olalquiaga’s tripartite “degrees” of kitsch, Alicia Gaspar de Alba (1998) similarly defines the “third degree of *rasquachismo*” as that which elides facile consumption, such as ethnic or cultural commodities produced for tourists, and instead “includes icons and paraphernalia that have been recycled by the art world in the making of ‘happenings,’ assemblages, and mixed-media installations” (12). Regardless of what medium or style *rasquachismo* commandeers, it is a sensibility or aesthetic redeployed as “coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options, to retain hope” (Ybarra-Frausto 1991, 157).

Rasquachismo, moreover, redistributes given fields of the visible or sensible: that is, a particular sensory regime or sensorium that dictates who or what is audible, enunciable, visible, tangible, intelligible, thinkable, or possible, according to Jacques Rancière (2007). The redistribution of the sensible is created through the labor of “dissensus,” rather than consensus, a movement that crosses proscribed boundaries,

oversteps bounds, redefines given roles and competences. The work of dissensus, moreover, is to “always reexamine the boundaries between what is supposed to be normal and what is supposed to be subversive, between what is supposed to be active, and therefore political, and what is supposed to be passive or distant, and therefore apolitical” (Carnevale and Kelsey 2007, 266). Dissensus, then, is never a prescriptive path, but is galvanized through various spaces (political and aesthetic) of play and imagination, as well as always contingent and informed by particular and differential lived experiences that, by its very constitution, rejects grand master narratives of how a form of life should be. A “politics” of aesthetics, asserts Rancière, “involves a multiplicity of small ruptures” in addition to an interactive and cooperative relationship between the art object and the spectator in the creation of meaning (267). By calling upon and transforming received Chicana/o iconography, Project MASA disturbs and redistributes various interrelated fields or scales of the visual or the imaginary, such as (neo)colonial, nationalist, and global imaginaries. Project MASA visually undermines these imaginaries as well as produces alternative visions in flux, third space decolonial imaginaries whose “ideological unpalatability...is again recycled, again injected, like endless fishbones: slowly, steadily wounding the consuming body” (Pérez 2007, 20).

Decolonial Imaginaries: The Shapes of Things to Come

Since Project MASA’s first show in 2001, one of the principal objectives of each exhibition has been to increase participation and visual diversity so as to accumulate and synthesize new talent with each show as well as include the work of previously featured artists. In this way, Project MASA evolves as a complex composition, continually expanding and renewing its vision. As such, and in keeping

in mind the larger vision of the collective project, I have conceptualized overarching, yet porous and overlapping, themes present in the visual art of all three exhibitions. Although all the work exhibited by Project MASA purposely melds and collapses images of the primitive and modern in order to formulate a “third” space in which other postcolonial futures may become possible or imagined, artists accomplish this visual endeavor through diverse styles and mediums. Because I do not have the space here to incorporate all of the innovative work of Project MASA’s “space artists,” I focus on those whose work represents the major themes and styles of and whose trajectories align most strongly with the overall “mission” of Project MASA.

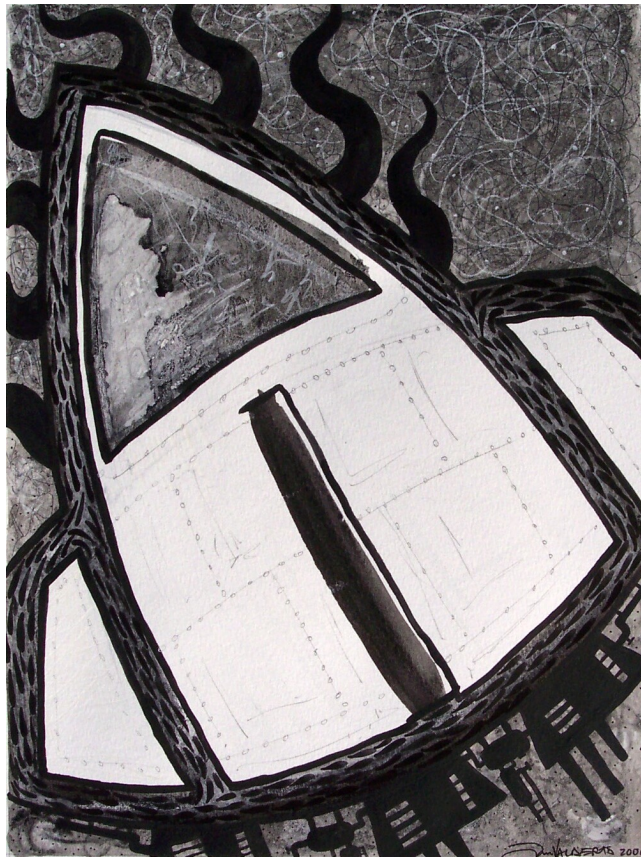


Figure 3. Luis Valderas, *Semilla*, 2001, India ink on paper.

Utilizing various shapes and forms, as well as diverse mediums, Luis Valderas, Rolando Briseño, and Arturo Almeida engage the material world through extraterrestrial or “celestial” forms. Refusing semantic closure or fixity, these forms operate as open, shifting shapes and outlines that invite viewers to participate in the genesis of meaning. In *Semilla* (see fig. 3) or “Seed,” Valderas refashions and re-contextualizes the form of an avocado seed, a source of nourishment in the Mayan diet, into a modern rocket bursting into the crowded and chaotic heavens, as noted by nearly imperceptible white, black, and blue scribble lines amid small, white stars. Valderas employs stark symmetry to create multiple optics through which his drawing may be approached. In the upper left-hand corner there are dark wavy lines arising out of the rocket, reminiscent of the rays of light, or spines of the maguey plant, depending on interpretation⁴, that surrounds the Virgen de Guadalupe. From this perspective the seed accrues the likeness and form of this hybrid indigenous and European religious figure. However, what appears to be the top of the drawing may also be perceived as the bottom, and, as such, an apocalyptic urban cityscape comes into purview. Apprehended in this manner, the rocket becomes latent potential, the germinal, for another kind of “modern” world. The celestial thus becomes the earthy, and the earthy, celestial. This ambiguity and multi-faceted quality of the drawing is accomplished through the manipulation of form as well as through the use of India ink, which ranges in blue and black.



Figure 4. Rolando Briseño, *Celestial Shamans*, Earth on giclee, 2006.

Briseño also confuses the heavens and the worldly in *Celestial Shamans* (see fig. 4) in order to play with visual perception and dismantle the binary of the earthly and heavenly. Consciously composed of “earth on giclée,” or an inkjet-based digital print, this work tactically combines the elemental with the technological, whereby forging a new, yet shifting amalgam. The central figure appears to be the outline of a shaman, inside of which floats heavenly bodies, another universe. And while “shaman” is often employed as an anthropological term, stemming from Eurocentric social science that has historically understood culture as quantifiable with given structures of thought and meaning, and therefore wholly intelligible, and readily consumable to the ethnographer’s gaze, Briseño disrupts this facile legibility through the interplay of binaries, such as the terrestrial and extraterrestrial, “primitive” and advanced. In doing

so, he ruptures this ethnographic field of sensibility or meaning. This visual rupture is visually demarcated by the amorphous shaman figure set against the backdrop of “earth” or mud-like material, teasing out the liminal aspect of this fraught figure. Through the use of shadow, Almeida’s photograph *Contact* (see fig. 5) similarly obviates facile consumption on the part of the spectator as well as combines technological and earthly and unsettling these very categories. In the photograph, the viewer is only permitted to see the shadow or outline of a satellite and a person, both of which seem as though they are touching, making it ambiguous whether or not the title *Contact* refers to the touching shadows, the human and non-human, subject and art object—or something in between, something more nebulous and in flux.



Figure 5. Arturo Almeida, *Contact*, Photograph, 200.

Also playing with form in order to unravel received orders of knowing or epistemologies, Felipe Reyes, Jose Esquivel, Lawrence Trujillo, and Jesus Chista deploy abstract expressionism, a style that gained popularity in the U.S. after WWII in the 1950s, incorporating anti-figurative elements of futurism and surrealism, and following the demise of social realism in the U.S. This art movement was characterized by its emotive, mystical, and kinetic qualities, and commanded by artists after WWII to refuse the violence and rationality of modernity. While this art movement drew from colonialist notions of “primitivism” in conceiving this aesthetic, these Project MASA artists, through appropriation and re-contextualization, both address and go beyond this troubling aesthetic colonial legacy by etching out abstraction of third space, a space where “another world is possible”⁵ despite global capital and the multi-pronged U.S. “war on terror,” as evidenced in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

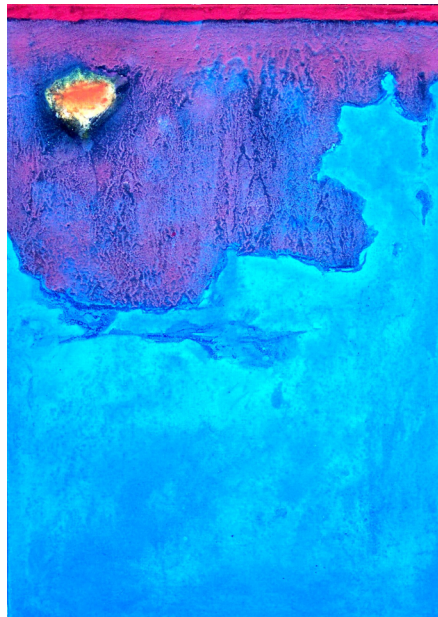


Figure 6. Felipe Reyes, *Self-Portraas*

a Celestial Body, acrylic on canvas, 2006.

⁵ world social forum

In *Self-Portrait as a Celestial Body*, (acrylic on canvas) (see fig. 6), Reyes deconstructs Mexican and Mexican American racialized subjectivity and embodiment by electing to paint a “self-portrait” in the style of abstract expressionism, gesturing instead toward a “subjectivity in process,” to borrow from Trinh Min-ha (1989). It is uncertain whether or not the smooth and striated textures, as well as the vivid blues, yellow, oranges, and reds, represent the land or water or if they signal a “celestial body.” The painting exudes motion, boundaries permeable and shifting between and among textures and colors. Esquivel’s *Untitled* (see fig. 7), although more pictorial or figurative than *Self-Portrait*, also uses abstraction to portray a human figure, although disembodied. A study in contrasts, the artist pairs various geometric shapes with fluid, collapsing the boundaries of organic and inorganic, rendering a moment of entropy, a third space of re-combination and signification.



Figure 7. Jose Esquivel, *Untitled*, acrylic, 2006.



Figure 8 Lawrence Trujillo, *The Watcher at the End of Time*, oil on canvas, 2006.

Lawrence Trujillo's *The Watcher at the End of Time* (oil on canvas) (see fig.8) and Jesus "Chista" Cantu's *Once Upon a Space—En El Principio* (see fig. 9) or "In the Beginning" (watercolor) disrupt and unravel master narratives concerning time through geometric and ephemeral shapes, respectively, within the starry cosmos. *The Watcher* alludes to subterranean or alternative accounts of temporality such as the Book of Enoch, the Apocryphal manuscripts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as perhaps the Maya calendar, which, in accordance with Mayan cosmology, emphasizes natural cycles of birth and rebirth⁶, and was one of the few remaining documents after the Spanish church and government burned and destroyed Maya texts during the colonial period in the Yucatán. But it is not a crystallized vision of Mayan culture: the abstract

⁶ 2012

geometric figures work to deconstruct the Maya calendar and refuse any totalizing cosmological narrative. Taken as a tenuous whole, what is presented, then, is a geometric de- and re-construction of time, a rupture in which other temporalities, histories, visions and codices may emerge and reconstitute themselves.

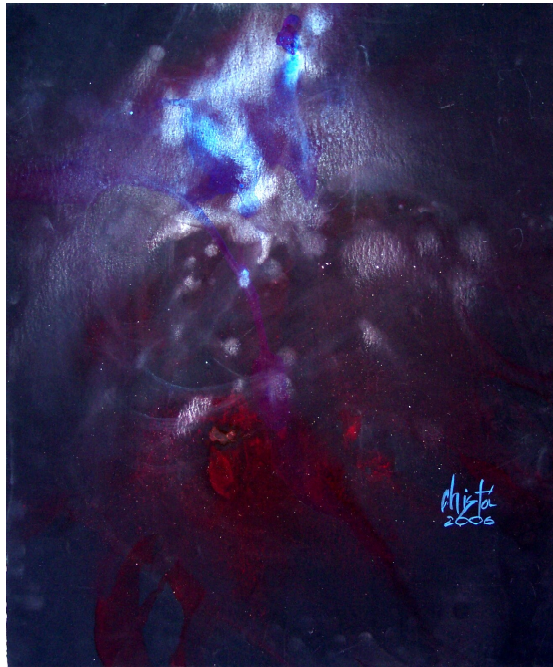


Figure 9. Jesus "Chista" Cantu, *Once Upon a Space--En El Principio* watercolor, 2006.

Once Upon a Space, by Jesus "Chista" Cantu additionally foregrounds twin processes of de- and re-territorialization, the processual aspects of time, space, and meaning. Employing a pared down and ephemeral style, reinforced by the use of watercolor (rather than more ponderous oil paints), this subtle work underscores as well the contingent, aleatory, and tenuous nature of any genesis, cosmology, or worldview. Both works, in sum, collaboratively function to critique and unravel dominant versions of time (and space) in addition to reminding us there exist multiple other conceptions of

time and history, despite persistent Eurocentric dualisms, muting any call for the “end of history,”⁷ apocryphal or otherwise.

A Lo Rasquache: Rematerializing the Conceptual



Figure 10. Gabriel Quintero-Velasquez, *Raza Cosmica #7: Xicano Dynasty*, readymade found objects, 2006.

In addition appropriating aspects of traditional abstract expressionism, artists comprising Project MASA also repurpose found object or the readymade, the hallmark of conceptualism. However, Project MASA radically redefines conceptualism, an artistic movement that began in the 1960s that stressed the “dematerialization” of the art object, that is, understanding art as an intellectual or conceptual project apart from the

material world. Project MASA, in contrast, repurposes conceptual art as a deeply political project rooted in lived world. Just as Luis Camnitzer (2007) has argued that conceptual art has and continues to function as powerful political project in Latin America, I would add that so does Chicana/o conceptual art in the U.S. operate as an important tool for conceptualizing various forms of oppression, raising consciousness, and inciting resistance. Resonant of Chicana/o *rasquachismo* or *domesticana*⁸, “dematerialization” stemmed from a lived experience of state repression or a condition of necessity for political expression:

In art historical discourse, “dematerialization” has been a way of “reducing” material, which has been a part of formalist reductionism typical of the very early 1960s. Formalism, in turn, generally excludes politics. In the Latin American context, dematerialization was not a consequence of formalist speculation. Instead, it became an expedient vehicle for political expression, useful because of its efficiency, accessibility, and low cost. (29)

It is in this other trajectory of the readymade as a “vehicle for political expression” that Project MASA pursues. Gabriel Quintero-Velasquez, Luis “Chispas” Guerrero, and Ray Gonzalez recombine readymade objects to critique the symbolic and physical ghettoizing and putative “proper” spaces and places of Mexicana/os and Chicana/os. In *Raza Cósmica #7: Xicano Dynasty* (see fig. 10), Gabriel Quintero-Velasquez emplaces against the backdrop of a *pañó* or handkerchief, a “low-brow” Chicana/o art form connotative of manual field labor. Quintero-Velasquez arranges small folk corn husk dolls (which are themselves composed of the readymade), whose miniature stature bespeak asymmetrical power relations between the U.S. and Mexico as well as the way in which Mexicana/os and Chicana/os are moored in this power matrix. However, the

⁸ See Amalia Mesa-Bains “”

allusions to corn in this work through not only the dolls and the corn tortillas placed on either side of the barbed wire evoke spaceships (modern) a pre-Colombian cosmology (pre-modern) as well as the physical nourishment that corn provides. This piece manipulates scale and meaning through unexpected symbolic combinatorial that at once critiques the material and discursive diminution of Mexicana/os and Chican a/os as well as exceeds these definitive limits in connecting the banal with the cosmos. “Xicano Dynasty,” then, refers to not a discrete line of succession as posed by Chicano cultural nationalism or a racialized and positivist teleology of Jose Vasconcelos’s “raza cosmica,” but rather an eccentric trajectory that transgresses borders of time and space.



Figure 11. Luis "Chispas" Guerrero, *Toys from Mars*, metal found objects, 2006.

Luis “Chispas” Guerrero and Ray Gonzales intentionally meld found or ready made metal objects to signify and foreground movement and the process of creation in addition to culturally specific meanings. Guerrero excavates junkyards for scrap metals and parts in order to compose his pieces. In *Toys from Mars* (see fig. 11), the multiple small metal robot-like creatures scattered across the floor at once appear to be innocent toys for children while also resonant of something more ironic and playful, slightly more insidious, vengeful, and “alien,” especially the way in which they spread and “invade” the space of the floor, echoing and critiquing discourses of invasion associated with Mexican immigration and the Latina/o “boom” more generally.

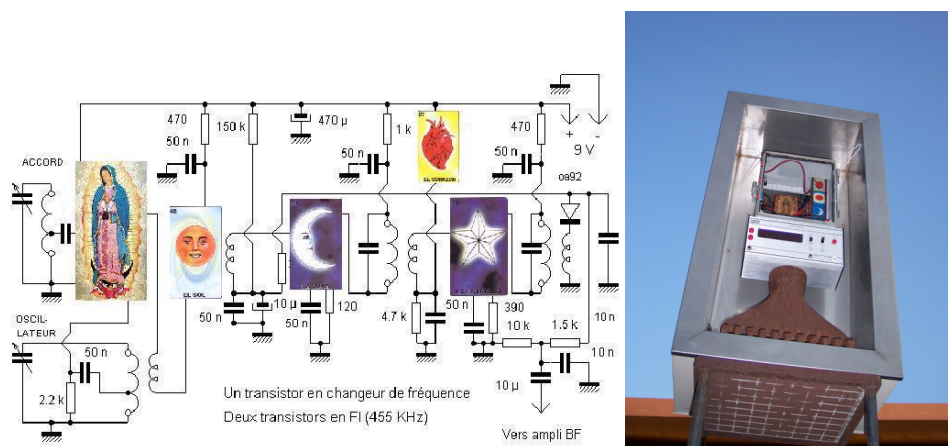


Figure 12. Ray Gonzales, *Super Heterodyne Mary*, readymde found objects, 2006.

Similar to the New Mexican artist Marion Martinez, Gonzales, who teaches physics at a local San Antonio high school, in his work *Super Heterodyne Mary* (see fig. 12) re-invents the Virgin of Guadalupe, an already European and Mexican indigenous hybrid form, as a universal and “modern” icon for the twenty-first century. Combining found objects of a metal box, lotería cards (a “lottery” game that is based on luck, chance, and future projections), circuit board imagery, and the Virgin of

Guadalupe, Gonzales effectively interconnects the past, and future as well as the earthy and the heavenly so as to re-frame the Virgin not as a static icon, but a dynamic one that transgresses temporal and spatial thresholds. In fact, “heterodyne” refers to the signaling or radio processing through which new frequencies are generated through mixing or multiplying two oscillating wave forms. This processing creates not just one, but two new frequencies produced through modulation and demodulation, both the sum and difference of these original frequencies. Gonzales playfully writes in his artist’s statement: “The resulting signal is mixed with an on board UHF oscillator and sets up a very pure and powerful beat frequency that is re-modulated and transmitted into the Multiverse at Celestial Imaginary Frequencies.” Thus, this novel amalgamation of the Virgin no longer resides in the registers of the primitive and modern but in the third spaces of their sum and difference.

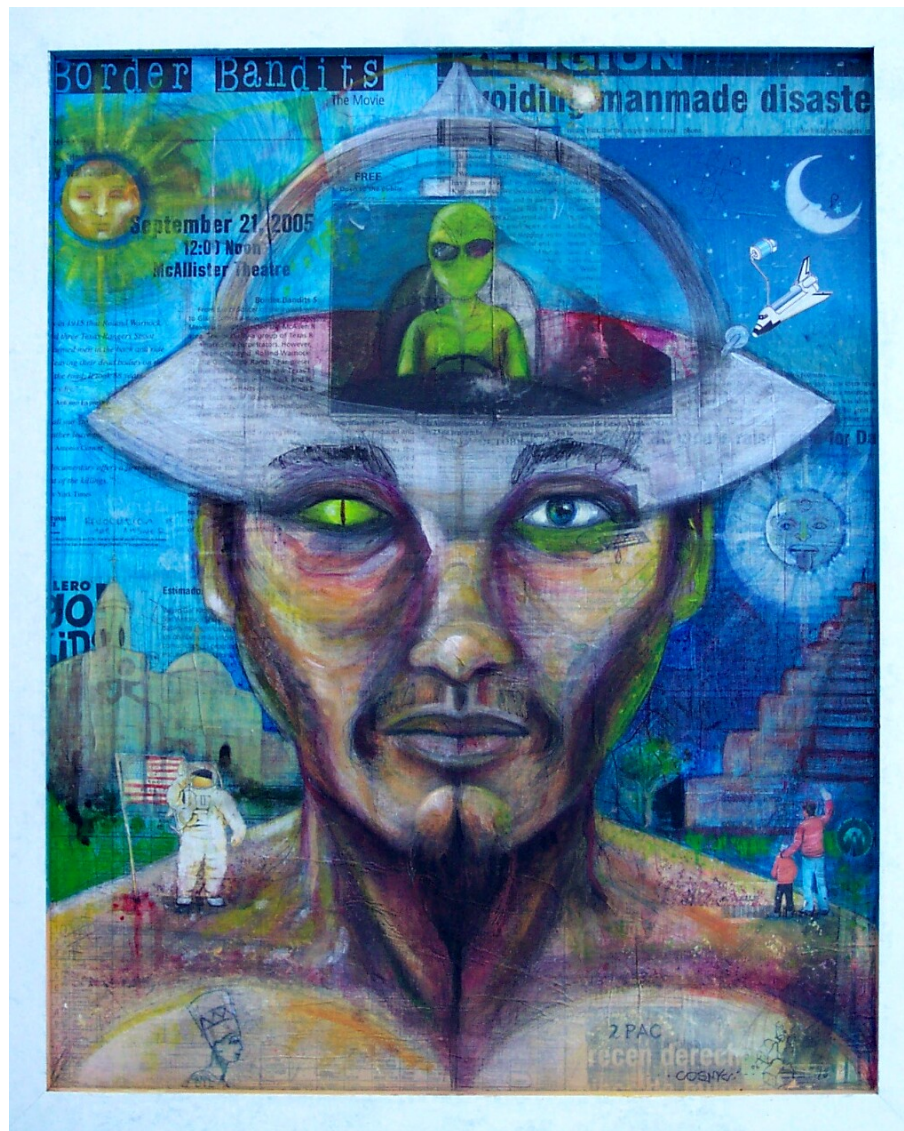


Figure 13. Jose Cosme, *Self-Portrait*, mixed media, 2006.

