Chicana Environmentalisms:
Dетerritorialization as a Practice of Decolonization

Dissertation

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Abstract

This dissertation considers the state of environmentalism in feminist studies in the American academy. I propose that ecofeminism, the branch of feminist philosophy that concerns itself with environmentalism, is limited by disciplinary divides and geographical exclusions that appear in its historiography—these limit what counts as ecofeminism as well as what it could be. “Ecofeminism” describes many things, including how the domination of women may be linked to the domination of nature and an examination of women’s environmental activism. While ecofeminist theories criticize the historically negative image of women and nature that exists in patriarchal cultures that measure nature by its market value, ecofeminism also posits a positive identification of women with nature. Some point to women’s greater contact with the environment through farming and conservation, reproduction and care work, or a spiritual connection with “mother nature” to describe woman-nature identifications and argue that women are well-positioned to protect nature. Though ecofeminist theory is useful for understanding the nature of oppression and strategies for resistance, it has also been marginalized in feminist studies due to criticisms of gender essentialism. It has also been marginalized because of its exclusions, including what appears to be a white, middle-class bias. My dissertation revisits these criticisms by reframing ecofeminism through the lens of Chicana studies. In bringing these two fields together, I aim to revise and revitalize
environmentalist feminist theory to make it more inclusive and relevant to academics and activists.

Revision is a multi-part process. First, I map ecofeminism in Western feminist studies through a genealogy that follows the master narratives that govern the field as well as their exclusions, such as the absence of Chicana environmentalisms. Second, I identify ecological narratives in the work of Chicana and Mexican-American women to revise and expand feminist environmental philosophy with the perspectives of a population that is underrepresented in the literature. I chose Chicana studies not just for the lack of attention it receives, but because the most problematic areas in ecofeminist theory can be re-evaluated in light of how such relationships are articulated in complex, non-essentialist ways by Chicana and Mexican-American writers, artists and activists.

My conclusions find that Chicana environmentalisms rewrite the essentialist themes in ecofeminism that have drawn criticism, including the link between women and nature, the role of embodiment and of spirituality in environmental literature and movements. At the heart of Chicana environmental practices is an effort to construct open and performative intersubjective identities that create new kinds of politicized human/nature/spirit relations. Ultimately, what can be seen in these efforts is the *determinitorialization*, or de-sedimenting and pushing into new directions, of identities and movements in ways that invigorate activism for social and ecological justice. Moreover, in bringing together ecofeminist and Chicana studies, I aim to disrupt each of those fields, deterritorializing them in productive ways. Together, then, this project reflects work to decolonize subjectivity, movement politics, and disciplinarity in the academy.
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List of Abbreviations

NIMBY ........................................... “Not in my back yard” environmental mentality
SNEEJ ............................. Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice
WED ..................................................... Women, the Environment, and Development
WIC ........................................................ Women’s Intercultural Center
WID ........................................................ Women in Development
INTRODUCTION

DETERITORIALIZATION AS GROUNDS
FOR A DECOLONIZING POLITICS?

Outlining the Research Question

The question that sits at the heart of this dissertation concerns the state of feminist environmentalism in the American academy. Ecofeminist philosophy has fallen out of favor with feminists writing through the poststructural turn due to its perceived history of essentialism, including its reification of “woman” and “nature.” This too easy dismissal forecloses important questions ecofeminism raises regarding women’s environmental activism and the gendered effects of environmental degradation. In light of the recent disaster from the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and a general trend toward embracing “green culture,” particularly through the consumption of green washed products that include everything from hybrid cars to household cleansers, it is becoming vitally important that feminists take up questions regarding how our relationships with each other and with the environment shape efforts toward justice. Feminist scholars must turn their attention back to the environment despite the marginalization of ecofeminism within the discipline.

The resurgence of ecological awareness in feminist theory need not necessarily be rooted in ecofeminist philosophy though in following Niamh Moore’s suggestion to rethink the value in ecofeminism, I advocate revisiting several key debates that
characterize the field in order to learn more about those tensions in feminist praxis that are abjected from the master narratives of Western feminism (2008, 320). In revisiting ecofeminism, however, I also note that while there are useful ideas that can be reclaimed and reworked, ecofeminist theory maintains its own exclusions; Chicana and Mexican-American environmental activists are chief among those that remain absent from the canon yet a survey of the strategies employed by Chicana writers, artists, and activists shows that their struggles for ecological and social justice suggest they have much to offer ecofeminism and feminist theory more broadly. Thus, the research questions that drove this project initially are as follows: What are the key debates in ecofeminism that need to be revisited in order for feminists to grapple with the question of environmental justice once more? Taking an (eco)regional response, what characterizes the environmentalism that grows out of the lives of Chicanas and Mexican-American women in the U.S. Southwest? How does the environmentalism of Chicana and Mexican-American women challenge or rework the dominant characterization of ecofeminism? I will demonstrate that the concept and process of deterritorialization (described below) is key to answering those questions.

Given the research questions, my approach is necessarily interdisciplinary and I employ multiple methods to arrive at a broad understanding of the varied strategies that women have used toward social and ecological justice. Chapter one deploys genealogical analysis to study ecofeminist scholarship, tracing the threads of ecofeminism that have become “stuck” and dismissed while also following those that have been embraced, including those that have been taken up in development literature, environmental
philosophy, and feminist studies. I believe that the “stuck places” are the most critical spaces for review. The majority of critiques focus on the sensational essentialists and spiritualists whose work has come to stand in for all of ecofeminism; in revisiting debates around essentialism, feminist scholars can learn much about our aims and politics.