Through the related “modern” form of collage, Jose Cosme’s *Self-Portrait* (see fig. 13) dis- and re-aggregates the liberal notion of the individual who is self-made and a product of progressive or positivist history. Cosme fuses seeming “found objects,” such as scraps of newspapers, such as the one with the headline “Border Bandits,” as well as various images that when comprehended together narrate a racist and imperialist U.S.-Mexico history that still impacts the present, *alienating* the Chicana/o or

Mexicana/o borderland subject, denying her or him full humanity or citizenship under the U.S. nation-state. Like the way in which Reyes stylizes *Self-Portrait* using or revising abstract expressionism, Cosme's deployment of collage foregrounds not a liberal or discreet subject, but a "subjectivity in process," imbricated in the past and future through the present time and space. Cosme also depicts how Chicana/os are networked into other subterranean histories within dominant U.S. or European History, such as the oppression of African Americans or the conquering of Egypt by the Roman Empire, as evidenced by what appear to be tattoos of "2 PAC" and an ancient Egyptian on the central figure's chest. What is more, Cosme visually undermines binary logic through his subversive use of symmetry—while the central figure seems to be divided, through merging the "primitive," such as elements of Aztec cosmology, and the "advanced" or technological, Cosme sets his "self-portrait" in motion, demonstrating how the "self" and history are plural and processual.

¡Ya Es Tiempo Mujeres!: Chicana (Re)Visions

"Nothing happens in the real world unless it first happens in the images in our heads."—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

In addition to visually grappling with issues of time, space, and race, many Chicana artists in Project MASA deal specifically with "intersectional" or "relational" issues of gender in their rendering of *altermundos*. And although much of the visual art in Project MASA incorporates alternative or "minor" cosmologies or spiritualities, Project MASA's Chicana feminist visual art excavates and refunctions the cosmos and "minor" cosmologies to forge a third space in which particular gender oppressions are explored. While these diverse artists utilize the working class aesthetic *rasquachismo*,

this artistic practice of selective making do takes on a particularly gendered inflection in this collective work, rescuing and reusing discarded “detritus,” including both physical objects or female deities. Both Amalia Mesa-Bains (2003) and Laura Pérez (2007) have explored how Chicana artists redeploy *rasquachismo* in forging more feminist and liberatory visions that are based in lived experience as well as alternative feminist forms of spirituality. Through what Mesa-Bains terms the *domesticana*, Chicana artists since the 1970s have repurposed traditionally feminine objects and personal style, such as dress or affectation, or seemingly ordinary domestic objects to imbue them toward a Chicana feminist political project. Similarly, Laura Pérez (2007), in her survey of Chicana art from the 1970s to the present, including that of Mesa-Bains, argues that particular forms of Chicana art engage an “aesthetic altarity,” bringing to mind the way in “which one invokes, mediate, and offer homage to the unseen but felt presences in our lives, whether these be deities, ancestors, or the memories of our personal, familial, and collective pasts” (7) spirituality powerfully negotiates the lived experience and future possibilities of the material world. Chicana feminist appropriations of *rasquachismo* have historically functioned to excavate the specific lived experiences of Chicanas in order to carve out visual and performative third spaces in which other histories emerge and other conceptions of time and space become possible. It is this aesthetic political practice that Chicana feminist and/or queer artists in Project MASA engage in various manners.

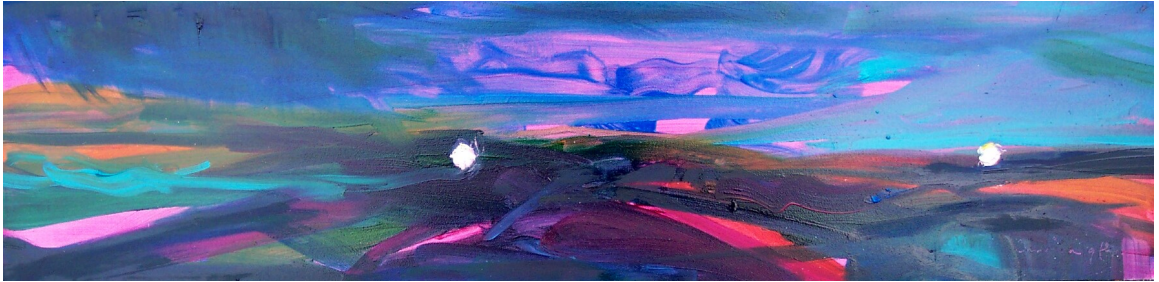


Figure 14. Carolina G. Flores, *Marfa Lights*, oil and gesso board, 2006.

Carolina G. Flores and queer activist performance artist David Zamora-Casas intertwine the heavenly with the terrestrial in order to render other, shifting landscapes of possibility, particularly in regard to race, gender, and nation. In *Marfa Lights* (see fig. 14), Carolina G. Flores utilizes the rich textures and brilliant colors of oil paint on gesso board to depict the largely unexplained phenomenon of the Marfa Lights in the small town of Marfa in southwest Texas. The lights, which purportedly appear mostly in the evening, a hazy and indeterminate zone between day and night, are spontaneous and erratic, making it difficult to pinpoint the precise cause. Explanations are diverse, ranging from the lights being attributed to a devised mythos to attract tourists into the socio-economically depressed town, to extraterrestrials, to the headlights of cars, to the visible effect of thermal expansion in nearby crystal rocks embedded in this mountainous region. Regardless, the Marfa Lights index an uncertainty, unpredictability, as well as possibility that compel the viewer to figure her own meaning. Amid the bright swirl of colors composing an expanse of Texas sky are two Marfa lights that function to create the visual effect of puncture or what Roland Barthes calls the “punctum,” or that which pierces through the everyday or the given, a ruptural time and space that allows for the reshifting of the ordinary. The swirling “soundboard

of colors” additionally reinforces this ruptural effect in conveying movement and dynamism and effecting synesthesia, creating multiple sensorial pathways toward other worlds (artist’s statement). And while Flores does not literally depict or address the “femicide” in nearby Juárez just hours northwest, perhaps intentionally, her painting takes on political resonance when paired with Zamora-Casas’ *Las Estrellas del NAFTA* (see fig. 15).



Figure 15. David Zamora Casas, *Las Estrellas de NAFTA*, mixed media, 2006.

This mixed media work similarly melds the earthly with the celestial, playing with light and color as well as symmetry and contrast to bring into relief that which is not immediately visible, purposely playing with the viewers’ perceptual field to re-see the so-called alien and unknown. The bottom portion of the painting is illuminated by car lights emanating from what seems to be the city of or possibly an other U.S.-Mexico border town crowned by surrounding mountains, on top of which languorously lies a female figure. This feminine form brings to mind imaginings of *la tierra madre*, in

addition to escalated violence in border towns, especially the femicides in Juárez, due to deregulation of U.S. corporations enacted by the North American Free Trade Agreement in the late 1990s. Also signaling the celestial and other-worldly, the contours of this goddess figure's body seamlessly fuses with the heavens, re-integrating the abject female Mexican and/or indigenous body with a universal human rights, all the while redefining the human and non-human.



Figure 16 Sandra Moreno, *Evening Star*, mixed media assemblage, 2006.

Figure 17 Jane Madrigal, *Four Regions of the Universe*, acrylic on canvas mounted on MDO board with stained glass, 2006.

Sandra Moreno, Jane Madrigal, and Ana Lillia Salinas take yet another route in forging a third space, and remap the prosaic within the universal. In the style of the *domesticana* (Mesa-Bains 2003), Moreno in *Evening Star* (see fig. 16) frames the brown female body within a feminine trinket or keepsake box in her deployment of mixed media assemblage to re-chart and re-signify the brown female body as goddess-like or universal. Moreno juxtaposes this nearly nude brown female body against a

planetary compass, with planets suspended both above and below her. This “Venus” figure, particularly within the larger context of Project MASA, interlinks and reworks with a Chicana feminist agenda various Roman, Greek, and American indigenous cosmologies. This new mode or interconnected methodology of seeing is additionally circumscribed through the work’s physical depth and multi-dimensionality achieved through the actual space of the box in which the top aperture is comprised of glass. That Venus, though, is classified as a “terrestrial” planet as well as that the female figure is portrayed realistically (rather than highly stylized or adorned) blurs and conflates once again the material and the celestial.



Figure 18. Ana Lillia Salinas, *Going to a Party and Shaking Off an Estrella*, oil on canvas, 2006.

In *Going to a Party and Shaking Off an Estrella* (oil on canvas) (see fig. 18), Salinas creates a light-hearted tableau, at the center of which a Chicana female body leaps into outer space in unison with other women from a vehicle in front of what seems to be a house party in the *barrio*. It is significant that the women in the painting are the

active, kinetic figures, as well as the driver of car, which is particularly resonant within Chicano low-rider culture, which has been traditionally a predominately masculinist and sexist cultural practice, wherein women's scantily clad bodies function as ornaments or accessories. The planets and constellations surrounding this cosmic house party suggest that the ordinary and extraordinary, the particular and universal are inextricably connected. Madrigal's *Four Regions of the Universe* (acrylic on canvas mounted on MDO board) (see fig. 17), moreover, refers to the Aztec creation myth in which the four regions or directions were birthed by a god that was both male and female from the void of the cosmos, a space of potential. This subversion of dualism is also reinforced through the backdrop of MDO ("Medium Density Overlay") board, a wood panel on top of which stained glass is adhered, materials derived from the earth. Both works therefore operate to recast the terrestrial within the extraterrestrial, thereby blurring the boundary between the two and opening up other possibilities for signification.



Figure 19. Mary Agnes Rodriguez, *Dream Catcher*, acrylic on canvas, 2006.

The work of activist artists Mary Agnes Rodriguez and Deborah Quetzpalin Vasquez most explicitly recast the personal within the sphere of the political, the “local” within the “universal,” whereby imploding these binaries, carving out a particular third space in which other, more liberatory visions may surge forth. Both artists accomplish this “universalizing” feat through the tactical use of social realism, and the merging of everyday images with those of the cosmos. In *Dream Catcher* (acrylic on canvas) (see fig. 19) Rodriguez re- and deterritorializes the city of San Antonio, interconnecting the local—in this case a racialized femininity—within an alternative cosmological order, as well as links various indigenous creation mythologies through generative and powerful female figures. However, Rodriguez does not uncritically regurgitate female goddess archetypes whereby fetishizing femininity or hybridity, but rather roots indigenous and Chicana femininity within material concerns and struggles.

Rodriguez here alludes to the American indigenous archetype of the “Spider Woman”⁹ whose significance ranges from that of an earth goddess to a strong celestial creator who enacts life through chanting and/or spinning. Her generative power is further conveyed through the figure’s *tatuaje* or tattoo of the *el corazón*, which in Chicana/o iconography symbolizes will, desire, and/or life. It is significant that this figure cradles the cityscape of San Antonio, beset in a globe reminiscent of a tourist souvenir, in her palm; however, it is not a strangling or totalizing grip, but rather an open and loose embrace. This figure playfully recalls and satirizes a patriarchal god

⁹ Rodriguez, who creates political art for the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in San Antonio, may be referencing this figure due to her participation in the annual International Women’s Day March, who incorporate “Spider Women” along particular sites in the march route to honor and perform occluded, native history within San Antonio’s corporatized downtown core.

who has “got the whole world in his hands.” Rodriguez additionally indexes another generative figure in the upper left-hand corner of the work: the Aztec moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui, who was slain by her sun-god brother, Huitzilopochtli. Many Chicana feminist creative writers and/or scholars such as Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua have re-appropriated this complex figure as agentic through a creative and empowering re-configuring of her, imbuing her with new life and the power of self-determination. Yet, while Rodriguez references various indigenous goddesses, her third space vision is firmly entrenched in the real lives of women, as portrayed through the myriad “real-world” female figures on the left-hand side of the page, including a small, seemingly photographic image of a woman in repose. Finally, confronting the commoditization and reification of indigenous, Mexicana/o, and Chicana/o culture informed by the tourist-driven economy of San Antonio, Rodriguez repurposes the Ojibwe or Native American “dreamcatcher”¹⁰ through visually teasing out its web-like aspects, piecing together and interweaving the past, present, the particular and universal, while also rendering gendered and racialized difference.

¹⁰ Ojibwe *asabikeshiinh*, the inanimate form of the word for "spider"



Figure 20. debora quetzpalin vasquez, *La Llorona Soñando en el Nuevo Mundo*, acrylic on canvas, 2006.

In *La Llorona Soñando en el Nuevo Mundo* (see fig. 20), vasquez specifically targets and powerfully reframes violence against women and women of color within the universal through a dramatic re-presentation of an actual case of domestic violence that occurred in San Antonio. In a similar arrangement to Rodriguez’s composition, vasquez’s work centers upon the figure of “La Llorona” (“Crying” or “Wailing Woman”), who is usually portrayed in Mexicana/o and Chicana/o folklore as an oversexed siren or passive victim, who supposedly drowns her own children after being rejected by her aristocratic Spanish lover. vasquez re-imagines this fraught figure, informed by nationalist, heteronormative, and misogynist imaginaries by visually re-writing this figure as a victim of domestic abuse as indicated by the apocalyptic headline in the adjacent blood-drenched clipping, “A Fatal Failure in the System.” In

the upper half of the painting, cries in rage Coyolxauhqui, as suggested by the blood drip marks below her head. Her figure reinforces a larger critique of domestic violence in that it was her brother who had slain her, according to Aztec mythology. Yet crying and sadness, which are often feminized and denigrated in popular culture, is linked with recognition of gender oppression and ensuing empowerment. vasquez, as well, underscores agency, the power to regenerate and heal, through the maguey plant in the background, a powerful feminine symbol in American indigenous cosmologies. In the left-hand corner, Citlali, a “macha” character from a political graphic cartoon series that was featured in a community newsletter published by the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, cries out her manifesto with her *corázon* in hand: “Let’s help our mujeres not just dream about another world. YA ES TIEMPO MUJERES!” In other words, alternative worlds and utopias cannot just remain in the register of the imaginary, but they must also be actualized in the real world.

What the creative work of Rodriguez and vasquez call for, as well as that of other feminists (re)visions in Project MASA, is not a fixed blueprint of the to-come, is an outer or third space in which other, more equitable worlds are possible and imaginable. This work, as well, is not content to remain in the imaginary, but also demands instantiation, and underlines that like vasquez’s *rasquache* use of newspaper, new worlds exigently need to be “scrapped” together.

(Trans)Mission Possible: Chicanafuturism and Alternative Modernisms

In this world, the borders are as solid as the inequalities, and, until there’s proof to the contrary, the United States doesn’t envision tearing down its wall but adding a thousand miles to it. –Jacques Rancière

While Chicanafuturism has focused on the visual collapse and critique of the archaic and the technologically advanced in relation to who comprises the “human” and “non-human,” I want to extend its definitive scope to encompass the visual art of Project MASA, and, more generally, the visual juxtaposition and disintegration of the “primitive” and the modern through third space form propelled through the disordering visual practice of *rasquachismo*. In this way Chicanafuturism renders visible the way in which this visual corpus functions to unravel colonial legacies endemic to diverse geographic locations within the U.S. and the Borderlands. Within the specific cityscape of San Antonio, Project MASA works to destabilize particular colonial legacies that shape racialized and gendered social relations, perhaps most poignantly captured in the “master symbol” of the Alamo and the constellation of five missions it comprises. It is through this politically engaged focus on particular categories of difference and the accompanying visual bridging of the particular and universal that Chicanafuturism signals a radical departure from the traditional artistic movements of futurism and modernism. Through engaging the universal through the particular—or the particular through the universal—Chicanafuturism articulates an alternative modernism that redefines the modern and the human.

Building on African American scholar Alondra Nelson’s (2001) work on *Afrofuturism*, Catherine Ramírez (2004) conceptualized “Chicanafuturism” to analyze the work of New Mexican artist Marion C. Martinez who, in the exhibition *Cyber Arte* (2003), assembled images of the Virgin of Guadalupe through the creative recycling of computer hardware, bringing into relief and refusing the relegation of Hispano identity and culture to a romanticized past, and therefore poised as anachronistic and in

opposition to the technological present and future. Ramírez defines Chicanafuturism as “Chicano cultural production that attends to cultural transformations resulting from new and everyday technologies (including their detritus); that excavates, creates, and alters narratives of identity, technology and the future; that interrogates the promise of science and technology; and that redefines humanism and the human” (78). And although Ramírez extends the parameters of Chicanafuturism to include other “cyberartistas” in addition to other visual and performance artists, such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes, all of whom incorporate explicit themes of the technological, I extend the porous genre of Chicanafuturism to include Chicana/o cultural production that deploys a *rasquache* aesthetic to creatively recycle detritus of the past, whether it be computer hardware or images of Aztec cosmology, in order to dismantle, rearrange, and project beyond the colonial and racialized categories of the primitive and modern, civilized and uncivilized, human and non-human, the colonial and post-colonial. Through fusing the putatively opposed, Chicanafuturism visually or performatively enacts a third space vision that is receptive to multiple, differential past, present, and futures, as well as concomitantly refuses the determining and classifying logic of colonialism that presumes in advance a particular (veiled as the universal) future. As such, the seeds of Chicanafuturism, this visual melding of the so-called primitive and modern, for example, can be seen as early as the 1960s during the inception of the Chicano Mural Movement, wherein many muralist drew upon a cultural nationalist archive of indigenous (Aztec or Mexica) iconology and cosmology, such as in the posters and murals of the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF).

Ramírez further asserts that while Afrofuturism explores the diasporic experiences of African Americans, “Chicanafuturism articulates colonial and postcolonial and postcolonial histories” of Mexican Americans or Chicana/os (78). Regarded as an idealized “Land of Enchantment” or “of Poco Tiempo,” New Mexico’s colonial legacy manifests in discourses of an isolated and romanticized past, mutually exclusive from the present and technologically modern. Spanish conquest in New Mexico, moreover, was relatively difficult in that “unlike Texas and California, New Mexico was not accessible by sea or any easy route” (62). This notion of New Mexico as geographically distant and remote still inheres in the U.S. popular imagination, the presence of Los Alamos National Laboratory being merely anomalous: “despite Los Alamos National Laboratory’s prominent role in establishing and maintaining the dominance of the so-called free (that is, capitalist) world and its superpower champion, the United States of America, New Mexico remains relatively underdeveloped economically” (63). And so, according to the “logic of colonialism and racism,”

Hispanos—especially poor, rural, Catholic Hispanos—have been barred from the present and the future and a fixed in a racialized past. They appear to have changed very little over the centuries and seem to occupy a world older than and separate from the white, capitalist, mechanized, and or digital world of modernity and postmodernity. In particular, by virtue of being associated with the preindustrial and predigital, they are often deemed incapable of understanding, mastering, or even living with science and technology, signifiers of the present and future...

In short, Hispanos have been excluded from the world of science, technology, and reason, and continue the domain of superstition, mythology, and intuition. (63-4)

It is this very colonial geographical imagination, though, on which tourism capitalizes, offering up reified versions of romanticized Hispano culture, emphasizing its Spanish heritage rather than its Mexican and/or indigenous one.

Like New Mexico, San Antonio, at the inception of Spanish colonialism in the early 1700s functioned as a remote outpost of empire, a waystation between Mexico and other markets and missions in what is now east Texas. San Antonio is similarly an heir to a colonial legacy that relegates Mexicana/os and Chicana/os to an idealized milieu of the missions, despite the presence of a “modern” forces, such as a booming tourism industry, several military bases, and five Fortune 500 companies, and the headquarters of myriad large corporations, including Boeing and Lockheed Martin, and is a relatively short distance from NASA in Houston. Whereas Hispanos are portrayed as geographically and temporally remote, though, Chicana/os in San Antonio are depicted as integral to the cityscape in the capacity of picaresque “local color.” In fact, in the mid-1800s, Frederick Law Olmsted, who designed Central Park in New York, described San Antonio as a place inhabited by a strange “jumble of races,” emanating “an odd and antiquated foreignness” (?) And while the tourist industry, the largest generator of annual city revenues, capitalizes on mainly sanitized simulacrum of “Spanish” culture, whereby occluding Native American, Mexican, and/or Chicana/o culture, Latina/s experience the highest rates of poverty, violence, and disease due to a historical and present lack of access to vital resources, such as adequate education, healthcare, housing, nutrition, clean air and land.

This manifold colonial legacy is most concretely represented in San Antonio’s constellation of five missions, constructed in the 1700s to “Christianize” and “civilize” the indigenous populations so as to exploit their labor and fortify the Spanish mission against outside “hostile” tribes. The missions, a National Historic Park under the Department of the Interior, additionally function as a major tourist attraction, whose

programming offer a singular, liberal multicultural vision of history in which native peoples were merely “acculturated” into Spanish mission life, whereby not only erasing other narratives of history, but also discursively relegating the native and/or Chicana/o other to an idealized and seemingly harmonious past. While the Alamo is owned and operated by the civic organization Daughters of the Republic of Texas, it also operates as a “master symbol” that crystallizes a dominant version of history of white Texas heroes and demonizes and occludes its Mexican “other.” The missions symbolically make impossible other versions of not only the past but also the present and future. It is these colonial or master narratives that Project MASA and Chicanafuturism, seek to de- and re-territorialize.

Project MASA and Chicanafuturism, moreover, engage or explicitly address particular oppressions so as to disrupt and exceed them in addition drawing upon and repurposing specific dominant U.S. and Eurocentric forms and styles, largely those associated with modernism and the related movement of futurism as a vehicle of social critique. Modernism, beginning at the turn of the nineteenth-century with the advent of scientific and technological innovations as well as rapid social change, enduring through the 1950s and 1960s, encompassed a wide variety of styles and subject-matter that responded to the new-fangled matter of the twentieth-century. Notes art historian Frances Pohl (2007), “for many, modernism captured the rapid shrinking of world as a result of new technologies of communication and transportation, and the excitement and wonder created by the coming together of different cultures and of the old and the new” (303). For others, however, technological innovation incited a colonialist and nostalgic return to an imagined pristine, more simple past through the appropriation of so-called

“primitive” forms, particularly those of Native Americans and Africans, even though these diverse peoples had already for centuries suffered the violent legacies or structural conditions fomented by slavery, genocide, and colonization. Modernist art, furthermore, yielded “two nationalist aesthetics,” one stemming from primitivism, and the other in the “machine” or the technologically advanced, such as in the case of Futurism (304). This artistic movement arose in Italy in the early twentieth century and adamantly rejected the past and the perceived antiquated, and embraced instead an imagined modern future propelled by speed, youth, nationalism, violence, technology, science, and innovation. Seeking to render a “universal dynamism,” Futurism tried to reflect the perceived progressive, continual movements and intensities of everyday modern life.

Through its *rasquache* aesthetic and in its related endeavor to render diverse third spaces, Project MASA and Chicanafuturist visual art consciously redeploy elements of modernism and Futurism, so as to not only critique primitivism and trajectories of scientific or technological positivism, but to radically destabilize totalizing colonial categories of primitive and modern in order etch out other possible presents and futures. Engaging experiences and categories of identity or subjectivity in order to formulate more desirable presents and futures also radically challenges a growing body of Marxian social theory, aleatory materialism, largely rescued from and inspired by Spinoza as well as the late work of Althusser, which together posit a more supple account of social and economic structures as not static monoliths but rather as contingent “chance” encounters. In addition, this social theory proposes a flat and fluid ontology in which social relations and even the body are understood as inherently

indiscreet movements, speeds, and intensities, capable of escaping the totalizing seizure of power. Aleatory materialism, though, often conflates liberal multiculturalism with radical difference, which has been constituted and maintained through forces of nationalism and/or colonialism.

And while aleatory materialism and cognate social theory or philosophy has been a colossal influence in contemporary U.S. and European visual art, it has been perhaps most explicitly been taken up by prominent art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud in his most recent work, *Nicolas Bourriaud: Altermodern* (2009). This work incorporates and builds upon his previous conceptualizations of relational aesthetics and conviviality as well as nomadism, conceptualizes an alternative or “alter” modernism for our current globalized milieu that describes new kinds of social relations that refuse static notions of origins, identity, or nation for new kinds of networked “intersubjectivities” animated by exchange, translation, and journey. This “new modernism,” resulting from “global dialogue” in tandem with the reinvention of art on a “planetary scale,” cannot be refracted any longer through staid diachronic or synchronic experiences of time assigned to the modern and postmodern, respectively. Instead the altermodern gestures toward change and dynamism, a modernism so as to “jolt us out of tradition; it embodies a cultural exodus, and escape from the confines of nationalism and identity-tagging” (*Tate Triennial Altermodern 2*). Nor is the altermodern rooted in a specific geographic locale, “but a positive experience of disorientation through an art-form exploring all dimensions of the present, tracing lines in all directions of time and space (3). The consummate figure of the altermodern then is the “cultural nomad,” the global flâneur.

Also the title given to the fourth Tate Triennial at the Tate Britain in London 2009, *Altermodern* is a collective exhibition featuring various artists from around the globe. In an interview, Bourriaud elaborates his neologism as such:

First, it is an attempt to reexamine our present, by replacing one periodizing tool with another. After 30 years into the ‘aftershock’ of modernism and its mourning, then into the necessary post-colonial reexamination of our cultural frames, ‘Altermodern’ is a word that intends to define the specific modernity according to the specific context we live in—globalization, and its economic, political and cultural conditions. The use of the prefix “alter” means that the historical period defined by postmodernism is coming to an end, and allude to the local struggles against standardization. The core of this new modernity is, according to me the experience of wandering—in time, space and mediums. (2009)

The altermodern, moreover, enables more fluid social relations and creative assemblages through “relational” visual art that break out of the rigid and immobilizing essentialisms of identity and multiculturalism, which he defines as the complacent “sterile coexistence of cultures” (Bourriaud 2009a, 28).

Yet the altermodern myopically reduces identity and difference to a liberal and essentialist multiculturalism as well as ignores the material reality of the body. Critiquing the flat or “rhizomatic” ontology and the deterritorialization of desire and bodies, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari, whose theorizations largely inform Bourriaud’s concepts of relation and travel, Emma Pérez (1999) asserts that “they offer a utopian body, one that is not racialized, colonized, presexualized, or abused...they offer a body that does not fantasize, wish, or hope, but instead responds quite superficially to touch, to action, to feelings upon the skin in the present as it happens” (109). Chela Sandoval similarly points out that horizontal accounts of power flatten out categories of difference, imaging “identities-as-positions can equally access their own racial-, sexual-

, national-, or gender-unique forms of social power,” whereby enacting a “new kind of democratization of oppression” (74). The body, a living nexus of history, memory, and desire, is therefore erased in Bourriaud’s altermodern, supplanting it rather with speeds, rhythms, and intensities devoid of history and geographical specificity. In this way, difference is flattened and nullified, and multiculturalism is understood as an impediment to “human” connection, whereby further invisibilizing those subjectivities who have already been relegated to the “non-human.” I elaborate a critique of this flattening of difference in relationship to liberal multiculturalism in the next two chapters through literature and social theory more broadly.

Included within the exhibition and larger artistic movement of altermodernism are African artist Pascale Marthine Tayou and Marcus Coates, who refuses the folkloric or “tribal” iconography for more abstract forms, as demonstrated in *Plastic Bags* in which he uses the uniform and billowy or formless shapes of plastic bags to convey the urban landscape. Bourriaud also lauds the cultural appropriation and veiled primitivism of the contemporary shamanism of hipster British performance artist Marcus Coates, a rising star in the Anglophone art world. Coates’s performances are comprised of donning a retro 1970s light blue tracksuit (a la *The Royal Tenenbaums*), aviator sunglasses, and a taxidermed badger atop his head and a stuffed rabbit peering through his tracksuit jacket as he visually attempts to seamlessly insert himself into modern tableaux, interconnecting past and present. In an interview in *Altermodern* (2009), when asked by Bourriaud if this “‘archaic’ model” is a statement on our time and/or the role of the artist today,” Coates replies: “I am using ancient techniques to answer modern-day questions, taking on a role that has ceased to be commonplace in Western

society. This process is implicit in all traditional indigenous cultures and co-incidentally involves skills not dissimilar to those used by artists—to move at will between the conscious and subconscious, to articulate beyond language and to be visionary” (63). Apparently Coates learned about the “ancient techniques” of shamanism in a weekend course in Notting Hill, London, through the aids of “ethnic drumming” and “dreamcatchers,” among other New Age paraphernalia (*Frieze* 2009). As the featured work of these artists evidence, Bourriaud’s altermodern uncritically resuscitates the “primitivism” and fetishization of the other characteristic of traditional modernism, despite Bourriaud’s claim of eschewing modernist linear timelines that demarcate the “archaic” from the modern. Protesting what he nebulously calls cultural standardization and the homogenization of mass global communication, Bourriaud’s altermodern uncritically reiterates discourses of primitivism and modernism in the service of an elite cosmopolitanism propelled by notions of travel and abstracted nomadism as well as superficial connection among the art world’s privileged urbane citizens.

Glaringly absent, in sum, in the altermodern is a vital recognition and sustained engagement with disconnection and global uneven development: that is, a critique of the socio-economic conditions that have given rise to modernism, modernity, and its discontents. Project MASA and Chicanafuturism, on the other hand, intentionally engages modernism in order to both critique it as an artistic movement as well as the modernity that informed it. Chicanafuturism importantly proposes an alternative modernism that brings to the fore *who* is included, and excluded, within the modern, particularly as it relates to Chicana/o social issues in a global or universal context. In

this way, Project MASA and its eclectic re-visions do not *transcend* particular colonial legacies embedded within and shaping the “Mission City,” but rather create alternative trajectories through and beyond this fraught (third) space.

Project MASA and “World-Traveling”

One does not need to go farther than the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands to see firsthand the contradictions of a neoliberal post-9/11 world. While NAFTA has opened up the border to free trade and the deregulation of large U.S.-based corporations and best practices, thousands of women in Juarez have been systematically and brutally murdered and/or gone missing. As the U.S. touts the merits of the free market and its ability to make permeable national borders, it paradoxically alienates Mexican immigrants and undocumented workers as it builds a wall on the southern border. San Antonio, known for its “modern” military industrial complex and tourist convention centers, maintains a de facto feudal system in which the white elite reap the profit from the exploited bodies and labor of its Mexican other. And so while Project MASA incorporates images of outer space and the extraterrestrial, this collective visual art in fact engages and re-imagines the material world through a “constant changing of forms, *renacimientos de la tierra madre*” (Anzaldúa 1987). Interrogating the binary of the so-called primitive and modern, Project MASA utilizes the open and dynamic form of third space to foreground the precarity and looming entropy of these colonial categories whereby destabilizing and reforming them. Project MASA is thus at once ruptural and reconstructive, a space de- and re-territorialization wherein other, multiple decolonial imaginaries are conceived.

In her exploration of a “pluralistic feminism,” Maria Lugones conceptualizes “world-traveling” as a vehicle of connection through “worlds” of difference. She writes,

But there are “worlds” that we can travel to lovingly and traveling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason why I think that traveling to someone’s world is a way of identifying with them is because by traveling to their “world” we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have traveled to each other’s “worlds are we fully subjects to each other. (401)

Love, according to Lugones, is not simply intimacy or fully knowing or owning the other, as would a conqueror or an imperialist, but it is a methodology of survival, or relating through differential terrain or “world.” She asserts, as well, that a world is “inhabited by flesh and blood people,” and for this reason cannot be a utopia or a complete vision of the material world (395). It is this trajectory of world-traveling toward which *masanauts* gesture. Through utilizing third space praxis, Project MASA makes not a world of difference, but many worlds within this *terra firma*, “this life,” through which the viewer critically travels, negotiates, and co-creates.

In the next two chapters, which focus on the novel *Golondrina, why did you leave me?* by Bárbara Renaud González and social theory more generally, respectively, I further expand this concept of love as also a political concept, that which intimately connects us to not only lovers, but also *comadres*, family, children, and even seeming strangers. Love is also a ghostly concept: it is not something readily identifiable, nameable, and containable: it is of this world, but also beyond it. It is profoundly felt, palpable, but not necessarily seen, fully present. Love, the ghostly, the socially spectral, is the potential to exceed our circumstances, but also requires us to reckon with the here

and now as well as what has passed—but continues to haunt us. Love and desire more generally, though, like haunting, have a history, a genealogy, and is shaped by the relational and contingent categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, dis/ability, among other vital categories of analysis.

Chapter 3

Reterritorializing La Llorona:**“Spirit Work,” Chicana Lines of Flight, and the *Terriblebeautiful* Love Story of *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?* by Bárbara Renaud González**

When angels speak of love they tell us it is only by loving that we enter an earthly paradise. They tell us paradise is our home and love our true destiny. —bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*

Because history in all its limitlessness determines the future.—Cherríe Moraga, *The Last Generation*

[Power]...can exhilarate like liberation, it can travel through time, and it can drown you in the present”—Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*

In this chapter I explore how the novel *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?*, by Bárbara Renaud González (2009), unearths the multiple ways in which particular colonial legacies embedded within the very landscape of both the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands and the Texas Panhandle region are infused by the revenants of not only race and class but also gender. In conjunction with the creative work of other Mexican American or Chicana writers, this novel foregrounds how colonialism produces differential categories of identity and lived experience in the Borderlands, shaping various forms of physical and social mobility as well as prescribes what kinds of intimate relationships may be forged and nourished. What this novel limns out and lays bare is how reckoning with the various legacies of colonialism endured by Mexicana/os and Chicana/os in Texas and the Southwest requires a reckoning with specific gendered oppressions, including those that emerge in intimate relationships with others.

Steeped in the socio-political geography of South Texas and the Panhandle after World War II, *Golondrina, Why Did You Leave Me?* is set in post-WWII south Texas as well as in the panhandle. Like the currents in the Gulf Coast, this novel surges and flows through an episodic and non-linear narrative. At times, it is a dizzying whirlpool that brings together and intimately explores the taut interrelationship among history, memory, spirituality, and social identity in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. Inspired by the Argentinean legend of the golondrina who journeys the world only to return home “telling an infinity of things” and is awarded by god the “gift of changing countries,” the title *Golondrina* recalls this seemingly unremarkable “swallow,” an allegory for diaspora, migration, and movements that blur the physical and spiritual worlds. Focusing on the various journeys of Amada (“Beloved”) García, a Mexican woman who travels to *El Norte* to escape an abusive marriage and to find love, *Golondrina* is narrated by her daughter Lucero or “bright star,” alternating between first- and third-person. What the disjointed and fluid plot and narration re-members, though, is more than just Amada’s quest for romantic love, the perfect heterosexual union. It recollects, rather, a sojourn of the flesh and the profoundly material connections to not only her romantic partners but also to her children, *comadres*, and *familia* in the face of a colonial legacy that has displaced Mexicans and Mexican Americans, cutting off vital ties between individuals and cultural communities, between individuals and their collective pasts, and, consequently, other potential futures.

However, this complex journey is propelled by an excavation of what *churns underneath* the Rio Grande, an entanglement of history, desire, and gender. And so, this novel must be read through *a film of blue*, because there we find traces of La

Llorona, who invisibly yet palpably shapes Amada's search for love, her past, present, and future.

Although the novel concludes with what appears to be a tragic ending, or Amada drowning in the Rio Grande, when interpreted through the anti-romantic conceptualization of love and spirituality as articulated in the book, another possible conclusion surfaces: a line of flight. Divided into five parts or "acts," the conclusion of the novel effectively "redistributes" the classical tragic conclusion, one that is historically tied to that of La Llorona and her "rememory," effectively remapping or "wildly destratifying" putative hierarchical (b)orders between the material and immaterial, between *what is* and *what could be*. The conclusion thus refuses its own ending or demise, and opens other possibilities that dislodge seemingly concretized colonial legacies, something unsayable, something *blue*.

Cramped Spaces: Rerouting *La Llorona* in "Woman Hollering"

"Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to its politics."—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*

Growing up Mexican American in South Texas, the folklore of La Llorona ("Weeping" or "Wailing Woman") is a familiar one. While there are many versions, depending on geographic location or context, most include a young, usually indigenous and/or lower class woman who has an affair with a Spanish "gentleman." When he abandons her to return to his legal wife in Spain or Mexico, depending on the version, La Llorona drowns her children in despair and then kills herself. Consequently, she is banished to haunt bodies of water, dressed in all white, and crying out for her dead

children. In the variant that Chicana scholar Sonia Saldívar-Hull was exposed to growing up in Brownsville, Texas, for example, she “was emphatically aimed at frightening boys and men” as she “appeared to men who were ready to betray their wives girlfriends” (119). Yet, as Saldívar-Hull and many other scholars have observed, La Llorona is rooted in a colonist imaginary of Malintzin, a Nahuatl woman who acted as Hernán Cortés’s translator, intermediary, and lover. More commonly known as “La Malinche” or “La Chingada” (“the fucked one”), her figuration embodies the sexualized and racialized aspects of conquest in Mexico as well as the misogynistic and paternalistic valences of Mexican cultural nationalism.

Reckoning with and re-envisioning this troublesome, haunting figure, moreover, has largely been a Chicana feminist enterprise. Scholar Domino Perez (2008) argues that while some refigurations of La Llorona recast her as agentic, “the most radical repositionings involve abandoning traditional elements of the lore or changing the outcome to challenge its social conventions and the dominating forces at work in it: forces most often cited as heterosexual Mexicanos and Chicanos, Catholicism, and other patriarchal institutions” (72). It is this revisionist Chicana feminist spirit that inspires Amada’s character’s spiritual journey, refusing romantic or ideal notions of love. This central character instead generates earthly modes of connection to others and the past, and in doing so, excavates the multiple and overlapping ways in which colonialism moulds and concretizes the social positions of Mexican and Mexican American women—or, simply put, keeps them in their ostensible places. Amada displaces this troublesome myth.

It is in this vein of constraining social spaces that I remember this legend.

Hearing about La Llorona as a child in San Antonio, Texas, I remember sensing her acute pain and victimhood, yet also how she had seemingly brought her tragic fate upon herself, straying beyond normative parameters of race, class, and nation. As such, this fraught figure “haunts the cultural landscape of our imaginations, reminding us of the necessity and consequence of acting against oppression, but she also teaches us how to use our voices, whether wailing in protest or shouting in liberation, so that we may actively shape new cultural and social realities (73). For me, she was a woman who did not know how to stay in her place, in what I understand now as a patriarchal landscape, and therefore destined to haunt her own watery grave, *a tight passage* (*Kafka* 3). Her claustrophobia, the confines of her racialized and gendered geography, her “cramped space,” has always captivated me.

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Deleuze and Guattari (2006) define a “minor literature” as that which deterritorializes language, connects the individual to political exigency, and fosters collective enunciation through the articulation of a “cramped space,” which I understand as a tight space or spatial ordering that is both material and immaterial, psychological and physical, that confines various forms of flows and intensities, various forms of being or subjectivity. A “striated” space, a cramped space contains blockages, impasses, and obstructions—both discursive and physical. However, within the context of *Golondrina*, I approach and theorize cramped spaces as a particular gendered, racialized, and embodied “psychogeography,” to borrow from Guy Debord, that constrains and delimits specific movements through the stranglehold of social positions or categories of subjectivity. Cramped or striated space

is thus a particular form of “territorialization” or spatial assemblage. Within the novel, cramped spaces name not only specific social positions informed by specific colonial legacies in South Texas and the Panhandle, but also a form of embodied Borderlands poetics.

Moreover, while “cramped space” indexes the specific social positions that are occupied by and constrain Mexican and Mexican American women in the novel, I also playfully employ the term to reference the particular lived and maternal experience or “gynopoetics” of Amada as a Mexican woman living in “Tex-Mex purgatory” who bears and loves several children, as well as loses them, and the unspoken, but profoundly felt, material connection or disconnection to these other bodies. This cramped space is womb-like and thus multiply inflected: just as Amada’s first born daughter “Sálome’s birth screams” and “the red streaming from her daughter” (González 2009, 238), followed by postpartum uterus cramping or after birth pains, this incarnate space signifies both connection and separation as well as profound pain and sublime joy. It is a space of love. This term signals, as well, her particular embodied connections to other characters in the capacity of *comadre* and lover. Naming the particular social conditions that structure cramped spaces for Amada is central to understanding how she negotiates, embodies, occupies, or exceeds them through acts of love and spirituality, creating what I also playfully term “Chicana lines of flight.”

However, before analyzing the novel, I briefly turn to Sandra Cisneros’s (1992) short story “Woman Hollering Creek,” on which *Golondrina* is partially based, to underscore how this short story creates a sense of geographic claustrophobia in relationship to Mexican women’s colonized and constrained social positions, which

enter the discursive register of legibility through the virgin-whore dichotomy as well as other disempowering female archetypes inhering throughout the story. This short story, which comprises *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Short Stories*, centers on the main character Cleófilas, who, after marrying Don Pedro, escapes her restricting hometown of Monclova, Coahuila, Mexico where “there isn’t much to do except accompany aunts and godmothers to the house of one or the other to play cards” (44) for Seguin, Texas where she anticipates romantic love like that in her *telenovelas* or Mexican soap operas. However, in this small Texas town, Cleófilas encounters only more isolation, allegorically and spatially demarcated by the presence of her neighbors who live next door on both sides of her home, Dolores (“Pain”) who pines away for her philandering husband, and Soledad (“Solitude”), who mourns for her sons and husband, as well as the arroyo or creek that cuts across the back of her house named “La Gritona” or “Woman Hollering,” foreshadowing the refunctioning of La Llorona from one who passively cries to one who actively yells out and takes charge of her present and future. Through this spatial complex, Cleófilas resides in and occupies a social location that only permits women to engage in “pain or rage” (47). The town, too, reinforces spatial imprisonment for Cleófilas, containing only a “TV repair shop, drugstore... liquor store, bail bonds...” (50). She reflects: “Because the towns here are built so that you have to depend on your husbands. Or you stay home...There is no place to go” (51). Cleófilas’s confinement is thus expressed through carceral spatial arrangements that entrap her at various scales, ranging from the domestic to the public sphere.

Governing this cramped space and immobilizing Cleófilas is a paternal order that is crystallized and sanctioned through the institution of marriage in the story. Soon after moving to Seguí, her husband Don Pedro begins to physically abuse her:

But when the moment came, and he slapped her once, and then again, and again; until the lip split and bled an orchid of blood, she didn't fight back, she didn't break into tears, she didn't run away as she imagined she might when she saw such things in *telenovelas*...

...when it happened the first time, when they were barely man and wife, she had been so stunned, it left her speechless, motionless, numb. She had done nothing but reach up to the heat on her mouth and stare at the blood on her hand as if even then she didn't understand. (47-8)

Just as no one in the town is able to explain the significance of the arroyo's name "La Gritona," resonant of La Llorona, Cleófilas is unable to vocalize or register her abuse, reflecting the way in which a gendered colonial legacy impacts and cements her present social location as well as the way in which conquest is always gendered, how each bleeds into one another, rendering them inseparable. Unlike the traditional association of roses with romantic love, the floral imagery in this passage, "an orchid of blood," which recalls Dolores's sunflowers, "fringed and bleeding a thick menstrual color" (47), suggests not only rape, and by extension conquest, but also the labor of bearing and caring for children, particularly after men betray or abandon their girlfriends or wives.

Locked within this patriarchal order, Cleófilas is bereft of language, denied the room or capacity to write her "spatial story" (de Certeau, 2002) and has nowhere to go literally and figuratively. And as Mary Pat Brady (2002) points out, "Absent from this map are the battered women's shelters, crisis care centers, or ESL schools that might

help her respond to abuse without saving to return to a ‘father with a head like a burro, and those six clumsy brothers,’ who don’t necessarily ensure her future safety or happiness” (134). After Don Pedro beats her, she is “motionless,” unable to extricate herself from this predicament, trapped in a cartography of violence: her only escape route is to return to her father back home in Mexico. It is this “social isolation” that makes it feel as though the “violence is closing in on her” (134). Other than her two neighbors, who embody pain and rage, or Trini, the laudromat attendant, who chastises Cleófilas for failing to adhere to the norms of respectability by allowing her baby Juan Pedrito “to walk around with no diaper and his pee-pee hanging out” (Cisneros 1992, 46), Cleófilas is described in the above passage as “numb” not only due to her abuse but also because she has no connection or support from other women, or men for that matter, in Seguín or back home, a dislocation and disconnection indicative of a larger neo-colonial condition, “complex,” or psychogeography.