The remainder of the dissertation considers Chicana and Mexican-American women’s environmentalism from several different sites. Chapter two investigates ecological narratives in the cultural production of writers and artists that self-identify as Chicanas, including their literature, murals and other paintings, mixed media and performance art. Chapter three moves from a broad survey of ecological strategies across Chicana cultural production to an in-depth case study of a documentary, Señorita Extraviada, directed by Lourdes Portillo (2001). The chapters on cultural production rely on iconographic, textual and intertextual analysis as well as discourse analysis to make sense of how critiques of sexism, racism, heterosexism, classism, and colonialism are unfolded through cultural productions that aim to move spectators toward decolonization.

In contrast to the two chapters on cultural production, chapters four and five focus on women’s environmental activism across a variety of movements and show that, indeed, much of this activism defies categorical understanding. Chapter four offers a historical review of the ways in which Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans have been erased from historical narratives in the name of an environmentalism that supports nationalist interests based on white supremacy. In turning to alternative accounts that bridge the histories of diverse social movements, chapter four also addresses Chicana/o and Mexican-American driven activisms against epistemic and physical, economic and
ecological violences perpetrated against their communities. Lastly, chapter five yields an in-depth case study of a single organization, the Women’s Intercultural Center in Anthony, New Mexico, that draws women interested in personal skill-building and empowerment as well as those interested in broader change for social and ecological justice. I use ethnographic methods of interview and participant-observation as well as document analysis of the news stories about the center, and brochures and videos by and for the center to analyze how narratives about ecological justice are articulated in the everyday activities of contemporary activists in the Southwest.

Taken together, each chapter explores strategies that decolonize environmentalist theory and the academic disciplines in which it is produced. I do this by deconstructing problematic genealogies of activism and theory production and by challenging the disciplinary divide in environmental and ecofeminist research that separates humanities-based approaches from social science approaches to study. In addition to decolonizing the academy, these chapters show how Chicana writing, art, and activism produce decolonizing efforts that rework the self and movements for social and ecological justice. “Deterritorialization” is the main strategy by which decolonization occurs and one of the key ways in which selves, and ultimately movements, are deterritorialized is through a process I name performative (ecological) intersubjectivity—I distinguish those intersubjectivities which are relational among humans from those that are more fully ecological, connecting humans within a broader web of care for human and nature-others. As each of the chapters unfold, the reader will note that there are many different technologies that enable the construction of performative intersubjects oriented toward
ecological and social justice. My intent is to introduce the reader to these concepts below and to show how particular and differing technologies grow out of different research contexts in the remaining chapters. The conclusion will draw these technologies together once more and offer summative remarks on their nature.

Exploring the Interstices: Toward Deterritorialization

This project emerged from within the intersections of three bodies of literature: ecofeminist philosophy, Chicana studies and borderlands art and literature, and French poststructural philosophy, particularly that of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. While these broad fields of literature may appear to be strange bedfellows at first glance, they all contribute to theories on intersubjectivity. The term “intersubjectivity” connotes the development of a sense of self that moves beyond the bounded, individualizing “I” of western philosophy or the Cartesian rational self. Major works within each of these three fields show a recognition that we can only understand ourselves through a web of relations to others, including humans, non-humans and the natural and built environments through which we move and to which we develop attachments. To further emphasize the role of attachment, Aimee Carillo Rowe defines intersubjectivity as that which “may be thought of as an ‘effect’ of belonging—of the affective, passionate, and political ties that bind us to others. There is no separation between longing—to be with—and being” (18).

As I show below and throughout this dissertation, the development of an intersubjective self is central to how justice is conceptualized in much of the literature of Chicana studies and in Chicana and Mexican-American women’s activism across multiple movements. Thus, my framing of “Chicana environmentalisms” expands narrow
definitions of environmentalism that are strictly concerned with the protection of natural environments though my assumption is that the development of a self that is more aware of and connected to one’s surroundings fosters a stronger desire to care for human and non-human others as well as both built and natural environments.

While Chicana studies, ecofeminist and Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy share much in their efforts to theorize a “self-in-community,” or a self that longs to know itself through its relationalities, the ways in which they interrupt each other with their differing and context-specific approaches can also prove insightful and productive for community-based change efforts. In order to explore both the tensions and collusions among these bodies of literature and arrive at a clearer picture of the nature of ecological narratives in Chicana cultural production and activism, I put these three bodies of literature into conversation with the concept of “deterritorialization”—a concept that derives from Deleuze and Guattari, but which has since been taken up in a multitude of ways and has sparked heated debate amongst scholars.

For Deleuze and Guattari deterritorialization signifies a process of constant movement that avoids fixed states or the stasis of being and the sedimentation of identity. Claire Colebrook explains, “The idea of deterritorialization, which runs throughout Deleuze and Guattari’s work, is directly related to the thought of the machine. Because a machine has no subjectivity or organizing center it is nothing more than the connections and productions it makes; it is what it does. It therefore has no home or ground; it is a constant process of deterritorialization, or becoming other than itself” (2002, 56). Such a philosophy is post-humanist in that it decenters human subjectivity and instead of the self
that knows itself and the world around it, Deleuze and Guattari advocate for the troubling of boundaries and a focus instead on the character of relations and connections with others. Bodies (the human body, body of literature, body of a social movement, etc.) are seen as constantly shifting and frequently remade through the connections they forge.

This philosophy, which is also understood as schizoanalysis or nomadology has been criticized for what appears to be a fetishization of the nomad who is seen to travel freely and whose mind makes any number of irrational connections and fantasies about himself and the world around him—a characterization that seems at once to minimize the struggles of those who have been diagnosed with schizophrenia as well as celebrate the privileged world traveler while ignoring the many ways in which those with less privilege are barred from travel or are forced to travel via political, economic or cultural displacement. Given the above, feminist critics of Deleuze and Guattari are most interested in the apparent evacuation of the political investments of their theories and see them as the culmination of the abstract, dissociated mind of the Western philosopher.

It should be noted, however, that Deleuze and Guattari theorize deterritorialization from their observations of capitalism, which they see as the first great deterritorializing machine in that in assigning monetary value to objects and labor meaning is stripped away and capitalist processes continuously seek to deterritorialize objects, people, land in their profit-seeking logic (Holland 1999, 65-66; Deleuze and Guattari 1983). Capitalism continuously decodes and recodes people, objects and territories and for Deleuze and Guattari, any confining logic—even a constantly deterritorializing and reterritorializing logic such as capitalism—traps desire and limits
thought. Eugene Holland summarizes Deleuze and Guattari’s response to capitalism that challenges Marx’s logic of false consciousness: “People are not ideologically tricked into acting against their best interests: their desire is attracted by an organization of force that enslaves them” (1999, 106). He concludes, “But such is the predicament of any and every subject-group in a capital-saturated society: how to move from effective but localized subversion to out-and-out revolution, without reproducing power relations and/or getting subsumed under a new axiom” (108).

In theorizing resistance against capitalism and other oppressive systems such as patriarchy (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 275-276), Deleuze and Guattari argue that one can only become revolutionary by constantly keeping desire in motion, by making new connections so that ordering systems cannot continue to co-opt and subjugate at will. In keeping desire and subjectivity in motion, we disinvest in these systems and can begin to imagine new ways to order our lives and communities. In response to this line of thought critics have asked to what extent does “becoming revolutionary” necessitate Deleuze and Guattari’s ultimate goal, the ultimate deterritorialization of “becoming imperceptible” (1987, 232).

Feminist and decolonization movements that have relied on the formation of a politicized identity said to be rooted in common experiences of oppression based on shared belonging to a sexuality, gender, race, or class grouping become suspect under this logic that would prefer to dislodge identitarian politics altogether. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between molecular politics (a state of becoming, connections are partial and multiple) and molar politics (a state of being, connections are sedimented)
(Deleuze and Guattari 1983, Holland 1999); they suggest that “becoming revolutionary” may require some negotiation between molecular and molar politics, particularly at the beginning of any movement when forming attachments to others is important. In *A Thousand Plateaus* they write, “It is, of course, indispensable for women to conduct a molar politics, with a view to winning back their own organism, their own history, their own subjectivity: ‘we as women…’ makes its appearance as a subject of enunciation. But it is dangerous to confine oneself to such a subject, which does not function without drying up a spring or stopping a flow” (1987, 276). In fact, in claiming a fixed identity of “woman” based on the apparent characteristics of some women such as whiteness and middle-classness, feminist scholarship did begin to “dry up” and it was with the publication of books such as Audre Lorde’s *Sister Outsider* (1984) and Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga’s *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) that the movement fractured and was set into new motions.

In *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (2000), Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook explore the risks and possibilities Deleuze (and Guattari) pose for feminist theory. As Deleuze and Guattari might ask of the moving, producing force of a machine: “what does it do?” Buchanan and Colebrook ask what such a post-humanist theory can do for feminist theory? What can a striving to “become-woman” where “identity is always provisional, in the process of creation” do for feminist theory (Colebrook 2002)? What new thoughts can a theory stressing the ontological connections between objects, ideas, people, art, places, etc. offer that the epistemological debates about “truth” and the nature of representation that have characterized feminist theory over the last several decades do
not? They write, “If thought is not directed towards an image of good thinking but sets itself the task of thinking otherwise, then feminism might less be a task of emancipation, and more a challenge of differentiation. This might provide the way of thinking new modes of becoming—not as the becoming of some subject, but a becoming towards others, a becoming towards difference, and a becoming through new questions” (12). In centering relationality and challenging capitalist modes of social production that render gendered, classed, and racialized bodies as well as nature exploitable, Deleuze and Guattari offer the potential to fundamentally rethink ourselves through new relationships with each other and with our natural and built environments with an eye toward how to create more meaningful connections oriented toward social and ecological justice.

In the paragraphs above I laid out Deleuze and Guattari’s sense of deterritorialization as a molecular politics of becoming that can both use and trouble identity politics in the process of becoming-revolutionary; here I want to briefly address the spatial politics caught up in the concept of deterritorialization. From an ecological perspective, total deterritorialization might suggest a dislocation from the place(s) we occupy, which can slide into disregard for those spaces and the other species that share them with us. Furthermore, those that are under threat of displacement have much to gain from efforts to establish new relationships with the territories in which they come to reside. How do these environmentalist and postcolonial or decolonizing efforts at reterritorialization challenge a politics of deterritorialization?