It is through her connection with a community of woman, all of whom share allegorical names, at the conclusion of the short story that Cleófilas forges a line of flight or an escape route from Seguín, her social position, and a gendered colonial legacy that forecloses other possible lifeworlds. When Cleófilas finds out that she is pregnant with her second child and obtains a sonogram, her doctor, Graciela (“Grace”), calls her friend Felice (“Happy”) to drive her to San Antonio to catch a Greyhound bus back home to her family. Felice undermines and re-scripts normative gender roles: she is husbandless, she *owns* her own pickup truck, she yells rather than wails. When they cross over the arroyo “La Gritona,” Felice “yell[s] as loud as a mariachi” (55):

Every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know. Woman Hollering. *Pues*, I holler. She said this in a Spanish pocked with English and laughed. Did you ever notice, Felice continued, how nothing around here is named after a woman? Really. Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin. She was laughing again.

That's why I like the name of that *arroyo*. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, right? (55)

In response, Cleófilas reflects:

Can you imagine, when we crossed that *arroyo* she just started yelling like a crazy, she would later say to her fathers and brothers. Just like that. Who would of thought?

Who would have? Pain or rage, perhaps, but not a hoot like the one Felice had just let go. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, Felice had said.

Then Felice had started laughing again, but it wasn't Felice laughing. It was a gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water. (56)

The conclusion re-writes and re-imagines the legend of La Llorona, a figure who haunts and invisibly animates the social position of women in the short story: rather than cry, act as a passive victim, or remain chained to a future of pain or rage, cut off from loving relationships with others, Cleófilas momentarily gains “contrapuntal” (Brady 2002) momentum and exceeds the virgin-whore binary through the joyous act of laughter. Through connection with others, particularly the aid of other women, Cleófilas saves herself and her two children. Crossing over a bridge thus signals a liminal state in which she transforms from passive victim to active agent. There she begins to transform history, cultural memory, her own subjectivity. Through her laughter, rather than her crying, she pierces the colonialist and aural narrative of La Llorona wherein a new decolonial imaginary begins to critically resonate. Her newfound mobility, though, is not merely limited to her fleeing from Seguín, but rather from locating and forging a connection with Felice as well as temporarily unraveling a history of colonized and

gendered subjectivity as embodied by La Llorona. It is a fluid moment in which Cleófilas reconnects with a female community and transforms history, fragilely and tenuously linked by “a long ribbon of laughter.” Her particular “line of flight,” finally, is not simply an escape, or a leaving behind her past, but rather an spatialized and embodied re-routing of La Llorona through which a patriarchal order is de-stratified and re-territorialized. It is a beginning, a moment rife with potential, the germinal, love—that which is not easily “placed” into words.

The way in which romantic or ideal love is supplanted with a more worldly or material love, a love that also “bridges” the material to the immaterial or decolonial imaginary, within the cramped spaces of “Woman Hollering Creek” is also echoed and extended in *Golondrina*.

“Tomorrow I leave this fucking land”*: Tex-Mex Purgatory in *Golondrina

Overflowing *Golondrina* is the ineffable, or, that is, what cannot be most fully expressed through words and language, but rather through bodily connection or disconnection. In this novel love and spirituality function as complex acts of transmission and connection, but their paths are rarely straightforward or readily accessible or translatable. Like “Woman Hollering Creek,” *Golondrina* excavates and re-writes the legend of La Llorona, exploring how Mexican women become entrenched and trapped within a overlapping patriarchal orders informed by nationalism and colonialism. As such, the novel focuses on the plight of Amada, young and dark-skinned woman, who flees her home in Mexico just after WWII to escape a physically and emotionally abusive marriage with “Sapo,” “the toad man” in search of romantic love in *El Norte*, and is consequently forced to leave behind her baby daughter, Salomé.

After a brief love affair with Sapo's cousin, Jorge, who helps her cross the U.S.-Mexico border to *el otro lado* in Texas, she encounters and marries Lázaro Mistral, who soon becomes distant and obsessively consumed with the recuperation of land or territory, and with whom she bears, raises, and loves several children. In various ways Amada is frozen and immobilized by mutually defining processes of language, history, memory, and space, unable to fully articulate or make visible the intricate way in which she is paralyzed by dominant social orders.

In part one, "Where are you going, my beloved swallow?", González makes apparent the way in which Amada is confined and disciplined through her sexuality and gender as a poor and dark-skinned young woman living in post-WWII Mexico. Because her family is poor, Amada is taken out of school at thirteen and is required to sell boxes of Chiclets or gum on the street. Upon marrying Sapo who is twice her age, Amada, at only fifteen, is immediately forced into de facto servitude, both in terms of housework and sexual exploitation. Although she enjoys mopping and washing the linen sheets within her domestic domain, or creating order within the space she is allotted, she continually focuses her gaze and imagination toward the color blue, such as "the blue-starch sky that she imagines must be the color of pure freedom" (12) under which she hangs her laundry. Blue, the color of sky and water, symbolically yoking her character's desires to those of La Llorona: Amada experiences an "omnipresent wanting for blue." It is the color of love: "something she aches for, but she doesn't know what it is, only that it's the color blue" (12). Blue, which is associated with earthly or natural elements, therefore signifies a mode of connection in addition to that which exceeds her various cramped spaces.

On their wedding night, Sapo rapes Amada, brutally revealing the way in which Amada is imprisoned within virgin-whore dichotomy, suffocated under the actual and symbolic weight of various patriarchal orders:

Amada is a virgin of course, and she feels like a whole jalapeño has slammed into her mouth, bursting inside without her biting it, except it happened down there, in that mouth, so the jalapeño burns and cuts, squeezing itself into every corner and closet she has.

She cries and he doesn't care, boasts that she's his, that he owns her.

Then he makes her champagne-filled *boca* ache too with his jalapeño, big and fat and greasy with his toad juice. Swallow it! She's choking. [...]

¡Putá! he wheezes. What a whore you are!

He pushes her here and there, sucking her nipples so hard they drip blood from his sapo-feeding, forces her head facedown on the bed, grabbing, pressing, thumbing her body like *masa* for tortillas. She squeals with his thrusting, and he just laughs more. Her flesh is his *masa*, his *gordita*, and he's grunting like a pig when he turns her over again, ordering her to open her legs wide, wider, flattening her with his frogself. And she opens her legs until she breaks into pieces. Wider. *Más. ¡Más!*

Hija de puta. he calls her a whore, and that's worse than all the rest he is doing to her. You like it, I know you want it. You're like all the others, daughter of a good-for-nothing whore.

Then he does it again. ¡Putá-madre! [...]

She can't walk for days. That was the first night. (13)

In this horrific scene, the legend of La Llorona haunts her, literally and figuratively consumes and chokes her. Whereas in the opening chapter Amada uses *masa* or corn dough to lovingly nourish her daughter and connect to her past, *masa* becomes the reification of Amada's flesh, her alienation and dislocation from her own body, profoundly shattering her sense of her self. This symbolic "break[ing] her into pieces" (13) directly contrasts the loving act of narrative and remembering introduced in the first chapter, in which Amada relates to her daughter that the best story, like a quilt, ... is made from scrap pieces of cloth, old buttons, leftover thread..." (7). The act of rape here, which foregrounds the gendered and sexualized aspects of conquest, leaves

Amada quite literally paralyzed, frozen, for “she can’t walk for days.” There is seemingly no exit from her deplorable situation, a veritable stranglehold of history until she resolves to clandestinely “*leave this fucking land*” (30). And yet history and its unspeakable violences cannot be completely forgotten, left behind, as this novel indicates: history, for Amada, for Mexican and Mexican American women must be de- and re-territorialized.

In addition to the cramped space of Amada’s body, debased through its figuration as penetrable landscape of conquest, the third part, entitled “To reach it safely, what wind will you follow,” depicts a larger claustrophobic space that spans the neo-colonial geography of Texas. While Amada’s husband Lázaro is not physically abusive like Cleófilas, he is at best neglectful, and fails to intimately connect to Amada or to his children. Whereas Amada’s orientation is elevated toward the sky, the water, the exciting and promising uncertainty of the future, Lázaro gravitates toward the land, a site of trauma that perpetually consigns him to a history of loss. Land for Lázaro functions as a trauma of colonialism, a wounded attachment or symbolic order that compels him to perform backbreaking labor to recuperate and continually react, rather than go beyond, this loss. Like many Mexican families living in Texas after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, who lost their rights as U.S. citizens, Lázaro’s family land had been violently dispossessed of their land after the Texas Revolution by “Mr. King” or the owner of the King Ranch. This loss not only animates his monomaniacal focus on labor and land as well as the past, but also gridlocks him into complex colonizing patriarchal orders or Oedipal relationships with his father, the Kings, and various ranch owners for whom he toils their land.

Lázaro thus continually reacts to various forms of patrimony or the Lacanian “Law of the Father”: “Work, *la labor* was his father’s favorite word, meaning the land is all we have, remember!” (25). “Living in the shadow of a filial memory” or the “spirit of the father” (Derrida 1994, 5), Lázaro is falls prey to what Jacques Derrida calls the “visor effect.” Referring to the way in which Hamlet blindly obeys the injunction of his ostensibly murdered fathers to exact revenge on Claudius, the “visor effect” indexes the way in which the uncertain is apprehended as certain, as The Law:

Since we do not see the one who sees us, and who makes the law, who delivers the injunction (which is, moreover, a contradictory injunction), since we do not see the one who orders “swear,” we cannot identify it in all certainty, we must fall back on its voice. The one who says “I am thy Father’s Spirit” can only be taken at his word. An essentially blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin: this is a first obedience to the injunction. It will condition all the others. (7)

Lázaro, in other words, takes as certitude his father’s injunction to work the land, and remains captured and immobilized within a colonial logic of acquiring land, amassing territory, an act, to reiterate, that is inflected by symbolic and physical rape. When the *rinches* or the Texas Rangers come on behalf of the King Ranch to steal the land of Lázaro’s great grandfather, Honorario, a *negro* from Louisiana, and his great-grandmother, Mamá Camelia, they lynch Honorario, beat him, and then drag his body behind a horse” (González 2009, 211). Concurrently, Mamá Camelia is presumably raped:

Camelia didn’t know a man could take so much kicking and punching, the ribs cracking like branches, a tree-man falling, timber crashing down under those brass-toe boots, the mashing of skull, the uncoiling intestines, the swelling of hands and thighs and jaw, the pounding of riffles and broken rocks and still Honorario struggled. And then she was running, stumbling toward him, her feet muddy with *sangre* and urine and *caca* and gunpowder mixing in and oozing stream under her feet, a yellow, red, brown, black river. Her ripped skirt left a

bloody trail as she ran and fell to him so that all those footprints that night became one sad geography, one map of forgetting, another of remembering, of telling the story over and over and over, so that her children and their children and their children would hear it when everyone else pretended this night never happened. (210-11)

While this passage echoes the ambivalent concept of “this is not a story to pass on” that gives form to “rememory” in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), a novel that also inspired *Golondrina*’s main character Amada, this passage also uncovers a “sad geography” of forgetting and remembering that interpellates and ensnares Mexican or Mexican American men and women. This cramped space or colonial geography injures and traumatizes both men and women, making them subject to a legacy of conquest, of a patriarchal order, albeit in different complex manners.

It is this fluid and communal geography of forgetting and remembering that Lázaro privatizes and stakes out as his own. In this way, Lázaro, who is conferred a ghostly or hollow status through his biblical namesake, fails to make substantial connections to other characters in the novel, such as his own family. At times, he even physically abuses his own children, passing on a colonial legacy of violence, controlled by and re-enacting his own trauma. And although Lázaro, whose name also connotes a passive acceptance of poverty, is forced to work for low wages on various ranches because of his own position within a racialized and classed social order, he strangely repeats and is drawn toward paternalistic ranch bosses who exploit his labor, despite Amada’s pleading and constant criticisms of him being worked to death like an animal.

Lázaro inadvertently inflicts and transposes his trauma onto hers, pooling their collective colonial injuries. When they move to the mission town of Goliad, Lázaro attempts to keep Amada in her proper place within his patriarchal ordering of space, by

telling “her that more gringos had been massacred by the *mexicanos* here than even at the Alamo. He thought such knowledge would shame her somehow, would keep her quiet when she started to talk back to him. He doesn’t like her asking so many questions, hungry to know, a seesaw of happy and sad” (39). This containing of Amada’s excess is elaborated and exploded when they try to leave behind Goliad and Texas for California after Amada argues with Lázaro about the “bossman” not paying him once again, Amada pleading to leave, “*por el amor de Dios*” (50).

After packing up the truck or *la colorado*, Lázaro, Amada, and their two daughters Justicia and Lucero depart for California, where Amada’s sister lives, driving across West Texas, the family unearths a larger colonial geography of forgetting and remembering as well as a cartography of *vergüenza* or shame that ultimately obstructs the family from going beyond the borders of Texas. Driving on the freeway, the family makes their way north up, traveling through San Antonio, then up to San Marcus, passing through Del Rio, and then they take the longer, more mountainous route through El Paso located on the Texas-New Mexico and U.S.-Mexico border. Haunting these landscapes are multiple and overlapping legacies of colonialism that have rendered the memory or history of Mexican and American Indians invisible, naturalizing their absence. While driving through San Antonio, following the old Camino Real, “the old Indian trail that the Spaniards took” (51), and after driving by Fort Sam Houston, where Lázaro had received his military training for WWII, Lázaro remembers how he use to eat pecan pie and recalls the various kinds of indigenous species: “Caddo, Cheyenne, Choctaw, *aver* [let’s see], Kiowa, Shawnee, natives!” And Amada replies, “Just like us!”, which agitates Lázaro as he “quickly gives her his

own kind of look” (53). Amada then begins to tell the girls about how the Alamo was the first mission due to its proximity to what is now the San Antonio River, which in only a few decades later after the novel’s setting would become the city’s primary tourist destination, capitalizing upon “authentic” Mexican culture, while also promoting a European or Spanish heritage fancy through its built environment, particularly the European-style promenade that flanks both side of the river.

And when Lázaro adds that the military bases are located in San Antonio because of the Alamo—an oblique allusion on the part of González concerning the way in which the military industrial complex has built upon the “Alamo City’s” peculiar colonial legacy or foundation as well as the way in which neo-colonialism in San Antonio, Texas, or the U.S. operates in complicated ways through various overlapping institutions of power—Amada thus tellingly replies: “But the Mexicans were here first, Lázaro” (53). Upon espying Indian paintings in a canyon while crossing over the bridge of the Pecos River, Lucero asks “But where did all the Indians go?”, to which Lázaro playfully answers, “To Mexico...to build pyramids” (55), Amada “rolls her eyes” and says “Tell the girls *la verdad* [“truth”]” (55). Amada thus makes present a history and memory of colonization that has rendered Mexicans and American Indians absent.

This absent cause or history of shame that has been internalized and naturalized by Lázaro weighs on and burdens him, obstructing him from crossing state lines through El Paso into New Mexico. The passages culminating in Lázaro’s ultimate immobilization by the weight of a history of conquest and dispossession is imbued with

a sense of claustrophobia, of history closing in on this family. The narrator Lucero remembers:

On the highway from Van Horn where we can see the jaggedy black shade of the Guadalupe Mountains now close close to the big city of El Paso where we'll leave Texas *por fin* [finally], Mami sighs real deep, and the minutes are ticking even slower, slower, as we drive into the city of El Paso saying goodbye, Mami whispering *adiós* to Texas, and I'm looking for the sign to California. But Daddy says we have a long way to go. (60)

Just thought of leaving Texas at last seems to free Amada from the suffocating grasp of a collective past, giving her room to breathe, to live finally. However, as this passage foreshadows, Lázaro, who paradoxically is vivified and vitiated by his labor and obsession with reclaiming lost territory, is once again wholly governed by historical trauma, as if he is sentenced to haunt this geography of shame, finds an excuse to stay in Texas: a flat tire. Although Amada pleads with him to keep going, offering to call her sister for money, Lázaro, impervious to her words and “excessive” emotions, refuses.

Alternately, though, he is unable to articulate his loss, his emasculation, nor his hopes or desires: “How can he tell her that all he wants is to be a good father and husband, but he doesn't know anything except green and blue and pink and yellow that come from the earth” (62). He cannot assimilate her words either as her “silvery voice is burning up on its way to earth” (64). It is as if Amada and Lázaro are constituted and *moved* by different competing natural elements: whereas Amada's orientation is toward the water and sky, “blue” horizons of the possible, Lázaro is pulled to the earth in its variety of colors, drawn toward what is familiar and known. These diametrically contrasting orientations, both propelled by the gendered lived experiences of

neocolonialism, moreover, make Amada feel “like some prisoner inches away from the keys that could unlock her cell, a prisoner unjustly sentenced” (63).

Both characters, though, in their own complex ways are stultified by *vergüenza*. Both characters, moreover, are haunted and paralyzed by gender roles shaped by unseen forces of colonialism. Amada is victimized and unable to walk or move forward as her knees become “wobbly . . . , like when you try to stand after swimming a long time” (67), resonant of her paralysis after her rape by Sapo. Here she comes to embody a history of conquest, of shame, of immobilization, of La Llorona: “Amada’s a *vergüenza* of water crying from the inside out, and he’s ashamed of her for letting him see that” (67). Not only does Amada embody La Llorona, but also, as a corollary, is in excess of Lázaro, who, in contradistinction, personifies the land, a patriarchal order—one under which he suffers and toils, for he projects his own shame, his own perceived failure to be a “man,” onto Amada, a La Llorona figure whose body, symbolically and physically, functions as a territory for men to penetrate, conquer, and project. Yet, as the narrator underlines:

Daddy has *vergüenza* too, only he hides his, though it’s always there in the way he walks and laughs and even sleeps. All crooked and jangly. Like he’s dying a little from it, like he’s waiting for his own life to begin, so he tries to be more man because he doesn’t want us to know, but we do. We do. And he’s ashamed *que sabemos* [that we know]. (67)

Lázaro, a ghost of a man, “he who returns from the dead” (124), is impaired by shame, both in terms of physical mobility as well as his inability to connect and communicate with Amada. However, it is their collective shame, their lived experiences and embodiments of particular colonial legacies, that forces them to return to Texas, to the

familiar, a colonial or oedipal social order: “And that night, all the shames turned us back to Texas. I guess that’s all we knew” (67).

However, in the same way that Lázaro idealizes his relationship to the land, Amada also romanticizes, at times, love and the unknown or unattainable. Rather than recognizing that there exists racism and exploitive conditions in California, she idealizes this state because it exists in the abstract, and is therefore malleable and serviceable to her own desires and imagination. And yet there are pivotal moments throughout the novel in which Amada creates “lines of flight” or escape by bridging the material to the immaterial through spirit work, acts of love and connection, particularly in the way she practices her spirituality. This spirit work, which effectively enacts lines of flight, is essential to understanding how the conclusion of this novel, this “*terriblebeautiful* love story,” re-routes or redistributes tragedy, and concomitantly, re-writes the legend of La Llorona.

“Spirit Work”: A Labor of Love

Although Amada is to some extent religious, she disidentifies with religion as an institutionalized and patriarchal practice, particularly that of Catholicism. As many scholars in multiple disciplines have amply documented, Catholicism has operated as a vehicle of conquest in Latin America, subjugating native populations. Anthony Stevens-Arroyo (2008), for example, provocatively argues: “Catholicism in the Latino homelands was initially shaped by the peripheral status of these colonies to the Spanish Empire. Loyalty to religion rather than to an institution was a by-product of belonging to the periphery, as was a softer configuration of race relations than what characterized most of Latin America” (60). What he terms “pious colonialism,” was enacted through

this particular form of transculturation in the U.S. or Latino America. It is this pious colonialism that Amada, as well as other characters in the novel, satirize, resist, and transform: “Amada hates the priests, doesn’t believe that God speaks through the pope, and though she got her dreams wedding at the *catedral*, she only goes there to please Sapo and her mother’s *vale más*. But on the evening before she leaves Mexico, Amada visits El Templo de Carmen, the one with the mosaic dome named after a saint or whore, depending on which story you favor” (174). For Amada, Catholicism represents an unrealistic ideal as well as indexes an institution that sanctions violence against women through marriage and the socially symbolic virgin-whore dichotomy. Because Amada does not fit neatly into this symbolic space or placing, as nor does any woman, she is figured as a “bad mother” in the fashion of a whore, a Malinche, a La Llorona.

Amada further apprehends Catholicism as a cramped space paradoxically devoid of a higher power:

Even though she’s never seen anything else, Amada just knows her city of San Luis has too many churches, so many she can’t find God because of it, dazed before each rococo masterpiece of massive wooden doors, each caoba *reclinatorio* for the archbishop to sit and pray. Each church the very same: altars made of gilded gold, bronze, onyx, and marble, depending, the hand-painted stone tiles, the carvings! Here are the allegories, look! Jesus in the orchard. Jesus and the Last Supper. Jesus tempted by Magdalene, and Amada wants to blurt *What about the fetuses buried in the church’s camposanto?* The priests are fucking all the nuns, *¿a poco que no?* (González 2009, 174).

In Amada’s estimation, then, the Catholic church is suffocating, hollow or evacuated of spirituality or divine connection, and chock-full of misogynistic allegories. Yet, the novel *Golondrina* reads allegorically through biblical names, such as Lázaro (Lazarus) or Salomé, combined with non-biblical allegorical names, including Amada (“Beloved”), Sapo (“Toad”), or Lucero (“Star”). What *Golondrina* effectively

accomplishes, then, is the re-writing and redistribution of spirituality, re-territorializing and connecting it to spaces outside of religious institutions, which are informed by and informing various processes of subjugation, disconnection, and dislocation.

What the novel offers in the stead of institutionalized and “out-of-touch” Catholicism is an anti-romantic vision of spirituality as love, as intimate, as physical, as labor, as anti-hierarchical, as lived experience, as seemingly contradictory. Spirituality in the novel functions as a complex act of love that connects Amada to her family, her *comadres*, her indigenous history. It is both material and immaterial, weaving the past and present with what *could be*. The spirituality and love, modes of connection, are conflated with and explored through sensuous acts of singing, dancing, making love, eating or domestic work, such as cooking and sewing tablecloths and napkins—everyday objects that are meant to be touched—*se deben tocar*—“like when the minister reads from his big Bible and finds just the right verse, wets his finger with his tongue and marks it as his” (136). It is what liberates, even if momentarily, from a geography of shame and fear. When Lucero can only partially communicate with her mother because she has been robbed of her mother’s language due to processes of assimilation and various ideological apparatuses, such as school, she knows that she can still dance with her mother, so as to “pulse” “together” (169). It is also a mechanism of shared experience through which she reclaims her body, proclaims it her own, and becomes a “speaking subject”: “When I dance, my words are in my shoulders, my arms, waist hips, feet, and especially in my eyes when I feel people are looking at me, and I’m not ashamed” (169). However, dancing does not simply announce a liberal

discreet subject, but one who is galvanized through connections to other bodies and moves with their distinct rhythms and dances.