This dissertation takes up that question and addresses the potential for women to become appropriate subjects to their own landscapes, a feat which is particularly
important within the work of Chicana and Mexican-American women considering the urgency of reclaiming a postcolonial landscape from an imperialist and patriarchal presence. There is a strong tradition of this attempt to reclaim geographic and discursive space within Chicana studies (Anzaldúa 1987, Moraga 1993, E. Pérez 1999) that has roots in the early days of the Chicano movement’s efforts to imagine and reclaim Aztlan, the Nahua or Aztec homeland that comprises the U.S. Southwest. However, as is often evident in these works, becoming appropriate in the land is no easy task and requires a radical revisioning of “home.” Works such as Lourdes Portillo Señorita Extraviada (2001) and Sandra Cisneros’ House on Mango Street (1991) describe place-centered subjectivities but often the places are unhomely and subjects feel inappropriate in them. Such works ask how landscapes that are seen as places of violence and alienation might be reclaimed. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “deterritorialization,” contrary to beliefs that it disallows belonging altogether, asks us to question the nature of our identifications and belonging and, where possible, make new connections. Here, “deterritorialization” might help theorize the ways in which Chicana writers like Cherríe Moraga in her “Queer Aztlan” (1993) and Gloria Anzaldúa in her Borderlands/La Frontera (1987) rewrite their homelands, recoding understandings of the border that currently construct it and its inhabitants as disposable. Once deterritorialization has taken place such that our thought can no longer be trapped by the same imperialist symbolic configurations of the border, they begin to theorize how we might relate with each other in more just ways—that is, Anzaldúa invites us to join the “new mestiza” in alliance,
constantly reworking our relationships and questioning our politics always so as to avoid exclusions. She writes,

The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (1999, 101)

As the quote above suggests, and which has been detailed by Chela Sandoval in *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), the poststructural philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari is not only often in line with that of decolonizing theorists such as Anzaldúa, but often it grows out their critiques (Sandoval 7).³

The following chapters continue to explore the ways in which Chicana and Mexican-American artists, scholars and activists deterritorialize problematic representations of the border and its inhabitants while posing new ways to think the borderlands and our relationships with each other. The following chapters also center the ways in which these new relationalities address both social *and* ecological justice, balancing the tension between ecological locatedness/territorialization, or what Devon Peña, a scholar of Chicano environmentalism, calls “lococentrism” (1998), with efforts to deterritorialize identity to allow for a more open subjectivity. As I argue throughout, such a post-humanist approach to (inter)subjectivity does not ignore our relationships with nature, but suggests the need to form more connections (if only partial and temporary) with our surroundings and, in fact, to conceive ourselves as more fully part of the
territories in which we move. In addition, while ecofeminism too has long posed the need to see ourselves through our webs of interconnection with the natural world (Warren 2000, Starhawk 1999, King 1995, Mies and Shiva 1993), one of the sticking points of ecofeminist philosophy that has drawn criticisms of essentialism relates to the construction of the categories “women” and “nature” that are thought to be inextricably linked within ecofeminist logic. In putting this debate in conversation with Chicana and Mexican-American artists, scholars and activists and the work of Deleuze and Guattari that focuses on the nature of our connections, the following chapters also begin to theorize new directions for ecofeminist philosophy. In so doing, I show how each of those fields—Chicana studies, Deleuze and Guattari’s continental philosophy, and ecofeminism—might begin to deterritorialize each other.

*Performative Intersubjectivity as a Movement of Deterritorialization*

In this section I shift attention from deterritorialization as a theory to a specific kind of deterritorialization that leads to the development of a *performative orientation to intersubjectivity* that can deterritorialize the self. Throughout this dissertation, I point to various technologies employed by artists, writers, scholars, and activists that construct, via performative strategies, intersubjective relationships between selves, landscapes, and spirits. Thus, the notion of performative intersubjectivity, and in particular, and performative *ecological* intersubjectivity that recognizes continuities and relations between humans and their surrounding environment, is key to this dissertation and to seeing how the concept of deterritorialization works in practice.
In feminist studies, the theory of gender performativity has been most thoroughly explored by Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1997). Butler’s theory of performativity shares much with Michel Foucault’s theory of subjectification (1990, 1977). In both approaches subjectivity is an effect of discourse. That is to say, there is no “doer behind the deed,” but that our identities and sense of selves are created through the reiteration of practices (Butler 1999, 181). Butler writes, “Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (1999, xv). Femininity, with its emphasis on “perfecting” oneself through rituals of dress, make-up, diet and exercise, posture, speech patterns, etc. that must be re-enacted constantly to keep up the image of ideal womanhood stands as a good example of the fact that “one is not born a woman, but becomes one,” as Simone de Beauvoir famously noted (1953).