While normative or institutionalized Catholicism or religion eschews mixing the sacred and profane, Amada's love-making as spirituality works to undo or sensuously unravel this binary. In the following passage, Amada redefines and grounds spirituality in the sensual, in her love-making with Jorge before crossing the border, while also simultaneously linking to something in excess of the material world:

God is a lie, Amada whispers in Saltillo that night. The divine truth *is* the heart speaking, and she listens because she knows it must be the only way to be free. God is Jorge's fingers, following the silver hoops in her ears, wrapping a strand of her long black hair, pulling it and her to his lips. God exists in the way Jorge's hands trace the hem of her dress like a blind man reading Braille. God is the hunger between them, an infinite, boundless, predestined, savage, shared history, a war waged in order to surrender to another. (36)

God is thus contoured by history of desire, rooted at once in lived experience to something beyond the horizon of the flesh. But, as Amada observes, spirituality understood in this way is never innocent. After making love to Jorge, her "head aches, her body feels inside out, tender, a blood-red orchid" (36), highlighting an ecstatic post-coital state, but also insinuating something more pernicious through recalling Cleófilas's "orchid of blood" after suffering abuse from her husband. In other words, spirituality requires reckoning with complicated, unnamed histories of desire: it requires work, "spirit work."

While scholar Lara Pérez (2007) uses the term "spirit work" to denote the multiple ways in which various multi-disciplinary Chicana cultural production from the 1970s to the 1990s "to derail Eurocentric cultural evolutionary arguments" (20) that posit spirituality as uncivilized or irrational, I take it up here in a double sense. First,

spirit work denotes the ways in which the Amada ground spirituality in her lived or sensuous experience of the Borderlands. Second, it underscores how spirituality in the novel pushes beyond the limits of specific colonial legacies and histories toward other kinds of presents and futures, enacting a space where decolonial imaginaries may manifest. Spirit work thus *labors* beyond and through binaries, merging the material and immaterial. In this way, I argue that spirituality operates as a complex act of love that refuses romantic abstractions and vitally connects and nourishes various relationships among lovers, parents and children, among cultural communities in addition to linking the past to the present, various histories, memories, and desires from which Mexican and Mexican Americans have been severed through the strategy of “divide and conquer.”

In order to flesh out a complex definition of love at work in the novel, I examine and place into conversation the work of radical women of color, particularly Black and Chicana feminist thought, as well as the Marxian scholarship of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri concerning love in relationship to pedagogy and political action.

Throughout their work Audre Lorde and bell hooks have articulated the ways in which love or erotics and/or the spiritual is too often ignored in the academy and social movements. For these activist-scholars, love or the erotic is intimately tied to the spiritual, that which gestures toward the possible, a passage from the virtual to the actual. However, Lorde (1984) notes how, for example too often mainstream conceptions of love or the erotic have been tethered to patriarchy and wielded against women, relegated to the register of the purely physical, the irrational and the pornographic—that which has historically stripped women of power and self-

actualization, and therefore a “denial of the power of the erotic” as a source of empowerment, mode of connection and knowledge production (54). We must therefore learn to re-envision the erotic beyond genitals or a sexual act, and understand it as a creative force that actively shape how we engage the world around us. She explains,

The very world *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects—born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony. When I speak of the erotic then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives. (55)

And because of the way in which the erotic is conflated with the pornographic, she argues, so has the spiritual or “psychic and emotional” been severed from the political, immobilized in a false dichotomies (56). It is erotic, sensuous knowledge that refuses binary logic and forms a “bridge” between the spiritual and the political or lived world. It is the erotic that brings us joy, “illuminate[s] our actions upon the world around us” (56) and puts us *in touch* with not only others, but also ourselves, giving us a way of recognizing our erotic capacity so as to be open to recognizing and connecting erotically with others.

bell hooks (2000) similarly expounds that too often love is associated with ideal or romantic love that promises the “happily ever after” (100). In the same way that Lorde argues that the erotic is dangerously conflated with the pornographic in which women are rendered inert, desensitized objects, romantic love, hooks contends, is based in patriarchal domination and possession, and renders women as passive objects of affection to be pursued, obtained, and owned. This possessive relationship conferred by romantic love is not limited to only heterosexual relationships, but queer or non-

normative ones as well. What we need, she asserts, is a more “liberatory vision of love,” a radically different way of relating to ourselves and others outside of domination, possession, and coercion. That is, one based in feminist politics and “mutuality” in order to unleash love’s transformative potential through connection and compassion for others (102-4)

As she elaborates more fully in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), love is the potential for actualization, the breath of the possible, within the classroom and beyond. Extending the work of philosopher and scholar Sam Keen, she explains,

Understanding that eros is a force that enhance our overall effort to be self-actualizing, that it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know, enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination. (195)

Love is thus works as a “bridge” between self and other, between *what is* and the *could be*. Too often, though, love is privatized, and ceases to be a connecting and vital force, inciting the “critical imagination” or even bodily connections, sexual and otherwise. The task at hand, therefore, is to locate “the place of eros within ourselves and together allow the mind and body to feel and know desire” (199).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri¹¹ as well as Chela Sandoval conceptualize love as a mechanism through we which we maximize our capacity to connect and relate

¹¹ It is important here to note that although the methodology of the oppressed functions as a “deregulating system” to

to others in the service of coalition building under global capitalism, the “transnationalization of capitalism” or “Empire” so as to forge what Sandoval calls the “methodology of the oppressed” and Hardt and Negri term as the “multitude.” In their elaboration of the “constituent power” of the multitude, or the capacity for revolution and transformation of globalized capitalist relations and the real subsumption of all forms of cooperation, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s (2004) apprehension of love as a political concept dovetail with that of Lourde and hooks. They assert, “the modern concept of love is almost exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family. Love has become a strictly private affair. We need a more generous and more unrestrained conception of love” (351). Love and spirituality or religion, for Hardt and Negri, are not inherently mutually exclusive as well. In fact they claim that we should look to “pre-modern” traditions found in Christianity and Judaism, for example, “to recuperate the public and political conception of love,” for “love means precisely that our expansive encounters and continuous collaborations bring us joy” (351). This love is not “necessarily metaphysical” in that “both God’s love of humanity and humanity’s love of God are expressed and incarnated in the common material political project of the multitude” (351-2). Like Lourde and hooks, Hardt and Negri reiterate that love increase’s one’s capacity to be open to and connect with others, and recover a “material and political sense of love...as the basis for our political projects in common, and the construction of a new society. Without this love, *we are nothing*” (352; emphasis mine). In other words, without this sense of love, common political struggles are unrecognizable, unthinkable, undoable, and therefore impossible.

Sandoval, in similar vein, formulates a “neorhetoric of love” that describes a “political technology, as a body of knowledges, arts, practices, and procedures for re-forming the self and the world” (3, 4). Love is thus a “technology for social transformation” (2). Utilizing the theories of Roland Barthes and Stuart Hall, Sandoval further conceptualizes a “prophetic love” that ruptures everyday modes of being, the creation of third meaning that allows for new outgrowths and connections through “differential consciousness”: “part and parcel of global decolonizing alliance of difference in its drive toward egalitarian social relations and economic well-being for all citizenry: an oppositional politics for *planeta tierra*” (182). This third species of differential consciousness that Sandoval outlines is the fluid and shifting site for the tactical imagining and practice of possible identity, a timespace that refuses the Cartesian split of binaries, and gestures toward the “shimmering” or “a luminous thin thing that grows thicker everyday,” the profane illumination of the subjunctive or the *perhaps* (Anzaldúa 1987, 73).

It is this more generous and communal conception of love, or love as “profane illumination,” finally, that simultaneously germinates in and is nourished by the earthly, and yet connects what is with the possible. This revision of love informs not only alternative notions of spirituality in the novel but also the novel’s seemingly tragic conclusion.

one seamless motion: Chicana Lines of Flight

In the conclusion Amada attempts to assist her long-lost daughter Salomé, whom she left behind as a baby in order to escape a brutal marriage with Sapo, and her children illicitly cross the U.S-Mexico border by swimming across the Rio Grande. It

begins to rain, and the water becomes perilous. Although ambiguous, Amada presumably drowns or is drowning, and it seems as though she commits suicide, repeating historical trauma by re-inscribing the legend of La Llorona by becoming a victim to fate, the archetypal “bad mother” or siren figure, along with a slew of demonized “universal” female archetypes. The structure of the novel, which is divided into five parts, in addition, suggests a tragic, fatal conclusion. The incorporation of tragic biblical figures and the allusions to aunts who “are always like a Greek chorus singing in Spanish” (González 2009, 126) giving insight into Amada’s embodied history, intimates this genre as well. However, when read intertextually or in conjunction with “Woman Hollering Creek” as well as through the lens of spirit as a “line of flight,” a different ending—or *en medias res*—emerges into purview.

Important as well, though, what this novel effectively demonstrates through the figure of La Llorona is how a line of flight is enacted not through de-subjectification but through de- and re-subjectification. And even though “flight” may potentially constitute a line of flight, this concept does not necessarily entail flying. As translator Brian Massumi (2007) points out, in addition, the phrase line of flight, a translation from French, although it seems to indicate flight in the sense of transcendence, it ironically “has no relation to flying,” but rather signifies flight in the sense of “fleeing or eluding” as well as “flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance” (xvi). Understood in this way, the titular figure of the golondrina does not gesture toward transcendence, toward forgetting and leaving behind, but a return, that which guides Amada through the material world, but at the same time, connecting her to something more, in excess of the banks of the Rio Grande. Although a line of flight denotes a

process of de-subjectification and promotes “antigenealogy” or “short-term memory” (21), or bodies without histories of desire, I assert that unless we recognize and reckon with memory in relation to bodies and desire lines of flight are politically nonviable, evacuated of historical force and exigency. I also take seriously Deleuze and Guattari’s assertion that their work is “cultural” and “necessarily a tracing: already a tracing of itself...an endless tracing of established concepts and words, a tracing of the world present, past, and future” (24). A strange “assemblage” indeed, I here participate in this tracing, making my own line flight between Chicana feminist cultural production and the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

Even though the conclusion of the novel may seem initially suicidal or tragic, it is ultimately a moment of grace or love, wherein colonial and gendered geographies of shame and fear undergo transfiguration, a line of flight. Grace, a form of love, though, here is not the domain of the romantic, ideal, or abstract, but emanates from a river, a complex cartography of remembered and forgetting, a history of bodies and desire. After Amada drives for four hours after working all day cooking and cleaning, she drives down to the U.S.-Mexico border to assist Salomé and her children to cross the river. However, while waiting for them to arrive on the other side, Amada falls asleep and experiences a spiritual “awakening.” Upon hearing the sound of name “*Mami*” “she opens her eyes, a white-winged dove flashes by in the pause between the smooth steadiness of rain thrumming its last, a rain waking her to a film of blue, and she knows that voice. She opens the car’s door and runs to the river” (González 2009, 236). The “white-winged dove,” resonant of the proverbial “white light,” signals Amada’s “flight” from the material world to something “in-between” or liminal for she rests in the

“pause” of the rain. This awakening, the inauguration of her death, then, does not indicate an ending nor a conclusion, but rather a middle, *en medias res*. That is also dawn and springtime reinforces the temporal in addition to the spatial aspects of this liminality. Amada, though, is still haunted by traces of blue, by the river, its potential.

(Re)enter La Llorona:

Amada hears songs swirling around her, and the stickiness in her mouth tastes strangely like the melted *piloncillo* from her father’s old rancho, and this time when she makes it to the surface of the water, she wheezes mud and slips again, smelling the anise in their mothers *pan dulce*, and once again she hears the whole plaza’s clapping for her little-girl rhymes, and then she’s dancing, her legs moving fast below her, and she sees Jorge, it’s him, at that plaza in Veracruz she always wanted to see, where the Gulf Coast crashes in time with the orchestra, and the trumpets, guitars, violins are pulling silver threads from the stars, winding them together in one seamless motion, and it’s beginning to rain...and it’s a thunderstorm, but this time she’s not afraid.

Then Amada opens her mouth to the rain drenching her at the bridge, feels the hands calling her, scratching for her, kicks some more, and she’s at the plaza again...*¡Amada!* She hears Jorge’s voice, his saxophone moan at dawn, and her girlish songs start falling from her mouth, and the sunrise smells of vanilla and figs, lemongrass, verbena, and she’s tasting the first peach from that tree of life where Lucero was born, and she’s waling across the bridge with her high heels, and her son Jorge is waiting for her over there, and she sees all her children impatient, waiting to be born, crying for her, *mami, mami*, glimpses her Zacarías...and then she hears Salomé’s baby screams, smells the red streaming for her body when she was born, *mamá, mamá*, why did you leave me? *Dame fuerza, Dios* [Give me the strength, God], I have to walk across. *Una chansa nomás* [No more chances], just give me this chance, *por el amor* [for love].

As she closes her eyes she hears them, the wish-whooshing in the sky, the purple-tipped majesty of *golondrinas* soaring toward *el norte* in their diamond-shaped bravura, knows they’re going to accompany her. Amada opens her mouth one more time to greet them, her arms spread wide in welcome, a yellow banner of hope, as the river swallows her last words, and those words are in a language of women who have learned how to fly. (241-2).

And so, in the above passage, Amada’s liminal state is reinforced in multiple ways, which, a transitional state in which the legend of La Llorona is repurposed. Past and

present dizzyingly unite, denying discernable beginnings and endings, flowing into “one seamless motion”

where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to another and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and pick up speed in the middle” (Deleuze and Guattari 2007, 25)

It is a Borderlands space: “It is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa 1987, 25). It deluges binaries, and spills beyond and “undermines its banks.”

As well, her senses and her “excessive” desire work in concert like the Gulf Coast that “crashes in time with the orchestra” (242). It is significant that water here is not configured as a purifying or cleansing element within the context of this redefinition of grace and the La Llorona legend. Instead grace emerges from the blurring of the sacred and the profane as Amada’s blood streams into the river while rebirthing her daughter. The mentioning of “yellow banner of hope” does not only indicate connection to others and the past, but also weaves together various yellow threads both within the novel and “Woman Hollering Creek.” The yellow banner, brings to mind the how Amada’s *comadre* Milagro ties her baby’s umbilical cord to the Mexican cypress with a “yellow ribbon,” “giving thanks for his fat cheeks and legs” (43), simultaneously excavating an indigenous spirituality in addition to alluding to Felice’s laughter, which is “gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter, like water” (56). And so Amada, Milagro, Felice, and others transubstantiate into a chorus of woman, nourishing a collective body tied together through texts, geography, history, and desire. It is this language that de- and re-territorializes La Llorona within a larger collective body that enunciates a collective reckoning with her spirit. It is this collective body that permits

Amada to take flight, to undermine and elide suffocating binaries beset by divide and conquer: sacred and profane, life and death, U.S. and Mexico, the past and present, the material and immaterial, virgin and whore. It is the “voice at the edge of things” (Anzaldúa 1987, 72), that pushes against and opens up the horizon of the possible, brushing up against “purple-tipped majesty” (González 2009, 242). It is a voice that always already speaks and laughs through a “film of blue.”

Taking cue from Chicana scholar Chela Sandoval (2000) in creating “cognitive maps” that catalyze oppositional consciousness through identifying and aligning various seemingly disparate philosophies, theories, or “ideational forces” (6), I perform an act of theory banditry, expropriating the concept “line of flight” as both critical methodology and critique. However, the work of Deleuze and Guattari has been largely dismissed by Chicana and/or material feminism primarily due to the way in which Deleuze and Guattari ignore the significance of the body as a vital source and site of political theory and action, especially in their theorization of the Body Without Organs (or BwO), which underpins many of their theoretical concepts. In an attempt to escape the totalizing theories of traditional Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, BwO comprehends the body as an inorganic compound amenable to disassembling and desubjectivization, producing a line of flight. As such, this “body,” broadly conceived as a loose structure of organization, is only capable of short-term memory—rather than the overdetermining subconscious that supposedly guide our thought and action (21). Long-term memory, History, and genealogy for Deleuze and Guattari are always subject to and complicit in the crystallized form of the State Apparatus.

However, this formulation of the body in relation to memory or history becomes troublesome within contexts of colonialism (as well as other systems of oppression that work through categories of race, class, gender, sex, nation, (dis)ability, size, etc.) in that colonialism is embodied. Theorizing the body as a site of knowledge production, desire, memory, and history articulates a “theory of the flesh” or a body politic that works to dismantle particular forms of power that work through and discipline the body, rendering it a critical site of intervention and transformation. Emma Pérez (1999), in her critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s dismissal and disembodiment of the Oedipal complex in *Anti-Oedipus*, explains that it is not important whether or not that Oedipus or “father-mother-child triangles” (106) is a Western construct. What quite literally matters is that this myth informs relations of bodily subjugation under conquest or an “Oedipal Conquest Complex.” It structures desire: “Memory as history, as social construction, as politics, culture, race—are all inscribed upon the body”; in other words, “The body remembers” (108). And so we cannot simply forget psychoanalysis and Oedipus: we must not only *resist* it to dismantle it—but also to exceed it so as to move beyond the consistent limits of colonialism toward the realization of a decolonial imaginary. Giving a historical account of desire, the “memories of origin,” “invokes a site of fantasy where resistance is possible, perhaps even making revolution possible” (110), such as that La Llorona and her symbolic progenitor, Malinche. Framed within a colonial or Oedipal history of desire, the notion of freedom is transformed into a heterogeneous and socio-politically specific concept, determining what is mapped as “liberatory terrain” (110).

In parallel to the way in which Pérez privileges the body in her articulation of a transformative politics and “third space praxis,” Cherríe Morraga ([1983] 2000), in her formulation of “Queer Aztlan,” she limns out the interconnections among identity, the body, land, and the capacity to love, to enact transformative social bonds. She explains, “the female body, like the Chicano people, has been colonized. Any movement to decolonize them must be culturally and sexually specific” (149). Decolonization is thus a body politic, the potential for new desires and affinities through engaging what the body remembers, what it knows, what a body can do. In *Loving in The War Years*, lo que nunca pasó por los labios Moraga illustrates this complex bodily relationship to desire and history in her poem “Passage”:

There is a very old wound in me
 between my legs
 where I have bled, not to birth
 pueblos or revolutionary
 concepts or simple
 sucking children
 but a memory
 of some ancient
 betrayal.

So that when you touch me
 and I long to freeze, not feel
 what hungry longing I used to know
 nor taste in you a want
 I fear will burn
 my finger to their roots
 it's out of my control.

Your mouth opens, I long for dryness
 The desert untouched.
 Sands swept without sweat.
Aztlán.

Pero es un *sueño*. This safety
 of the desert.

My country was not like that.
 Neither was yours.
 We have always bled
 With our veins
 and legs
 open
 to forces
 beyond our control. (38)

Desire, what and whom we want, long for, dream about, whose shimmering contours demand poetic form, for Moraga, is shaped by material colonial legacies, or that which is “beyond our control,” which compel how we relate to and recognize ourselves, our culture, and land. Land is more than a topography of flora and fauna. It is also one of bodies and lived experiences that bear the scars of not only the past but also imperialism and patriarchy in the present (173). However, colonialism and its legacies, that which divide and conquers, never wholly prefigures desire and the body. Desire and spirituality for Moraga, moreover, function as a healing salve, that helps to connect bodies through difference, but also acknowledge our relationship to “nature,” broadly conceived (172). In this way, “land,” and, by extension, the body, becomes “the common ground for all political action” (173). Understanding the way in which differential lived experience of these territories, these sometimes “cramped spaces” or constricted “passages,” demand that lines of flight or de- and re-territorializations be historically specific as well.

Tragedy Fatigue: The Grace of Women Dancing

“Line of chance, line of hips, line of flight,” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

“I’m taking this one down to the floor.” (Lucero) *Golondrina*, Bárbara Renaud

González

In the foreword to *Unmaking Race, Remaking Soul: Transformative Aesthetics and the Practice of Freedom*, Joy James (2007) writes, “‘Tragedy fatigue’ manifests not only among the invaded and the colonized, among the impoverished or caged in penal sites that double as trauma sites. It is the hallmark of imperial ambitions and the corporate, statist, militarist, or academic agents that further or counter those ambitions” (xii). Aesthetic production, in turn, in her formulation, becomes a transformative site for reckoning with the various “tight spaces” endured by people color through connecting these particular sites to other liberatory imaginaries. *Golondrina*, through exploring “spirit work” and the related de-territorialization of “cramped” spaces in culturally grounded ways resist and escape the weight of tragedy fatigue, re-fuses what the past insists on keeping severed, injured, and fatigued.

This tripartite concept of grace, love, and spirit work in the novel does not refer to the above and beyond, the transcendent, but rather confronts and dismantles this tragedy fatigue head on, in the flesh. It is a generous concept. This is a grace that requires reveling in the ordinary, locating paradise in the earthly, and while you are there, maybe even dancing to *conjunto*, “as if my body was the land, my heart a tornado untwisting itself to the two-step of *barbacoa* blues” (241). Figured in this way, grace, in all its fleshy manifestations, transfigures geographies of shame into sites of joy and the sublime. *Golondrina* concludes with neither an ending nor a beginning: it pauses and pulsates in the caesura of a river, someplace in “Tex-Mex purgatory,” for, as

Lucero states, this Borderlands space, this site of trauma and generation, “is home” (242).

What *Golondrina, why did you leave me?* effectively foregrounds through its engagement of the socially spectral, such as the marginalized positions of Mexican and Mexican Americans post-WWII or the elusive, but profoundly felt, concept of love, is the way in which literature itself *theorizes*. Many literary Marxist critics, such as Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton, among others, have pointed out how culture and political economy are overlapping and mutually informing as well as the way in which literature functions as a mode of ideology, revealing class tensions and contradictions that both reflect and inform the “real” or lived world, and in this way theorize the world in a particular way, or provide a specific ideological vista into class relations. However, it has been U.S. radical women of color theory in conjunction with critical race and postcolonial theory that have been pivotal in signaling the ways in which literature, broadly conceived, does not merely function as ideology or a “false consciousness,” but also illuminates lived experience, that which goes beyond discrete categories of class, that which perhaps explodes putative categories of subjectivity themselves. Literature, an imaginative terrain that bridges what is with what could be, theorizes the social—and therefore the ghostly. It is a mode of survival, a “telling to live” (the Latina Feminist Group 2001). It is, I argue, social theory itself—a way of articulating and bridging our social worlds. Commencing from the assumption that narrative is theory and that all social theory is in fact subjective, Chicana feminist theory often calls upon a more “informal” mode of theorizing, one that is informed by

storytelling or “*testimonio*,” revealing how all social theory, that is all narrative, is a subjective act, or, conversely, an act of subjectivity.