Despite the apparent decentering of the subject and her agency in accounts of performativity, there are ways to break free of the constrained repetition of statements and practices that reproduce the norm. While one might continue to cite the norm through all the femininity-producing practices mentioned above, for example, and this citation of norms is carried out to the point of giving coherence to identities (e.g., this is a woman), one can also miscite the norm—performing what Butler calls a “performative subversion” or “subversive repetition (1999, 185). Sarah Salih explains, “Butler is referring to subversive practices whereby gender performatives are ‘cited,’ grafted onto other contexts, thereby revealing the citationality and the intrinsic – but necessary and useful – failure of all gender performatives” (2002, 92). Norms can be subverted through practices
that denaturalize gendered identities and performances, leading to resignification of the norms, of the practices, and therefore, of identity; for example, drag, especially in exaggerated camp performances, can stretch the logic of gender and resignify what it means to be a man or a woman (1999, 174).

Butler’s performativity theory grows largely out of a marriage between Foucault’s observations on the power of discourse to shape materiality and Derrida and J.L. Austin’s observations on linguistic norms and instabilities. As such, critics have interpreted her work as being overly reductionist in its emphasis on discourse and linguistic norms that ignore the ways materiality might exceed discourse and language. In claiming that subjects are the effects of norm citations and subversions, she also limits agency to those small spaces of negotiation between working with and troubling the norm, but there is no fully intentional and therefore fully agentic subject that can resist norms (1993, 15). Nonetheless, Butler’s work has been extremely influential for feminists seeking non-essentialist notions of subjectivity and anti-foundational modes of coalition-building. Further, her focus on the citationality of discursive norms shines more attention on the micropractices (i.e., individual behaviors) of social reproduction and resistance.

Given Butler’s importance in the field of feminist studies and the utility of her theory of performativity for thinking through the self, I ask: Can a focus on micropractices or individual challenges to the norm stretch the norm’s ordering logic toward the point of deterritorialization; in other words, can performative subversions create a line of flight that departs from the norm altogether to create a new way to think and to be(come)? Further, can performativity offer a way to think ourselves through
relations and practices that diffuse boundaries between the self and its surroundings, enabling what I call “performative intersubjectivity” that is also ecological, recognizing continuities between selves, the environment, and non-human others? What role does affect play in the practices and rituals of repetition that create us as effects moving toward social and ecological justice? And lastly, given the above questions, where can agency be located in a theory of performative intersubjectivity and how can we be sure that movements are indeed working toward social and ecological justice?

There are few examples of the ways in which performativity can challenge ecofeminist philosophy, but Catriona Sandilands’ “Mother Earth, the Cyborg, and the Queer: Ecofeminism and (More) Questions of Identity” provides a good place to begin addressing the questions above. Sandilands criticizes ecofeminist attempts that continue to link “women” and “nature” together in either biologically reductionist ways or in a socially constructed form of identity politics that amounts to the same: essentialist notions of identity. She writes, “ecofeminism needs to take into consideration the limits of identity, and needs to make the job of politicizing these limits part of its very project” (Sandilands 1997, 19). As a solution, she focuses instead on the politics of coalition and affinity that might be made between feminist and ecological struggles—a project at the heart of this dissertation. Such a politics necessarily must engage with the patriarchal social constructions that bring women and nature together, but not in ways that would avoid key binaries (i.e., man/culture, woman/nature) and ignore their discursive links, celebrate them through reification of the connection between women and nature, or through contesting the link in ways that maintain a series of other binaries (e.g. women
are not actually closer to nature, men and women remain distinct from nature where each set of terms maintains the binary). Rather, Sandilands encourages *performative* disruptions that work within the symbolic realm that creates women-nature connections.

Sandilands draws from Donna Haraway’s notion of the cyborg and coyote as queer figures that disrupt notions of “human” and “nature” and reveal the unnaturalness of each and thus their co-construction and their possible disruption of each other. She writes, “the ‘woman-nature’ affinity becomes a statement in which the one set of constructions is constantly held up to the other to show the contingent, fictitious character of each. This stance is a playful one, marking a world full of imaginative women-nature boundary breaching, at the same time as it is a political one, causing us to make strange, to queer the discourses in which feminist environmental politics are constituted and negotiated” (34). Sandilands concludes her essay with the warning that this discursive strategy is important to interrupt representational violence that renders both women and the environment as exploitable, but that it should not be the only ecofeminist strategy employed. She notes that coalition is a space in which assumed identities are always challenged in the face of difference that exceeds individuals and the relations between them. Nonetheless, she does not suggest how this understanding might be brought together with the performative alliance she suggests (i.e. the discursive coalition she notes between feminist and ecological politics).

In the subsequent chapters of this dissertation I respond to those concerns by beginning to establish more coalitional space between ecofeminism, mainstream environmental and environmental justice movements, and between those ecological
movements and feminist and Chicana/o movements for social justice. I do so, in part, by showing their convergences and by reworking their genealogies to show histories and political investments that must be negotiated if a broad coalition for social and ecological justice is to be had. Subsequent chapters also show how scholars, artists, and activist create performative subversions in imperial and patriarchal logic that pairs women, and Chicana and Mexican-American women in particular, with an “untamed” and “dangerous” nature. However, while I do argue that such representational challenges are key to reshaping discourse and freeing up more space for liberating representations of “women” and “nature,” I also argue that such performative subversions do more than challenge epistemological frames; they also can encourage ontological shifts of being→becoming. They can deterritorialize not just discourses and movements, but people as well.

In order to expand on the use of performativity theory proposed by Sandilands and begin to focus more on performativity via relations of becoming intersubjective, I highlight Donna Houston and Laura Pulido’s article, “The Work of Performativity: Staging Social Justice at the University of Southern California” (2005), which is notable in that it permits a larger role for human agency than might be found in Butler’s work and it moves focus from individualized performatives toward collective performance as a means to challenge and rework norms.

Houston and Pulido consider how performativity theory helps make sense of the construction of spatial identities in the field of geography and their research on political protests against worker mistreatment by the University of Southern California suggests
that not enough attention is given to the collective nature of performativity. While Butler emphasizes the performative rather than performance-based nature of identity and the reproduction of or challenge to social norms in ways that minimize the potential for agency, Houston and Pulido do emphasize performance. They look at street theater and performances such as collective fasting and the ritualized passing down of César Chavez’s personal wooden cross from one group of fasters to the next as ritualized performances that expose imperial logic and, in connecting one social struggle to a history of movement politics (i.e., linking these protests to the United Farm Workers and the Chicano movement via the circulation of Chavez’s cross), open up new logics to the participants. They write, “The workers at USC engaged the performative not only to expose the rupture and contradictions of the university’s unfair labor practices, but also to enact social justice as the work of collective action and imaginative intervention by intentional social agents” (319). The rituals, such as the ritualized fast, both critique dominant cultural practices and reorient individual protestors toward a collective and they do so with various technologies that emphasize relationality. Here, Chavez’s cross broke down the “individual experience of fasting” while serving as a technology of relationality that “linked the USC workers to ‘past performance’ of regional labor politics” and lent the protests a sense of moral authenticity (336).

Houston and Pulido show how ritualized performances can connect individuals to others across time and space. Protestors connected with a larger movement history and with those activists that came before them as well as with the contemporary activists with whom they share the current struggle. In the performance of social critique activists begin
to develop an intersubjective sense of themselves that is facilitated by technologies of relationality. There are two elements of this struggle that should be underscored: first, the role of agency that can be seen in this example and second, the role of technologies of relationality, including the ways these technologies rely on the movement of affect for successful collective action—a topic I turn to shortly.

With regard to the role of agency in performativity theory, I hesitate to downplay intentionality because of the substantial role it plays in Chicana studies and ask what is at stake in the constriction of agency. In response to Butler’s theory of “the doer” emerging from “the deed” as an act of hailing by discourse—that is, you understand yourself as a girl only after the nurse hails, “It’s a girl!” (1993, 7-8)—Chela Sandoval theorizes ways in which subjects that develop an oppositional consciousness might themselves hail discourse (2000). Drawing on poststructural theory and insights from borderlands theory that includes Anzaldúa’s “new mestiza” and María Lugones’ “‘world’ traveler” (2003), Sandoval suggests that, as subjects caught between cultures that include competing discourses and norming systems, one begins to recognize the logic and instability of such systems. As a result of being perpetually caught within and between these systems, one learns to manipulate them for survival. The development of this differential oppositional consciousness,

… requires a consciousness that perceives itself at the center of myriad possibilities all cross-working—any of which is fodder for one’s loyalties. Such loyalties, once committed, can be withdrawn and relocated depending on survival, moral, and/or political imperatives… when the differential form of cognitive mapping is used it is the citizen-subject who interpellates, who calls up ideology, as opposed to Althusser’s formulation, in which it is ‘ideology that interpellates the subject.’ To deploy a differential oppositional consciousness, one can depend on no (traditional) mode of belief in one’s own subject position or ideology;
nevertheless, such positions and beliefs are called up and utilized in order to constitute whatever forms of subjectivity are necessary to act in an also (now obviously) constituted social world. (Sandoval 31)

This is not to suggest that there is a coherent subject that remains identical to itself at all times, but to highlight the possibility of subjects that are constantly in movement, seeking new alliances and temporary identifications, and which, under certain circumstances, can develop a critical consciousness that is constrained by social, political and economic structures and the discourses that give them shape. Despite this, such subjects are also able to manipulate those discourses and destabilize those structures with collective effort. My aim here is not to challenge Butler’s work as Sandoval herself names performativity as a technology of opposition (69). Rather, in following Houston and Pulido and in situating performativity theory within the field of Chicana studies, I seek to highlight the spaces within performativity theory where actors can self-consciously manipulate social norms in the name of collective politics or, in Sandoval’s terminology, “democratics” aimed at “equalizing power between humans” (114).

Affect in Theorizing Performative Intersubjectivity and Its Deterritorializations

Given an understanding of intersubjectivity as enacted through a series of practices that are both constrained by norms and which sometimes exceed those constraints and open up new performances and becomings such as the coalitional activisms depicted in the work of Sandoval and Houston and Pulido, I turn to the role of affect in deterritorializing subjectivity. In this section I pursue deterritorializing practices that drive individuals toward becoming intersubjects that are more fully aware of and embedded in their human and non-human landscapes—that is, I explore the more
thoroughly ecological potential of performative intersubjectivity. In so doing, I analyze three sites of debate where performative subversions of human subjectivity are particularly important in the process of opening up more freeing subjectivities that can become more fully enmeshed or en-natured with their surrounding landscapes: (1) feminist debates on embodiment, (2) the relationship between women and nature, and (3) spirituality. These three areas are highlighted both because they are debates that can help us radically rethink our sense of selves and because those debates remain sites of tension within ecofeminism and feminist theory more broadly. The following chapters take up these debates in much more detail; here, I show how the movement of affect through repetitive practices oriented toward belonging contributes to a theory of performative (ecological) intersubjectivity.