Yet, and most likely because of its use of storytelling and its emphasis on the body in relationship to desire, very rarely is Chicana feminist scholarship theory and literature included. But literature, or theory, has much to say about ghosts, what is often occluded from view and excluded from the register of the sensible within the realm of contemporary social life. Chicana feminist theory remains socially spectral in not only the way in which it has been traditionally marginalized within the academic field (and beyond) of social theory, but also the way in which it traffics in the bodily, the personal and communal, that is, the seemingly non-empirical or official. Chicana feminist theory blurs what counts as official academic discourse, what is worthy as an “object” of study. It valorizes the ghostly or socially spectral. What I explore in the next penultimate chapter, then, is the way in which Chicana third space feminism intervenes in official academic discourse in addition to political social organization within and beyond the halls of academe through placing into conversation the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and other Chicana third space feminists with new directions in Marxian theory and practice. I do so in order to emphasize the importance of the body, desire, and history in social organizing, or that which is always already spectral, so as to accelerate radical social theory and action.

Chapter 4

Bridging Common Grounds:**Metaphor, Multitude, and Chicana Third Space Feminism**

Chicana feminist thought, as well as queer and/or U.S. radical woman of color theory more generally, remains socially spectral or alien to Critical Geography. This rich and diverse corpus of scholarship grounds its theorizations in the body and identity as well as in multiple socio-historical or political geographies so as to contest and extend beyond various specific and overlapping systems of power. Chicana third space feminism, such as the watershed work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Emma Pérez, Cherríe Moraga, and Chela Sandoval locate their theorizations within the particular lived experience of the “Borderlands” or the U.S.-Mexico border as queer and/or brown women. Collectively these scholars articulate a Chicana “Third Space” Feminism through which decolonial imaginaries and methodologies are conceived and enacted. The site of the Borderlands, a complex “third space,” is both physical and metaphorical in that it speaks to the actual lived experience of particular identities or subjectivities shaped by race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, and dis/ability as well as functions simultaneously as generative space of re-imagination that conceives emancipatory politics through addressing “the specificity of oppression” (Moraga 1981a, 52). This scholarship thus underlines the importance of incorporating identity as a central component to any social movement as it brings to the fore who constitutes the *we* in addition to how and why we move.

Although this body of work theorizes the specific cultural geography of the Borderlands in relationship to social transformation, it has been accorded marginal and invisible status within critical geography. And although this sub-discipline of geography is diverse and interdisciplinary, it is largely inflected by marxian theory, which has historically maligned and consigned cultural identity to the realm of the “militant particularism” (see Harvey 2001) or the epiphenomenal, an impediment to social organizing and transformation. What is more, as there is a growing interest in and deployment within this sub-discipline of what might be called a poststructuralist or postmodern Marxism, as exemplified by the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri as well as related Autonomous Marxist scholarship, which collectively theorizes the postmodernization and global restructuring and re-spatialization of capitalism or “Empire,” the marginalized role of identity in social transformation is further crystalized and occluded.

The work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri as well as specific Autonomous Marxist scholarship attempts to theorize the real subsumption of all social life under global postmodern capitalism or Empire as well as the multitude, a rhizomatic form of social organization that embodies the potential to work *within* and *against* Empire. However, the conceptualization of this collective “living flesh” fails to recognize the importance of identity and difference in activating the “constituent power” of this social organization, or how and why particular bodies aggregate in pursuit of being in common. This effacing of difference, I argue, is reflected in and exacerbated through this collective scholarship’s conceptualization of the multitude as diffuse networks and

through the attendant metaphor of the archipelago, which obscures the variegated and uneven lived experiences of global postmodern capitalism. Moreover, through these homogenizing metaphors this body of work unintentionally calls upon and reproduces liberal multiculturalism, making it seem as though *we* all experience capitalism identically.

In this chapter I critically connect or “bridge” the work of Hardt and Negri and Autonomous Marxist theorizations to Chicana third space feminism, particularly through the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, regarding issues of identity and social organization under Empire. Rather than deploying the dead metaphors (metaphors evacuated of their symbolic force) of the archipelago, I suggest incorporating Anzaldúa’s multi-inflected metaphor of bridging, which foregrounds the significance of identity, difference, and the body in social organizing so as to more effectively connect and move with others. I contend, finally, that to utilize Autonomous Marxist theory and practice within U.S. critical geography and beyond requires nothing less than an act of bridging between various *bodies* of social theory.

Identifying the Multitude

In *Empire* Hardt and Negri (2000) imagine the current regime of imperial politics as “a great sea that only the winds and currents move” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 354), a form of global capitalism that saturates all forms of cooperation. In contradistinction to previous forms of imperialism and European colonialism that relied on the acquisition of territory and the delimiting of margin and center, Empire functions as a “new global form of sovereignty” comprised of “national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule”: “It is a *decentered* and *detrterritorializing* apparatus of rule that

progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (xii). This new iteration of economic and cultural sovereignty is evident in the increasingly rapid production and exchange of money, goods, services, and information across nation-state borders, signaling a shift from the primacy of industrial or material labor to the central role of affective, intelligent, or immaterial labor. Through the “real subsumption” or total co-optation of human creative capacities by immaterial labor, Empire functions as an “artificial horizon” (354) that renders impossible a constitutive outside or alternative to this new form of sovereignty. As such, Hardt and Negri understand this postmodernization of the global economy as ontological, a fact of contemporary political and social life, inexorably encompassing us all within its “smooth world” (xiii).

Ironically, though, through this “becoming common of labor” or the production of the common global conditions of labor, Empire also guarantees its own demise through its generation of a rhizomatic and “diffuse network” or the multitude. This “counter-empire” always already embodies constituent power that may be activated in pursuit of common social and political objectives. In contrast to “the people,” a homogenous social body readily interpellated by the nation-state or sovereign power, the multitude is a “living flesh” comprised of heterogeneous singularities, an irreducible multiplicity that elides the logics of representation, sovereignty, and hegemony. And whereas “the people” act as a coherent and hierarchical political body, the multitude functions as a horizontal configuration of power, “a plane of singularities, an open set of relations” (103), capable of organizing itself and making decisions. Hardt and Negri explain: “The multitude, designates an active social subject, which acts on the basis of

what the singularities share in common. The multitude is an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity...but on what it has in common” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 100). The multitude, an ongoing process of being in common, moreover, does not refer to traditional notions of community or organic unity, but rather indicates a contingent process of “*communication* among singularities and emerges through the collaborative social processes of production” (204). Immanent to the multitude is the potential for “absolute democracy,” the potential to organize and act within and against Empire so as to transform and exceed its constituent horizons.

The most powerful and promising aspects of Hardt and Negri’s multitude, to my mind, moreover, are its related processual and excessive aspects, or that which Empire may never fully capture within its permeating grasp: love. The multitude, a radically heterogeneous being in common, though, is not readymade—it is actively co-constructed. The multitude is not a question of “*being* the multitude” but rather “*making* the multitude” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, 169). It is “a being that is not fixed or static but constantly transformed, enriched, constituted by a process of making” as well as “an uninterrupted process of collective self-transformation” (173). And so, the multitude additionally names the way in which individuals connect to and empathize with one another, what Hardt and Negri, through Baruch Spinoza, understand as an act of love. A practice rife with *potentia* or potential in their formulation, love is “ineluctably common” and “refuses to be privatized or enclosed and remains constantly open to all” (181). In opposition to constricted bourgeois notions of romantic love, Hardt and Negri’s love stimulates and helps to actualize the “constituent power” from

within the “common content” of the multitude. Through their articulation of the multitude, the authors gesture toward a more “generous” concept of love that “means precisely that our expansive encounters and continuous collaborations bring us joy” (351). Love, though, is not merely surplus value, but rather a “surplus common” (Casarino 2008) in that it is always already in excess of Empire, moving toward shimmering horizons of possibility.

However, while Hardt and Negri powerfully articulate the saturation of immaterial labor and the multitude, this concept of postmodern capitalism misguidedly projects that Empire engulfs us all in a homogenous manner on a global scale. This becoming common of labor, moreover, makes invisible how Empire works through categories of identity, which are informed by particular spaces and histories. Absent is a coherent explanation as to why it is individuals move *within* and *against* particular social positions under Empire in addition to what compels social movements to aggregate and articulate with other movements. The multitude falsely assumes, further, a universal common ground that we all experience equally as well as an automatic desire to resist Empire that goes beyond identity—as opposed to working through identity to address and bridge various oppressions or the differential subjectivities compounded by and produced through Empire. And although Hardt and Negri distinguish between *common being* and *being in common* so as to emphasize how the multitude embodies the capacity for the latter, which is processual and excessive (versus static and containable), the authors unintentionally reinscribe the multitude within common being through understanding the multitude as strictly a class concept. In doing so, the authors foreclose in advance the *potentia* of the multitude, the capacity

of the multitude to harness what is actually *in common* through denigrating identity and difference. What is ostensibly *beyond measure* is therefore prematurely delimited.

Because the multitude presumes the seeming common conditions of labor, Italian feminist Marxist scholar Silvia Federici (2008) asserts, this concept fails to adequately account for the differential relations embedded within Empire. The multitude actually homogenizes the conditions of labor, she notes, because it does not incorporate how capitalist development ensures capitalist underdevelopment, thereby occluding the ways in which Empire is indeed uneven and experienced differentially according to identity. Far from indexing an inclusive social multiplicity within this new form of “communicative capitalism” (Dean 2009), the multitude selectively describes a technological capitalist elite who is parasitical upon material forms of labor:

What Hardt and Negri do not see is that the tremendous leap in technology required by the computerization of work and the integration of information into the work process has been paid at the cost of a tremendous increase of exploitation at the other end of the process. There is a continuum between the computer worker and the worker in the Congo who digs coltan with his hands trying to seek out a living after being expropriated, pauperized, by repeated rounds of structural adjustment and repeated theft of his community’s land and natural resources. (Federici, 2008)

As well, Federici argues that Hardt and Negri’s notion of affective labor, which she points out is mistakenly conflated with “immaterial” labor because it does not produce tangible products or objects, in actuality conceals the particularity and materiality of women’s labor, such as reproductive labor in addition to other specific exploitations within the contemporary global economy (see also Schultz, 2006). This inattention to various forms of difference and the way in which the multitude takes for granted the becoming common of labor, she argues, further deepens the fissures within the working

class rather than overcoming them. Due to this significant oversight, Federici concludes, the homogenizing “cauldron of the Multitude” proves to be an insufficient analytic and organizational concept to understand the differential subjectivities produced through Empire as well as its uneven terrain of development and unequal access to technology (see also Camfield 2007).

What Federici concomitantly calls attention to through her critique of the “cauldron of the Multitude,” or “melting pot” ideology are troublesome metaphors concerning the multitude that imagine a global village identically experiencing this “enormous sea” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 60) of Empire. And even though Hardt and Negri underscore that the common conditions of labor do not signal sameness and unity, but rather differences in degree, such as “specific types of labor, forms of life, and geographical location” that “do not prohibit communication and collaboration in a common political project” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 106), they remain reticent on the vital roles of identity or subjectivity, how and why it is precisely that individuals in various geographic locations are compelled to move *within* and *against* Empire.

The Multitude: A Singular Concept

Giving rise to Hardt and Negri and related Autonomist Marxism’s inadequate conceptualization of the multitude as a diffuse constellation is a narrow focus on class and the related reformulation of identity as singularity in order to assimilate identity into the multitude. Curiously, Hardt and Negri have claimed that their focus on class functions as a “corrective” to the “fact that no new ideas have emerged that are adequate to address the crisis [of the Left]” (219-20). And yet, there is indeed abundant scholarship emerging from various fields and disciplines, especially in ethnic,

American, feminist and queer studies, and feminist geography that collectively enunciates a more complex and porous account of identity politics than what is misappropriated and partially assembled by Hardt and Negri.

Hardt and Negri's hollow conceptualization of identity politics, moreover, is based in a presumed opposition between essentialism or postmodernism, constricting the potential for radically deploying identity in pursuit of realizing the constituent power of the multitude. Chicana literary and ethnic studies scholar Paula Moya (2000) explains:

Recently, discussions about identity have become predictable and unilluminating precisely because their terms have remained fixed within opposing "postmodernist" and "essentialist" positions (where the latter is constructed as the basis for a naïve identity politics). Neither of the two opposing positions has proved adequate to the task of explaining the social, political, and epistemic significance of identities. Essentialist conceptions, which tend to see the meanings generated by experience as "self-evident" and existing identities as "natural," are unable to account for some of the most salient features of actual identities. They have been unable to explain the internal heterogeneity of groups, the multiple and sometimes contradictory constitution of individuals, and the possibility of change—both cultural and at the level of individual personal identity. In turn, postmodernist conceptions—which tend to deny that identities either refer to or are causally influenced by the social world—have been unable to evaluate the legitimacy or illegitimacy of different identity claims. Because postmodernists are reluctant to admit that identities refer outward (with varying degrees of accuracy) to our shared world, they see all identities as arbitrary and as unconnected to social and economic structures. (10-11)

Scholars such as Paula Moya (2000, 2002) and others involved in The Future of Minority Studies Research Project (FMS), a transnational and interdisciplinary network of scholars, have instead argued to understand identity through a "postpositivist realism" to bring to the fore the multiple ways in which identity is fluid or flexible, yet "real," a meaningful and embodied experience of contemporary social life. Hardt and

Negri, on the other hand, subscribe to the myopic logic described by Moya in that they that understand categories of identity as inherently essentializing and divisive: their logic follows that whenever identity is asserted, it severs individuals and groups from one another, creating an impasse in the working toward being in common. Caricaturing identity as intrinsically segregating unfairly renders identity vulnerable to postmodern deconstructive critique that refuses unitary narratives. Hardt and Negri, however, do not dismiss completely the role of difference or the lived experience of various forms of identity and oppression through “different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations” (2004, xiv). So as to elide essentializing identity, but also to acknowledge diverse forms of oppression under Empire, they reformulate and homogenize difference as “singularities,” which represent different forms of labor within the multitude.

Unlike the working class, which is based on exclusions (106), the multitude is conceived as a social multiplicity, a plurality of freely expressed identities that operate *in common* with one another. “A concept with a long history in European thought, from Duns Scotus and Spinoza to Nietzsche and Deleuze” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, 338), a singularity indicates a non-essentialized and evolving complex composition, as each singularity is comprised of a multiplicity of singularities, and can only exist in relationship to other singularities. Because of these qualities, the singularity, unlike identity, is “revolutionary,” and as such, *moves* to dismantle the immovable logic of private property: “What identity is to property, singularity is to the common” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, 339). Whereas identity in this analogy is considered static, finite, delimited, and reactionary, the singularity is understood as dynamic, infinite, open, and

revolutionary. And while internally different, to reiterate, the multitude is capable of organizing and comporting itself as a singular body or “living flesh” toward the pursuit of a common political objective. It is a body without history for it needs only to look to its “own present productive power for the means necessary to lead toward its constitution as a political subject” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 396). What the authors ultimately reinscribe through their deployment of the singularity, a de-historicized and deterritorialized mode of being, though, is the very universal subject of orthodox Marxism that they decry (Beverley 2004, 12-13).

In their most recent book, *Commonwealth* (2009), Hardt and Negri further argue that identity-as-singularity is necessarily a stage through which revolutionary politics must temporarily inhabit and extend beyond toward the realization of the common. Engaging Spinoza’s “parallelism,” which “maintains that there exist infinite attributes through which substance is expressed in parallel” (343), Hardt and Negri argue infusing identity politics are “parallel revolutionary streams of thought and practice” that “aim toward the abolition of identity” (326). Hardt and Negri then proceed to draw a parallel between identity and “traditional communist discourse” concerning private property due to that “the rule of property is a means of creating identity and maintaining hierarchy” (326). They elaborate:

The initial positive task of identity politics in the various domains is thus to combat [color] blindness and make visible the brutally real but too often hidden mechanisms and regimes of social subordination, segmentation, and exclusion that operate along identity lines. Making visible the subordinations of identity as property implies, in a certain sense, reappropriating identity. This first task of identity politics might thus be placed in the position that *the expropriation of the expropriators* fills in traditional communist discourse. (329)

And so, like private property, identity must be reclaimed, and then systematically dismantled. “Too often, however” continue Hardt and Negri, “identity politics begins and ends with this first task, sometimes combining it with pallid declarations of pride and affirmation” (329). Identity politics is thus not only apprehended as a temporary stage *en route* to activating the constituent power of the multitude, but also elaborated as a reactionary practice enacted by naïve subjects.

Pursuant to this argument of identity as a way station in the path of revolutionary becoming, Hardt and Negri also misread and misappropriate the scholarship of various critical race and queer theorists. In the same chapter, the authors also misconstrue the work of queer of color performance studies scholar José Muñoz (1999) in service of proving how identity is simply a stage toward its self-abolition. Hardt and Negri’s one-sentence explanation of Muñoz’s concept “disidentification” as a mechanism that operates to “abolish (or at least destabilize and problematize)” gender identity distorts the meaning and complexity of this concept. Summarizing disidentification in this way imparts the false impression that its sole function is to dismantle and decode identity. In fact, disidentification “is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (31). In other words, disidentification simultaneously deconstructs identity while also productively reconstructing it, highlighting the transformative potential of identity located in its ambivalent oscillation or “shuffling back and forth” between stability and instability. Disidentification thus produces identities that “have failed to turn around to the ‘Hey, you there!’

interpellating call of heteronormativity” (33). In Muñoz’s original formulation, identity is reexamined and rearticulated—not thrown by the wayside, as Hardt and Negri would have it.

Also in the same chapter, Hardt and Negri misrepresent the creative and scholarly work of Gloria Anzaldúa in their use the following quote, which they include as an epigraph from Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* ([1987] 1999), to claim that identity functions as an immanent critique of itself: “As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out...(As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer in me in all races.)” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, 325). However, like the concept of disidentification for Muñoz, the term “queer” for Anzaldúa is not purely deconstructive, a rejection of identity politics. What directly follows this quote, and not included in the epigraph, suggests another understanding of “queer” in the capacity of formulating a more fluid, inclusive, yet particular, “culture” that extends beyond Eurocentric dualisms: “I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and the planet” (Anzaldúa, [1987] 1999, 103). Moreover, in a previous chapter, Anzaldúa explicitly states that her “Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resistance” (43), a specific gendered and racialized genealogy and imaginary rooted in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. While Anzaldúa conceptualizes identity as processual and dynamic, identity for her additionally names a particular lived experience inflected by race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation.

Finally, in addition to misrepresenting queer of color theorizations of identity, Hardt and Negri opportunistically mine postmodern feminist theory in buttressing their specious claim that identity solely operates as a reactive formation or social injury and therefore must be jettisoned in the journey toward the common. Calling upon feminist scholar Wendy Brown's controversial argument from the mid-1990s that identity functions as a "wounded attachment" or a "state of injury," which has since been widely critiqued by feminist and radical women of color feminist scholarship, Hardt and Negri assert that identity functions as an enunciation of a particular social grievance, limited and informed by that which it names and critiques. Formulated as such, identity politics is only useful insofar that it makes visible a social injury, and then to be promptly discarded in the actualization of the social and political capacities of the multitude. In tandem with the work of Brown, Hardt and Negri also deploy related theorizations of Judith Butler and Donna Haraway from the early 1990s to argue how identity may be wielded to the purpose of its own destabilization and ultimate undoing. However, Hardt and Negri omit that Brown, Butler, and Haraway have been widely critiqued by radical women of color for ignoring the way in which identity is not simply reactive, but also productive, creating meanings and relationships that extend beyond "social injury" (see, for example, Moya, 2000).

And so, while the multitude, a seemingly "expanded" concept of class, attempts to articulate new forms of social organization and exploitation under the conditions of Empire, it demotes the role of identity in social organizing through positing difference as an essentialized category of understanding that is temporary and reactive. Identity, though, significantly embodies and identifies specific power relationships that inform

(and are informed by) race, class, gender, or sexuality, among other categories, that require sustained and evolving engagement and self-reflection concerning the various power positions we occupy. Identity, in other words, fleshes out the multitude, articulates its modes of differentiation, and gives us insight into the material dynamics of social organization and organizing.

(Pre)Figuring Collective Action: Autonomy and Archipelagos

This misapprehension of identity politics in the work of Hardt and Negri and the resulting erasure of the complex desires that motivate individuals or “singularities” to organize into resistive diffuse constellations also reverberates throughout cognate Autonomous Marxist scholarship, which understands the multitude through the corresponding metaphor of archipelago. This metaphor, moreover, naturalizes political commitments and affiliations among these singularities through figuring resistance as horizontal networks in which struggle is connected by a common base. Obscuring the very tectonics of social movement, or what compels individuals to move and coalesce, this metaphor consequently prefigures and forecloses liberatory politics and praxis. While I do not have the space here to examine Autonomous Marxism’s rich and diverse genealogies or all extant scholarship, I purposely mine specific texts to illustrate how their utilization of natural metaphors reflect and reinforce exclusionary practices in both the development and dispersion of Italian *Autonomia* as well as present articulations of Autonomous Marxism.

In the introduction to *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics*, Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi (2007) suggest a fluid and archipelagic body in their conceptualization of *autonomia*’s historical framework: It “is a way of acting

collectively. It is made up of a number of organs and fluid organizations characterized by the refusal to separate economics from politics, and politics from existence.

Autonomy never unified” (9). Yet even though the editors endeavor to trace the confluences and diffusion of Italian autonomy, they give scant attention to the power relations and dynamics animating the (dis)articulations of these organs or islands, ignoring the rifts and differential tectonics in the development of Italian autonomy.