**Embodiment**

One of the virtues of Butler’s performativity theory is that she theorizes awareness of the body via the repetition of practices. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler writes that matter should be considered, “not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (1993, 9). For Deleuze and Guattari bodies may become machines or assemblages with open, ambiguous boundaries able to make connections with other bodies and objects and they too focus on practices or relations among various bodies. Where Butler intervenes is in her assumption that bodies are created as effects by regulatory discourses that write themselves on the body (Foucault 1977, Butler 1999). The distinction between these approaches lies in the nature of the pre-discursive body, if
there can be such a thing. Feminist theory has waged debates around the body and female embodiment on these grounds to determine whether the body is only an effect of discourse and known through language (e.g., those that often cite Butler’s work) or whether the body precedes and exceeds discourse and can act as a site of knowledge production (e.g., those that may cite Rosie Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz, each of whose work builds off of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy). While I believe the debate is overblown in that there is much in common between the Butlerian idea of bodily performativity and the Deleuzo-Guattarian focus on becoming through repetitions of difference (see Flieger 2000), nonetheless, the ways in which Braidotti and Grosz have each taken up Deleuze and Guattari to focus on both the exteriority and interiority of the body (i.e., how the “outside” or discourses shape the inside and how the inside or psychic life shapes the outside) remain helpful in theorizing performative intersubjectivity.

Grosz, interested in disturbing binaries of inside/outside and mind/body writes,

If, as feminists have claimed, ‘our politics start with our feelings’ and if the very category of experience or feeling is itself problematized through a recognition of its ideological production—if, that is, experience is not a raw mode of access to some truth—then the body provides a point of mediation between what is perceived as purely internal and accessible only to the subject and what is external and publicly observable, a point from which to rethink the opposition between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the self and other, and all the other binary pairs associated with the mind/body opposition. (1994, 20-21)

I begin with this quote to theorize performative, intersubjective embodiment precisely because it raises questions about the inside and outside of bodies, about the social construction of affect (or feelings, emotions) as well as the ways in which feelings might bridge the “inside” and “outside,” moving between them and, in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense, making new connections among bodies. If affect does not exist in some pure form,
but must be understood through social relationships that give it context and a prism through which meaning can be made, then affect exists as a product of relations. My interest is in the way the relationality of affect joins bodies together, destabilizing boundaries between them while destabilizing the “self.” Affect or emotion, bearing the productive force of power to affect and effect bodies in unpredictable ways (Tolia-Kelly 2006), can fundamentally rework bodily boundaries in ways that center relationality; through performative repetition, affect can be mobilized to open up intersubjective selves. To illustrate, Teresa Brennan shows how the cultural inscriptions that produce affect might have a potent effect on the body: “The transmission of affect, whether it is grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or psychological in origin. But the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room’s atmosphere, some longer lasting. In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual” (quoted in Gorton 2007, 338).

What emerges is a theory of the body that sees the self as permeable and caught in a web of its surroundings, produced as an intersubject through the relay of affect that forges and regulates various connections between bodies. Throughout this dissertation I demonstrate this theorization of embodiment as shifting and reliant on the nature and modes of those connections, which are in turn reliant on the practices that produce the connections. Following Helen Fielding, I argue that such a theorization is non-essentialist in that embodiment is seen to be relational rather than foundational (2000, 124). Further, in constantly producing the subject through relationships of belonging with others, there
is the potential to hail (as Sandoval suggests) relations that are more just.

**Woman-Nature**

The argument outlined above directly bears on the question of the supposed essentialism of the theoretical connections between “women” and “nature” put forward by patriarchal discourses and some ecofeminist responses to them. In assuming a diffused self that is constructed by the practices of relationality forged between the self and its environment, the idea of “woman” is not only destabilized but so too is the idea of “nature.” Here, geographers have put theories of affect to great use in interpreting how we make sense of ourselves in relation to human and nature others in space (Whatmore 2008, Sharp 2009, Davidson et al. 2005, Davidson and Milligan 2004, Thien 2005, Thrift 1999). While it is more common in western culture to think ourselves collectively in relation to other humans, it is less likely that we think ourselves as en-natured with our surroundings. Thus, the performative subversions that deterritorialize binaries between human/nature and culture/nature are both more essential and more difficult to stage due to the weight and sedimentation of the norms constructing and maintaining boundary separation. As such, several scholars rely on the affective potential of art and creativity to explore human-nature connections and push us from our comfortable ways of seeing and thinking.

In “Geography and Gender: What Belongs to Feminist Geography?” (2009), Joanne Sharp explores the boundaries around the self that are negotiated through past memories and current sensations of landscape interactions. Using sandplay and modeling along with open-ended questions about the landscapes participants inhabited as children,
Sharp’s interviewees used vivid and vital language to articulate their relatedness to their natural and built environments—those they currently inhabit as well as their memories of those of the past. This stands in contrast to the less vivid language that occurred in interviews that did not involve the creative and sensory experience that sandplay offered. Sharp concludes that for participants, “it was possible to unravel the intricacy of the relationship between Self and landscape; and that the relationship was indeed extraordinarily complex. The moment of perception of landscape was found to be a moment of intersection and interaction between the several elements of subjective sensory experience: various elements of identity, past memories, projections, myths, cultural and personal experience” (343). Creative practices and behaviors oriented toward rethinking relations with others and the landscape produced a change in the embodiment of the subjects—they became more animated, more likely to articulate themselves in relation to the landscapes of their childhood and present, more likely to see relationships in general as constitutive of their nature. Interviews and the use of language alone to frame their thoughts, experiences, and emotion did not bring about new thoughts about oneself or her environment.