Lotringer and Marazzi assert: “There is nothing ‘Italian’ about class warfare in Italy; here is nothing ‘original’ in the Italian theoretical contributions. If any, their specificity resides in the fact that in Italy these theories have been able to bloom and develop thanks to the class struggles and their formidable continuity” (12). However, while the editors give passing mention to Detroit-based African American activist James Boggs’s *American Revolution* (1963) and underscore the need to “rediscover the history of American class warfare” (Lotringer and Marazzi, 2007, 13), they disregard in their seemingly inclusive and diffuse genealogy that in the late 1960s Potere Operaio (PO) established links with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, who sought to organize a revolutionary movement outside of the traditional rank and file structure, and that PO, who was “still in its factory-oriented stage,” failed to incorporate issues of race in their re-definition of class, relegating race to “a specific stratum of the workforce” (Wright 2002, 133). And thus, PO “failed to draw any positive lessons from the work of Black militants beyond the shopfloor, arguing that the level of class struggle was superior in Europe” (133).

In addition, the introduction to *Autonomia* fails to address how gender and sexual domination in the late 1960s and early 1970s were also accorded marginal status within

PO's class politics. The Italian feminist Marxist organization Lotta Femminista ("Feminist Struggle") formed by Silvia Federici underlined (and continues to underline) the way in which labor is gendered, such as through biological reproduction and "housework," as well as brought to light the nationalist, misogynist, and racist practices of the male workers' hegemony within PO. Although not labeling it as such, this group significantly produced early articulations of "intersectionality," or the way in which categories of identity or oppression overlap and mutually inform one another. The "point of view of struggle" (as quoted in Wright 2002, 134), Lotta Femminista proposed in 1972, is to identify rifts within social organization that sanction asymmetrical power relations within a movement. "Today this question," Lotta Femminista concludes, "is one of the fundamental questions that the class must confront" (134). Lotta Femminista elucidated that by ignoring the diverse and complex constitution of class, the male workers in PO risked alienating other segments of the working class and erasing other lived experiences of capitalism. However, these critiques concerning particularity waged by Lotta Femminista were misconstrued by PO as instruments of capitalism that created class fissures within PO. And parallel to PO's experience with the League, PO—at this critical juncture of reformulating a more flexible "class composition"—also failed to make tension or contradiction within the organization productive or "positive." *Autonomia*, in parallel, through its silences and omissions concerning issues of identity and difference, also fails to make tensions productive, thereby further embedding and naturalizing asymmetrical power relationships within present and future autonomist thought and organizing.

In the introduction to *The Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigations, Collective Theorization*, editors Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber (2007) also utilize the metaphor of the archipelago to naturalize particular relationships of power in their elaboration of “constituent power” as that which:

emerges most fully and readily when these institutional structures are shattered, peeling back bursts of time for collective reshaping of social life. It is from these moments that archipelagos of rupture are connected through subterranean tunnels and hidden histories, from which one can draw materials, concepts, and tools that can help guide us today, wherever we might find ourselves. (32)

While this book offers exciting perspectives on how to conduct new collaborative forms of research within and against Empire, it nonetheless refuses to systematically engage the actual dynamics, power relationships, or identity politics involved in the “collective reshaping of social life.” For example, although Shukaitis and Graeber note that autonomist theory is “so obviously a collective creation” (28), they strangely refuse to engage diverse theorizations of identity in their genealogies of autonomist theory, other than a passing mention of the contributions of the identity politics of the new social movements beginning in the late 1960s. Echoing Hardt and Negri’s privileging of select postmodern theorists, moreover, Shukaitis and Graeber purport that North American universities are “no longer producing any social theory the rest of the world is particularly interested in,” except for most recently “possibly Judith Butler” (14). And only pages later, the editors declare feminism a failed movement that was co-opted and sold back to women by the current form of capitalism (28), as if “the” movement were over and only informed by second wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, a largely white middle class movement focused on obtaining “equal rights.” The editors’ myopic archipelagic framework for conceptualizing Autonomous Marxism thus makes invisible

rich and complex theorizations of identity and difference emerging from contemporary U.S. feminist and critical theory as well as limits the possibilities for Autonomous Marxist research and theory. Shukaitis and Graeber also thus paint a picture (along with Hardt and Negri) of liberal multiculturalism in which global postmodern capitalism has created a fluid global playing field in which we are all equal contenders.

Chicana/o Cultural Studies scholar Chela Sandoval (2000) argues that this squashing of difference through horizontal metaphors enacts “a new kind of democratization of oppression” that in actuality erases, and thus exacerbates, categories of oppression:

Because they [categories of identity] are horizontally located, it appears as if such politicized identities-as-positions can equally access their own racial-, sexual-, national-, or gender-unique forms of social power. Such constituencies are then perceived as speaking “democratically” to and against each other in a lateral, horizontal—not pyramidal—exchange, although from *spatially* differing geographic, class, age, sex, race, or gender locations. (73-74).

In this way, horizontal metaphors of archipelagoes fail to render the depth, history, and significance of identity and the physical or lived experience of identity in social organizing. Similar to Sandoval’s critique of horizontal conceptions of power, Chicana historian Emma Pérez (1999) critiques Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of the BwO (body without organs)—“a fluid, mobile texture affected by a multiplicity of pleasures” (105)— by arguing that the BwO, in its privileging of surfaces and the sensorial, ignores the history, memory, and depth of desire, or the embodied nature of desire. She asserts that desire not only propels revolution, but also conceives “desire as revolution” (105), that desire is a historical and embodied process, and consequently asks, “How can historical erasure be revolutionary?” (107). The related metaphor of

archipelago, which effectively erases history and memory, consequently effaces identity and difference—that which propels social organizing.

Metaphors, of course, never just passively reflect a discrete reality, but are rather an active function of language that intimately informs how we perceive and interact with the lived world (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). They shape how we make sense of the world as well as how the world shapes our own subjectivities, how we relate and connect to others. Metaphors *matter* in that they harbor the potential to articulate common experiences—as well as address and “bridge” or reckon with difference and power relationships. And while the work of Hardt and Negri and cognate Autonomous Marxist literature fail to take seriously the implications of identity politics or difference, and the power relationships that undergird these categories of analysis, it is not my intent here to dismiss this body of work wholesale. In fact, I find innovative, promising, and energizing Autonomous Marxist concepts concerning experimentation, movement, and contingency in regard to social transformation. I suggest instead that Autonomous Marxism take cue from Chicana third space feminist shifting metaphor of “bridging.” It is my hope that placing these two bodies of social theory into conversation will yield more complexly composed and liberatory social movements.

Connecting Theory: *Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar, or Island*

Despite important differences, Chicana third space feminism, the work of Hardt and Negri and Autonomous Marxism traverse common conceptual domains in respect to their rich theorizations of radical movement and social transformation. Chicana third space feminism, though, foregrounds the importance of difference and how it animates the kinds of movements and political ties or affinities that individuals and communities

desire. The notion of third space practice, however, is not isolated to Chicana feminist theory, but rather overlaps with other theoretical trajectories ranging from postcolonial critique, radical (Third World) women of color theory, French poststructuralist theory, to radical geography (Soja 1996). And while Chicana third space feminism references mainly the collective work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Chela Sandoval, Emma Pérez, among others, it arose, in part, from the scholarly and creative collaborations among radical women of color and allies in the watershed anthologies *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), *Making Face, Making Soul Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color* (1990), and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002). It is mainly in her prefatory remarks and in the introductions to these texts, in addition to a related lecture, where Anzaldúa most explicitly carves out a theoretical and practical framework of “bridging” to foster dialog across categories of difference so as to promote alliance and coalitional building.

Bridging is an embodied methodology for reflectively connecting to others in addition to a form of self-preservation:

We preserve ourselves through metaphor; through metaphor we protect ourselves. The resistance to change in a person is in direct proportion to the number of dead metaphors that person carries. But we can also change ourselves through metaphor. And, most importantly, attempt to put, in words, the flow of some of our internal pictures, sounds, sensations, and feelings... (Anzaldúa [1990d] 2009, 122)

Bridging, a simultaneously metaphorical and material practice, enables individuals to connect to others so as to transform and shift the boundaries between self and other without effacing various histories, desires, and differences. Bridging takes work and

does not provide comfortable or safe spaces. It is a “theory in the flesh,” what Chicana lesbian feminist Cherríe Moraga, describes as “politic born out of necessity,” a theory that “uses flesh and blood experiences” to vivify political action (Moraga 1981b, 23). While Moraga and Anzaldúa speak to the lived experiences of radical women of color and the need to form alliances beyond their own cultural communities, however defined, I argue that the metaphor of bridging proves instructive to critical geography and radical social theory more generally in its articulation of the labor and brutal self-reflection required in effecting meaningful social thought and action. In the remainder of the section, I examine Anzaldúa’s framing of the aforementioned anthologies in respect to bridging as well as a related lecture to more fully flesh out this metaphor.

Bringing together various writings by radical women of color, the groundbreaking anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* ([1981] 1983) sought to forge links among these diverse individuals. What is remarkable about not only this anthology, but also the two that follow it, are the editors’ capacity to self-reflect and, simply put, to change their minds, to pressure their own respective comfortable and safe spaces. For example, three years later, in the forward to the second edition to *This Bridge Called My Back*, co-editor Cherríe Moraga reflects on the anthology’s aporias, noting that if she were to compile the anthology again in 1983, she would include perspectives by men of color, gay and heterosexual, as well as international views to render a more holistic picture concerning the specific oppressions that contour the lived experiences of Third World women of color. Yet, Moraga also recognizes that the importance of beginning with the perspective of only U.S. woman of color, on “relationships *between women*” (Moraga [1981a] 1983, foreword to *This Bridge*), that this focus functioned to build a platform

from which to begin and extend outwards. In the subsequent forward to this edition, Anzaldúa echoes Moraga in the need to be more inclusive as “we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we—white black straight queer female male—are connected and interdependent” (Anzaldúa [1981] 1983, foreword to *This Bridge*). Anzaldúa, though, underscores the risk of bridging, that is, how the “weight of this burden” may “break our backs” if we are not careful to share this labor of connecting to others and entering their lives. It is a labor that must be shared equally through recognizing and incorporating the differential histories that have shaped identity and social position. This is a labor that requires response and responsibility, one that must be enacted contingently and continually, collectively making bridges as *we* go.

The work of bridging is never automatic, given—it is actively co-constructed and maintained. This work is demanding physically, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and consequently we cannot always participate in this process of connection: we cannot always be “activists,” or in Anzaldúa’s formulation, someone who is “active” in alliance building, someone who is “engaged in a political quest” (Anzaldúa [1988] 2009c, 141). Sometimes we need a “break,” a temporary respite and cutting off, however partially, from this demanding process. In her lecture entitled “Bridge, Drawbridge, Sandbar, or Island” delivered during the Lesbian Plenary Session at the National Women’s Studies Association, Anzaldúa explores the challenges of building alliances among and beyond lesbians of color, and emphasizes that “there is no such thing as a common ground” and that “we all stand on different plots,” albeit “shifting” ones (149). And while she emphasizes the necessity of forging connections to others, she also underlines the need

to temporarily withdraw from this work, to reenergize. Common ground, in Anzaldúa's figuration, is thus never natural or immanent:

Earthquake country, these feminisms. Like a fracture in the Earth's crust splitting rock, like a splitting rock itself, the quakes shift different categories of women past each other so that we cease to match, and are forever disaligned—colored from white, Jewish from colored, lesbian from straight. If we indeed do not have one common ground, but only shifting plots, how can we work and live and love together? Then, too, let us not forget *la mierda* between us, a mountain of caca that keeps us from “seeing” each other, being with each other. (141)

While acknowledging the potential for working toward common grounds, Anzaldúa refuses to naturalize affinities among women, foregrounding instead differential histories or “*la mierda*” that keep women and individuals divided, “the shit” that we must collectively excavate and work through to so as to forge meaningful and viable modes of connection.

Casting off the ossified and dead metaphor of common ground, which occludes the actual labor of forging connections through difference and identity, Anzaldúa outlines four fluid methodologies or metaphors for engaging the lived world: bridge, drawbridge, sandbar, or island. The work of becoming a bridge entails being a mediator, being able to go beyond binaries, to help locate commonality through difference. The role of drawbridge gives a person two options: either being “down” and being a bridge or withdrawing for a while in order to “recharge” and “nourish ourselves before wading back into the frontlines” (147-48). As women of color who are often tokenized in the academy and in social movements, Anzaldúa observes, we find ourselves “*mediating all time*,” and sometimes being used or “walked on,” and so, once in a while, withdrawing, inhabiting the state of an “island,” a modality of recuperation and survival. Yet, as Anzaldúa underscores, implicitly undermining liberal

and neoliberal ideologies that privilege the discrete individual, we are never absolutely alone or “totally self-sufficient” (148), but rather we always rely on others to some extent to sustain and define us through various forms of interaction and cooperation.

And, as if performing the very metaphor or methodology she describes, Anzaldúa de- and re-constructs her metaphors as she goes, consciously blending them in a “continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm” (Anzaldúa, [1987] 1999, 102). She models the necessity to continually shift and shake up frozen metaphors, to change one’s mind. Toward the end of this overlapping catalogue of metaphors, the “infrastructures of bridge and drawbridge feel too man-made and steel-like” (Anzaldúa, [1988] 2009a, 148) for Anzaldúa, and in seeking a more natural metaphor of bridging, (while acknowledging that nature, too, is considered by some to be constructed or man-made) she conceives the “sandbar,” such as the one that links an island to a mainland, a useful and a more egalitarian mode of creating connections and social organizing. Although she “forget[s] what it is called” (148), Anzaldúa maps out an archipelagic formation social body, yet, unlike Autonomous Marxist theorizations, she focuses on *how* islands or “singularities” connect. She elaborates: the important thing is how we shift from bridge to drawbridge to sandbar to island”:

Being a sandbar means getting a breather from being a perpetual bridge without having to withdraw completely. The high and low tides of your life are factors which help you to decide whether or where you’re a sandbar today, tomorrow. It means that you’re functioning as a “bridge” (maybe partially underwater, invisible to others) and that you can somehow choose who you’ll allow to “see” you bridge, who you’ll allow to walk on your “bridge”-that is, who you’ll make connections with. A sandbar is more fluid and shifts locations, allowing for more mobility and more freedom. Of course there are sandbars called shoals, where boats run amuck. Each option comes with its own dangers. (148)

Even though the sandbar gives lesbians of color more freedom concerning with whom they connect, no structure is “innocent” or wholly naturalized in Anzaldúa’s use of this archipelagic metaphor: each comes with its respective “dangers” or setbacks no matter how mobile or fluid or changing. But as Anzaldúa asserts in *Making Face, Making Soul* (1990), “our strength lies in shifting perspectives” in “adaptability,” as there is not “one movement, but many” (xxvii).

In the anthology *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, Anzaldúa (2002), co-editor and contributor, most explicitly fleshes out her conceptualization of building bridges, the complex and fluid process of connecting to others in pursuit of social transformation. Unlike *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (1981), this anthology, twenty-one years later, purposely includes contributions by non-women of color, such as those by men and white women, building where the previous anthology left off, expanding the dialog concerning the relationship between categories of difference and the feminist movement. She explains this complex act of bridging, or building a more inclusive social movement, in her essay, “Now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner work, public acts” (also included in this anthology): “You remove the old bridge from your back, and though afraid, allow diverse groups to collectively rebuild it, to buttress it with new steel plates, girders, cable bracing, and trusses” (Anzaldúa 2002a, 574). Thus, fluidity here for Anzaldúa, signals the complexities of lived experience in addition to the concrete, yet processual, nature of connecting to others or bridging our various differences. Anzaldúa explains that this anthology “intends to change notions of

identity, viewing it as part of a more complex system covering a larger terrain, and demonstrating that the politics of exclusion based on traditional categories diminishes our humanness” (Anzaldúa 2002b, 2). While still accounting for important differences and diverse relationships to histories of oppression, this anthology strives to build bridges among community, to unearth “commonality within the context of difference” (2). It reveals the heterogeneous and relational aspects of categories of identity, including that of whiteness or woman of color. Locating and linking commonality, she reiterates, is not a straightforward or comfortable process.

Anzaldúa embarks on this text with a description of her wandering along the bluffs at sunset in Santa Cruz “gazing at the shifting sea, a hammered sheet of silver” (1). The sea is a metaphor for a shifting liminal space in which she proceeds to bridge the previous anthology with this one. The sea, in parallel to the anthologies themselves, represents a shining horizon of possibility, bridging or linking the shore to the infinite skies. Anzaldúa further elaborates:

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 medio*. Transformations that occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. *Nepantla es tierra desconocida*, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling... Though this state links us to other ideas, people, and worlds, we feel threatened by these new connections and the change they engender. I think of how feminist ideas and movements are attacked, called unnatural by the ruling powers, when in fact they are ideas whose time has come, ideas as relentless as the waves carving and later eroding stone arches. Change is inevitable; no bridge lasts forever. (1)

Anzaldúa's bridge names an "uncomfortable" process of working toward the common. While all bridges are impermanent and contingent, we must continue to build bridges in and across uncertain and dangerous seas in pursuit of common social being. Bridging may be thus understood as radical act, an insurgency, *haciendo caras*, making waves, within the great and differential seas of Empire. Bridging difference and effecting alliances, Anzaldúa warns, requires understanding one's "home" as a bridge, in addition to knowing when "to close ranks to those outside our home...and when to keep the gates open" (3). It is an uncomfortable, uncertain, and experimental physical and mental space that exceeds blueprints. Bridges, as such, do not guarantee safe passage, and at times require profound re-visionings of that ontological ground—or waters—we hold sacred and still.

Theory Uprising

Utilizing Autonomous Marxist theory and practice within U.S. critical geography and beyond requires nothing less than an act of bridging between various bodies and social locations of social theory. Bridging Chicana third space feminism, such as the scholarship of Anzaldúa, with the work of Hardt and Negri as well as specific Autonomous Marxist scholarship unearths previously unexamined exclusions and silences within the latter that necessitate focused engagement, response, and responsibility. Bridging, moreover, demands not only an understanding of how socio-historical conditions of different movements erupt, but also how differential movements themselves articulate: that is, an earnest attempt to identify and reckon with all the various frictions and complexities of power embodied in identity. Refusing to acknowledge the multiple ways in which social organization is a profoundly embodied

social act only functions to impoverish our conceptualizations of social movements, masking how and why it is we move as well as who comprises the *we*. Finally, what I have attempted here in connecting seemingly antithetical domains of theory is what Chela Sandoval (2000) calls the acceleration of theory, that is, “theory uprising,” for bridging continually transforms the *we* so that we can more equitably move together: *si se puede, que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vámonos/ Now let us shift* (2002, 576).

Toward a Hauntology of the Oppressed:**Reflections on Engaged Pedagogy and Multiethnic Literatures**

“Life without memory is no life at all. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our actions.”—bell hooks, *homegrown: engaged cultural criticism*

“And this being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.” —Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

In this dissertation I have traced through various forms of Chicana/o cultural production the social figure of the specter and alienated more generally, and the ways in which these “ghostly matters” blur putative binaries of past and present, true and false, subject and object, the material and immaterial, as well as makes tangible to some extent what remains invisible, refusing full transparency and consumption. This cultural production theorizes or conceptualizes the ways in which colonialism and neocolonialism function as an assemblage or a complex of time, space, memory, bodies, and movement, in addition to formulating the multiple and unseen ways in which the past actively impinges on the present, etching out—or foreclosing in advance—other possible futures. Challenging the dominant analytical paradigm of the dialectic in Chicana/o and Latina/o studies for extracting meaning through the interaction between texts and their social contexts, this cultural production and its specterly figures enunciates a more contingent, open, and holistic mode of analysis that works within and in excess of constricting binaries. This cultural production, though, does serve up readymade “solutions” to discrete and identifiable “social problems,” but rather gestures toward complex and contingent relations, fomenting transformative recognition, a

ruptural time and space where decolonial imaginaries begin to assume form, where the germinal and insurgent reside.

I elected specifically to mainly focus on the specterly geography of San Antonio, Texas, which acts as a corridor to South Texas, the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. Scant academic attention has been paid to this “Mission City,” as it is often overshadowed by attention given to the social geography of Los Angeles, a city that shares much in common with San Antonio in terms of race, class, gender, and (neo)colonialism. Both cities share a Spanish “fantasy heritage” that privileges a white or European genealogy at the expense of American Indian or Mexican Indigenous histories, which profoundly colors the racialized cityscapes of these two cities and has historically fueled booming tourist economies. While such connections are indeed significant in identifying a larger national and transnational web of colonialism and its traces in the present, it is also important to unearth how colonialism has manifested differentially over time and space in both urban and rural geographies—I understand this dissertation project as an outgrowth of this larger project. More specifically, there is very little scholarship that tracks the peculiarity of San Antonio’s colonial legacy as it contains the largest constellation of missions in the U.S. or the way in which this particular colonial legacy informs Chicana/o cultural production from San Antonio and proximal geographic regions. Through engaging San Antonio’s social geography and cultural production through what anthropologist José Limón (2008) has termed a “critical regionalism,” I pay particular attention to the specificity of time and place in relationship to cultural production and identity in order to paint a more nuanced, yet

expansive, picture of the effects of colonialism, as well as to trouble what counts as “effect” or empirical evidence of something having happened.

In the first chapter I began by examining the urban legend or folklore of San Antonio’s Ghost Tracks as well as the actual physical and social space in which this narrative unfolds and is enacted in order to highlight ghostliness and *complexity* of San Antonio’s particular colonial legacy: that is, the way in which social memory is multiply composed of various bodies, desires, temporalities, and spaces. It is not enough to understand this urban legend in binary terms of true and false, but rather as something excessive and subjective that extends beyond normative Enlightenment rationalities. I do not seek here a discrete narrative origin and nor do I ask *could it be true?* I instead trace various complex confluences that compel crossing this fraught site. I unearth the way in which competing elements of primitive and modern haunt this site, opening up a liminal or Borderlands third space, what Foucault calls a “heterotopia,” in which other postcolonial presents and futures gestate and begin to take shape. Minor histories burst at the seemingly smooth seams of dominant Texas history, such as the invisible racialized labor exploited in the building of the Southern Pacific Railroad as well as the San Antonio missions, a history of labor that goes invisible, yet still actively impinges upon and pressures the present. And while the subaltern speak in a discourse unintelligible to a larger dominant colonial social body, poor and working class Mexicana/os and Mexican Americans illicitly cross a dangerous threshold linking the past, present, and future, like “blood memory” surging through and beyond forgotten wounds, *una herida abierta* (Anzaldúa 1997).

In the next second chapter, I focus on another third space—the imaginative (outer) space of Project MASA (MeChicana/o Alliance of Space Artists), diverse visions wherein decolonial imaginaries begin to emerge and take shape. This is a visual site of the inchoate or not yet fully formed, a site of potential and possibility that demands interaction with and a shift in perception on the part of the viewer. Like the urban legend of the Ghost Tracks, these diverse collective visions require that the spectator go beyond facile binaries and embrace a more contingent and holistic perspective so as to understand how various struggles, including those of Chicana/os and other marginalized populations, are interconnected under U.S. empire and histories of imperialism, or that which is too often invisibilized by ongoing trajectories of Manifest Destiny. The collective work of Project MASA, a contingent and complex composition of diverse artists, bring to the fore the way in which American Indian and Mexican Indigenous cosmologies and epistemologies contour the present and future, thereby challenging putative opposed categories of primitive and advanced or past and present. Yet, like the performance of the Ghost Tracks, these visual artists do not serve up readymade solutions, but foreground the protean and subjective nature of social critique and organization. I argue that while these visions take place in outer (third) space, these visual critique are very much grounded in lived experience as filtered through lenses of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Yet, in parallel to the urban legend of the Ghost Tracks, this visual art refuses stasis and closure, the hallmarks of the coloniality of knowledge production through creating collective and eclectic visions of the futures as well as various subjectivities in process.

In the third chapter I further examine how the ghostly is paradoxically grounded in categories of lived experience or subjectivity within the novel *Why Did You Leave Me?* by Bárbara Renaud González. More specifically, I analyze how González foregrounds through her main character Amada, who attempts to find love, the gendered aspects of a colonial legacy that haunts the social or cultural geography of Texas after WWII, how it is that Mexicanas and Mexican American women are constricted and confine in certain ways that prevent them from literally and figuratively *moving on*. González excavates the gendered components of Texas's colonial legacies through the figure of La Llorona, the "Wailing Woman," by foregrounding how this legend, which is based in a misogynist (trans)nationalist cultural imaginary, confines and disciplines Amada, or, to restate, keeps her in her proverbial place. Thus, this colonial legacy attempts to foreclose other kinds of presents and futures that Amada desires, as well as the love for which she longs, an embodied and fluid mode of connection that vitally interlinks her to the past, her lovers, her children, her *comadres*. Understanding this novel as a re-writing of the legend of La Llorona also enables another interpretation of the novel's conclusion that elides traditional Western conceptions of tragedy in which the tragic hero perishes in a catastrophe. In tandem with the urban legend of the Ghost Tracks and the diverse third (outer) spaces rendered by Project MASA, the conclusion of the novel leaves us in *en medias res*, in the middle of a river, between two nation-states, life and death, past and present, a dream state and the lived world, folklore and its feminist transformation. It is a liminal space that gestures toward *something blue*, something just beyond the horizon, almost within reach. Thus, there is ambiguity and uncertainty concerning Amada's possible demise as well as its meaning. However, one

thing is certain: it is in this third space that process is privileged over stasis and a more, uncertainty over certainty, and a more holistic perspective is adopted, refusing the split of Cartesian binaries.

In the penultimate chapter, I place into conversation Chicana third space feminism with the work of Hardt and Negri and Autonomous Marxism in order to foreground the socially spectral status of Chicana feminism and critical race theory more generally within radical social theory so as to valorize the utilization of a critical and self-reflective identity politics in social organization within and against contemporary global capitalism. I specifically engage Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of bridging, which emphasizes that there are no pat solutions in social organizing, that it is always an act in construction. The work of bridging, moreover, requires us to understand not only our own (sometimes invisible) positions of power in relation to others, but also how these social positions are based in shifting grounds. Radically democratic social organization and knowledge production does not allow us to be comfortable, but perpetually seeking to bridge and connect in productive and empathetic ways with others. This process, however, is never fully transparent, easily legible, but requires an understanding how the body, history, and memory—that which is inherently spectral—shape our heterogeneous subjectivities and attendant desires, rather than assuming natural affinities under the ostensible becoming common of labor within postmodern global capitalism or "Empire." While all chapters perform an excavation of the ghostly in Chicana/o cultural production in San Antonio and Texas at large so as to understand the spectral nature of the history, memory, and knowledge production, this

final chapter connects and makes relevant the concept of the specter or socially spectral to social organization as well as brings to the fore the materiality of the ghostly, structures of desire, feeling, and even love itself.

This dissertation argues that the ghostly, moreover, makes evident and palpable the complex ways in which the material world is always already haunted by the immaterial, and provides a mode of analysis that proves instructive beyond Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural production. Studying the ghostly, a constituent element of modern social life and lived experience, and how “we” are haunted and shaped differentially, should not be confined to disciplinary domains or the gaze of theory, but also must be put to practice in order to enrich pedagogy and pave the way for more liberatory forms of knowledge production. To that end, I briefly explore in this codex the implications of ghostly matters in relationship to Multiethnic Literature and pedagogy as well as to knowledge production more generally, specifically what I term a “hauntology of the oppressed.”

Reading Beyond the Color Line: Refusing Liberal Multiculturalism

I turn now to my own experience teaching the upper division English course “Studies in Multiethnic Literature,” to critically reflect upon how teaching through the analytical lens of ghostly matters or “cultural haunting” has helped me to create a more engaged and transformative pedagogy. After four years of attending graduate school and teaching at the University of Minnesota, I returned to San Antonio, Texas, a place I call home, to complete my doctoral dissertation. And one year later, I began teaching upper division English courses at Texas A&M University (TAMUSA) on the South Side of San Antonio. TAMUSA, a relatively new institution, only began admitting

students in 2008, holding courses in satellite campuses until the completion of the main campus's construction in the fall of 2012. As explained to me during my job interview, TAMUSA serves an underprivileged demographic, its "average" student being Mexican American, over thirty, working class, female, and a mother. In other words, this university's population is comprised of the so-called "non-traditional" student. However, there are also more "traditional students" who are in their late teens or early twenties and white, although usually rural working class, and often have to travel over an hour or more from their parents' farms located south of San Antonio. Because of TAMUSA's partnership with the local community college district to "streamline" credits from lower to upper division, most of my students transfer from this community college system. As well, many of my students received their primary and secondary educations from the Southside, a historically poor, working class, and Mexican American community. While my students are bright, motivated, and rich in complex "real world" experiences, including military service as San Antonio is home to four military bases, their writing and critical thinking skills lag behind, and they are often unprepared to meet the academic demands of an upper division English course. And more often than not they have not been exposed to Multiethnic Literature.

Unlike my experience teaching Chicana/o Literature at the University of Minnesota where many of students were white, middle class, and suburban, I anticipated and hoped, albeit perhaps naively, that the reading list would speak to or connect with my students' lived experiences, drawing them affectively into the texts and course discussions. Rather than teaching through a "pedagogy of disorientation" (Jay 1995), I sought to teach through a methodology of orientation, which I have come

to realize can be equally discombobulating. With this multiethnic literary pedagogy in mind, I constructed the following course description:

Through excavating various literary texts—as well as film and art—this course digs up and unsettles the past in order to explore how ethnic identity and experience in the U.S. is animated by unseen, but profoundly felt, forces, or what sociologist Avery Gordon has termed “ghostly matters.” Engaging the rich work of Multiethnic Literature, including authors such as Toni Morrison, Cristina García, Louis Erdrich, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Bárbara Renaud González, we will examine how the past actively shapes or “haunts” the present. We will also investigate the interrelationships among history, memory, space, and ethnic identity.

Using the conceptual framework of the ghostly will help us to articulate how these authors grapple with that which is not immediately accessible and knowable, but still sensed and “felt.” For example, how does Toni Morrison’s ghostly character “Beloved” embody a collective legacy of slavery? Or, how do ghosts and the ghostly in this collective body of assigned texts represent not merely what is absent, but also what potentially *could be*? In other words, how do ghosts or the ghostly demand reckoning and recognition? These are a few of the questions we will pursue in the course. In order to avoid a topical and isolated approach to the study of Multiethnic Literature, this course utilizes a comparative ethnic studies approach through using the ghostly as a central thematic framework. Doing so helps us to understand the paradoxically fluid and concrete aspects of ethnic identity as well as the overlapping and unique lived experiences of ethnic identity.

In order to challenge and extend beyond the liberal multiculturalist perspective or what Stuart Hall (1992) has called the “new ethnicities” through which ethnicity is homogenized, packaged for sale, and easily consumed within globalized markets, thereby evacuating the analytic category of ethnicity of any transformational potential, I elected to teach this course thematically through the lens of the specterly so as to encourage students to explore how racial and cultural formations have a history, although, at times, not entirely obvious or transparent. Calling upon the work of Avery Gordon (1997) and her exploration of “ghostly matters” through literary analysis, as well as the scholarship of Kathleen Brogan (1998), whose book *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts*

and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature examines how ghosts in the work by U.S. women of color, such as Toni Morrison, Cristina García, Louis Erdrich, and Maxine Hong Kingston, function as a vehicle of both cultural loss and reconstruction, to frame the course, I endeavored to thematically link texts through the ghostly in order to uncover not only racialized and gendered histories of difference but also of commonalities. Understanding how racial formation in the U.S. is informed by complex histories that still “color” the present—and future—seemed to me particularly important in our current socio-political and economic milieu not only because of the intensified commodification of difference on a global scale but also because of the recent emergence of a “post-racial” discourse following Barack Obama’s presidential inauguration.

Conversely, though, the ghostly also importantly pertains to subjective issues of remembering and forgetting, and, concomitantly, refuses history or remembering as discreet and linear processes. The ghostly, as Gordon explains, grants “complex personhood,” that “life is complicated” and the ways we remember are messy and sometimes contradictory. In addition, how and what we remember acutely speaks to the lived experience of present social conditions or “a structure of feeling” that defines “the subjective; it gives notice to the texture and skin go the *this, here, now, alive, active* contemporaneity of our lives” (199). Remembering, therefore, is never “innocent”: it has much to say about our present social positions our own “complex personhoods,” the ways in which we are blinded by our own prejudices, memory, and social worlds. Using the ghostly to understand the specters of Multiethnic Literature, simply put, does not let students off the proverbial hook: it invariably compels them to critically examine

their own social positions in relationship to larger, collective past, *to place their stories next to ours* (Morrison 1987) . It is this slippery and supple nature of the ghost, though, that allows for collective re-imagining of not only the past and present—but also the future.

Despite utilizing the lens of the ghostly, and framing conversations about racial formation with a critical history of race in the U.S., not all of my students have been receptive to these multiethnic texts, however, indexing the deep-seated conservatism of South Texas as well as the way in which students of color consume and internalize racist ideologies—or, conversely, how I succumbed to the “romance of community” or an ideal of “human relatedness” (Joseph 2002). Two male students in the fall of 2010 outright declared that racism and racial conflict no longer exists and that we all “basically get along, ” although one of them, who is Mexican American, later approached me after class about half-way through the semester and, much to my surprise (particularly because I thought I had been subtle about my own politics) let me know that he had given the racial issues more thought, particularly in relationship to his own family history in San Antonio, and let me know that he thought I was “right” about the palpable effects of racism in the present. The other student, who was white and has a military background, made racist stereotypical remarks about American Indians in regard to reservations and what comes “naturally” to their ethnicity, which ironically underscored the very thematic of the course: the way in which American Indian culture has been assimilated and erased in San Antonio due to our colonial legacy. In addition, two white young women found the earthly repurposing of institutionalized religion in various novels offensive, and refused to acknowledge how this subversive act

functioned as an embodied act of healing in the face of legacies of slavery or colonialism. These student responses to assigned texts, in sum, indicate how there are no easy alliances or affinities, regardless of social positions we occupy, and that “personhood” and subjectivity are always already complex. And while these moments created various impasses and frustrations (on both our parts), these moments ultimately proved instructive, teaching me that engaged pedagogy is one of experimentation, and occasionally a trial by fire: it is indeed a pedagogy without guarantees.

By and large, though, teaching Multiethnic Literature through the lens of the ghostly has been pedagogically transformative, and has functioned to intimately connect students to texts, creating vital bridges between their lived experiences to the world of others. In the next section, I briefly examine the transformative effects and potential of this engaged pedagogy through the formal reflections of one of my students as well as suggest how the ghostly as a pedagogy also inaugurates a more liberatory and open mode of knowledge production.

Dangerous Crossings: Hauntology of the Oppressed

For the 2011 Third Annual Teaching and Learning Conference at TAMUSA, select students from my Studies in Multiethnic Literature (both fall 2010 and spring 2011), composed a panel presentation entitled “Multiethnic Literature and Qualitative Research in the University Setting” in which they grappled with the ways that particular texts explored minor histories through the vehicle of the ghostly. While all of my students powerfully demonstrated how texts we read in my course helped them to reckon with their own forms of “cultural haunting,” my student Mayra explicitly teased out the connections she formed between these texts and her own lived experience as a

mixed-race Puerto Rican and Mexican American Muslim woman in her essay

“Multiethnic Literature: The Challenge of Self-Discovery.” In her introduction she

reflects:

In deciding to return back to school after twenty years in order to finish my bachelor’s in English, I knew that I would be presented with academic as well as technological challenges. Yet, I never imagined that I would be faced with perhaps an even bigger challenge: the challenge of self-discovery. It was through Cathryn Merla-Watson’s Multiethnic Literature course, The “Ghostly Matters” of History, Memory, and Ethnic Identity that enabled me to commence this intimate journey. I was intrigued with the topic of ghost stories yet bewildered with the course description which read: “Through excavating various literary texts—as well as film and art—this course digs up and unsettles the past in order to explore how ethnic identity and experience in the U.S. is animated by unseen, but profoundly felt, forces...” In all honesty, my first reaction was, “You gotta be kidding!” I had just finally found the courage to go back to school after two decades of trying to forget the obstacles I have faced as mixed-race individual, and now faced the challenge of “digging it all up” in a Multiethnic Literature course...With a clearer understanding of cultural haunting and ghostly matters, I was determined to prove myself that I could succeed in college. I committed to begin the “excavation” process with Tony Morrison’s *Beloved*, Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Woman Warrior*, and Barbara González’s, *Golondrina, why did you leave me?* Essentially, learning about different cultural histories through fiction helped me develop my critical thinking and literary skills as well as bring some depth to my understanding of my own cultural past.

Mayra highlights here the discomfort and disease of reckoning with ghostly matters and attendant processes of excavation. The ghostly figures haunting these assigned texts, as she notes, confuse boundaries between subject and object. As such, the memories and imaginative histories of these authors began to dovetail with hers. She describes this narrative convergence and collective remembering in her analysis of Hong’s *Warrior Woman* (1975):

In the episode, “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” Kingston reveals her years of conforming to a cultural tradition that held that girls are not to speak their minds. She recalls: “My silence was thickest—total—during the three years that I covered my school paintings with black paint. I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns, and when I drew on the blackboard, I put a layer of chalk on top” (Kingston 165). As I read this passage, my mind drifted back in time to Newark New Jersey in the year 1970 when I entered the public school for the first time as a Spanish-speaking student. I thought I had forgotten the struggles and cultural barriers that delayed my academic growth. I recalled an incident when a second grade teacher requested the entire class to draw a mug. Confused and not sure of what to draw, I drew two African men stealing a purse of an elderly lady. What I drew was reflective of a traumatic experience of when my mother had been assaulted by two African Americans on her way to cash her first paycheck. I was just six years old, but I remember the big fat red “F” my teacher angrily wrote on my paper with an attached note to my parents. Even at the point of getting home, I didn’t understand what I had done wrong. I felt the teacher did not think I did a good job drawing. As I showed the picture to my family, my mother runs and cries in her room and the rest of my brothers and sister are on the floor dying with laughter! Yet, I still remained clueless as to what I did wrong. It was until my eldest brother takes me to the kitchen and grabs a mug to show me. I argued and claimed, “*No, eso es una copa* [No, this is a cup]”. He patiently explains, “No, this is a mug. What you drew is a “mugging!” Reflecting back to that incident, I recall that my teacher was African American and I wonder if she felt insulted with the image I drew. As a result of that experience, like Kingston’s silencing, I passively stayed quiet for years trying to simultaneously survive the Spanish World and the English World. I remained in a state of limbo falling years behind because I could not read until I reached the third grade. What I realized by reading Kingston’s novel was that my family shared some similarities in making sense of the madness of living as an immigrant in America. Kingston wrote as a form of healing, using the genre of fantasy, and my family utilized the art of storytelling to reenact the incidents with a twist of humor instead of fantasy, making the stories unbelievable to some. But for us, the stories were the truth of that life lived...

Haunting Mayra’s text is that which is not immediately visible, yet always palpable, lurking just below the surface of text, of black paint and a child’s seemingly innocent drawing. In revisiting this incident, through the prompting of Hong’s memories, Mayra unearths and lays bare these unseen layers of racial and ethnic identification, the overlapping and relational armature of trauma, shared, yet differential

histories of racism and linguistic barriers. As Mayra notes, moreover, remembering this complex history does not take place within terrains of true and false, fact and fiction, but something else all together, something collective that indexes “that life lived” and *living*. Mayra’s personal narrative additionally names the danger inherent in crossing the dead with the living, in bringing the so-called dead back to life, as this process can be profoundly uncomfortable and painful, but hopefully revelatory and healing. As teachers, though, as Mayra’s reflections indicate, we must use care and caution concerning what we ask of our students, what kinds of crossings we ask students to traverse.

“Engaged pedagogy,” borrowing from bell hooks (1994), I argue, always already incorporates ghostly matters and prophecies dangerous crossings, as well as the dissolution of teacher and student, of subject and object, denatures either-or logic. Engaged pedagogy exhorts teachers and students alike to see and act beyond themselves, to become empathetic and critically connected to the world around them. This engagement, to reiterate, involves self-reflection, the consideration of how we are hailed by and/or become complicit in various complex and unexpected ways in the spaces and histories we occupy. In her poem “To live in the Borderlands means you,” Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) explores this fraught relation of subjectivity and geography by poetically gesturing toward how various legacies of racism and colonialism haunt the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, enveloping everyone in various and complex ways within its geography of remembering and forgetting:

In the Borderlands
you are a battleground
where enemies are kin to each other;

you are at home, a stranger,
 the border disputes have been settled
 the volley of shots have shattered the truce
 you are wounded, lost in action
 dead, fighting back (lines 28-35; 216)

While Anzaldúa references her own specific social positionality within the Borderlands as a self-identified Chicana lesbian, she also underscores how the lived experience of this “cramped” space implicates particular bodies, and how those dismembered bodies of history remember, although not always in readily legible ways. Chicana/o or Mexican American bodies, fleshed histories that have not been traditionally accounted for thus conversely haunt the Borderlands. And, although the “you” here interpellates Chicana/os, I would also contend that the “you” hails everyone, unearthing how we are all complicit and mapped onto this “battleground” in unseen, yet tangible ways. The Borderlands is a haunted and haunting space that blurs social categories of analysis, subject and object, and complicity. It is disorienting: it is an uncomfortable space that resists and elides easy binaries.

While at the risk of deracinating and erasing the socio-historically specific aspects of Anzaldúa’s Borderlands, this discombobulating geography is a particularly apt spatial metaphor for the classroom when reckoning with social difference. Teaching the ghostly matters of Chicana/o and Multiethnic literature similarly makes for an uncomfortable classroom: it is not a “safe space,” for *anything dead coming back to life hurts* (Morrison 1987, 35). Yet, I believe teaching ghostly matters through literature, or other cultural production, is profoundly generative and empowering by begging the question of how we are intimately related and connected to particular forms of

literature, textual geographies of remembering and forgetting. Ghostly matters demands of us to consider the places we occupy in relationship to others.

Studying the specterly also *embodies* theory, gives it shape, substance, and history, effectively connecting theory to the lived world. The relationship between radical women of color academics and theory has historically been a tense one in that much of literary and critical theory has been formulated through a Eurocentric and white male perspective, often ignoring the body, which has been relegated to the realm of the irrational and anti-intellectual. Literary and critical theory, consequently, has often omitted the ways in which people of color have theorized or engaged the world around them through their particular social positions, which have been many times informed by a body politic or the lived experience of being a person of color. In her pivotal essay “The Race for Theory,” Barbara Christian (1988) underscores how literary theory has not only de-centered the literary text so as to privilege theory over the text, but also how theory is wielded to designate the value of literature. Yet, Christian notes that theory is a vital tool to deconstruct various ideologies and systems of value and structures of power. Since the late 1980s and the publication of Christian’s article, however, there has been a proliferation of scholarship emerging from multiple disciplines or interdisciplinary fields, including ethnic studies, that have collectively theorized and valorized the body as site of knowledge production.

It is within this collective corpus that I situate the study of “ghostly matters” or the social figure of the ghost, which, according to Gordon, collapses putative boundaries between subject and object and animates the lived world through “structures of feeling,” borrowing from Raymond Williams (1977). And yet, just as these affective

structures are constructed through subjective forces of history so too are the experiences of these structures felt differentially. Thus, tracing the specterly in literature, which inherently includes and interpellates the reader or “subject,” evokes diverse responses and engagements. Studying ghostly matters may provide us with a more enriched understanding of reader-response theory: as Derrida (1994) reminds us, not only insists upon a response but also responsibility: that is, to go beyond liberal and solipsistic conceptions of tolerance and to reflect in a more critical way that fosters connections beyond just the reader and the text, but to larger collective webs of meaning, matter, and history. Forging these connections, to reiterate, is rarely easy or comfortable, for it is both orienting and discombobulating.

In closing, I propose that studying the specterly not only potentially links Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural production to the creative work of other marginalized groups in the U.S., but also enacts, more generally and to which this dissertation attests, what I playfully term a “hauntology of the oppressed,” a pedagogy and methodology—that is, a mode of knowledge production—inspired by a chorus of theorists and practitioners: Augusto Boal, Paulo Freire, Chela Sandoval, and Jacques Derrida. It is a “strange alloy” (Derrida 1994, 245) that is at once deconstructive and reconstructive, individual and collective, as well as demands us “to product new events, new effective forms of action, practice, and organization...” (245). It thus demands that we reckon with our ghosts, that we commence from where we are, all the while questioning our proper places or ontological moorings, our *present-being (on)* (214). It is a “theory uprising” (Sandoval 2000, 2) that elides and surges beyond binaries, contingently conjoining various bodies of knowledge, while working through uncomfortable and

often painful differences, in order to redistribute horizons of the thinkable and doable.

As such, a hauntology of the oppressed continually complicates “oppressed” and “oppressor,” paving the way for more socially responsive and responsible movements within and beyond the classroom. Connecting *what is* with what *could be*, a hauntology of the oppressed is a capacious and sensuous act: it is a more generous concept of love.

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² See Stoler, Ann Laura. 2006. *Haunted by Empire: geographies of intimacy in North American history*. Durham: Duke University Press.