Similarly, in Bronwyn Davies’ (In)scribing Body/Landscape Relations (2000), Davies explores in depth the co-extensive potential of bodies and landscapes and investigates practices that facilitate intersubjective awareness. Davies’ project openly notes the need to disrupt logics that individuate us from each other and from nature. She writes, “Because of the lack of practice in reading our bodies in this way [i.e., as body/landscapes], I have sought here to develop a new form of embodied writing. I
adopted a number of strategies for disrupting my taken-for-granted clichéd ways of knowing my own body/landscape relations” (19). Davies traveled to unfamiliar landscapes (she is Australian and traveled to Japan) and wrote about her embodied responses to such settings, reflectively noting the ways those responses are both bodied and culturally inscribed. She also engages with a process she calls collective biography; “Here, a group of Australian women explore, through stories of childhood in specific landscapes, the ways in which belonging with/in landscape is achieved in the double sense of becoming appropriate and being appropriated with/in Australian landscapes” (11). Lastly, she interviews male environmentalists to see how, “through their take-up of environmental discourses, they reinscribe their bodies” (13). In each case, the act of reflection and writing about embodied/encultured relationships with the natural world does not so much reflect our actual relationships or reveal aspects of our true selves, but instead represents a performance of becoming body/landscape. That is, through creative subversions of the norm and reinscriptions of ourselves with our environment, we stage new relationships and alliances that may be oriented toward more socially and ecologically just movements. Not to be misconstrued as a new age effort to get “in touch” with nature, such practices hail us to deconstruct the binary between humans and nature altogether and to see ourselves as co-extensive.

Nonetheless, as with all performative subversions, challenging the norm will not guarantee movement toward justice in itself. In tracking the ways Chicana and Mexican-American scholars, artists, and activists develop technologies toward performative intersubjectivity, this dissertation explores how artists have staged human/landscape
deconstructions in ways that do not merely point to the free embrace of an undirected ecological intersubjectivity; instead, many of the examples depicted pair their performative reconstructions of ecological intersubjectivity with a historicizing critique of the patriarchal, racist, and imperialist ordering of human/landscape relations, pointing the viewer to embrace an openly counter-hegemonic positioning.

**Spirituality**

Finally, I look to the ways in which performative relations couched in the language of spirituality challenge individuated notions of subjectivity and act as a means to deterritorialize the self. Although none of the theorists explored here posit a natural body or landscape that can be fully known pre-discursively, there is recognition seen in the work of Grosz, Fielding and others that the body might exceed those cultural inscriptions and provides other ways of knowing and feeling that we are not yet adept at thinking at the cognitive level (Fielding 135). Similarly, spiritual awareness may exceed our frames of understanding and articulation yet it often carries affective import and serves as a technology of relation, as we saw earlier with regards to the role of Chavez’s cross in social movement organizing in California. As we are unaccustomed to thinking mind and body together, we are even less accustomed to thinking the role of spirit in connection to the mind and body in any non-essentializing ways. Often in cultural studies and the academy more broadly, spirituality is conflated with culture and is not considered in its unique difference despite the fact that it may play a very important role in the lives of those living under oppressive circumstances. Laura Pérez summarizes, “Beliefs and practices consciously making reference to the s/Spirit as the common life force within
and between all beings are largely marginalized from serious intellectual discourse as superstition, folk belief, or New Age delusion, when they are not relegated to the socially controlled spaces of the orientalist study of ‘primitive animism’ or of ‘respectable’ religion within dominant culture” (1998, 38).

Laura Pulido’s study of spirituality in social movements of the American Southwest shows that, “Spirituality refers to consciousness and connection—our connections as individuals to our souls, other people, places, nature, spirits, and in some cases, connection to a creator” (1998, 721); she goes on to argue that spiritual beliefs may emphasize the supernatural and/or the community, but what is important is that they enfold us in a power bigger than ourselves and they can move us toward collective feeling, identification, and movement. Within movement politics a strong sense of spirituality can provide energy and courage to “withstand suffering” (721).

In light of a growing awareness of the limitations of current theorizations of religion among scholars of social justice, there is an emerging resurgence in interest in spirituality that recognizes its decolonizing potential. Performativity theory has been at the heart of these efforts as can be seen in the recent publication of texts such as Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler (2006). In addition, Jacqui Alexander has recently posed a serious challenge to the secularism of feminist studies. Alexander’s Pedagogies of Crossing asks readers to think differently about the role of time, memory and the sacred in learning about and teaching transnational feminisms. She writes, “In a fundamental sense Pedagogies of Crossing moves from the betrayals of secular citizenship and dispossession to sacred citizenship and possession, from alienation to
belonging, from dismemberment to rememory. And it does so not in any discrete, noncontradictory, linear way, not in any way that suggests that there is no traffic between and among them, but rather as a way to indicate that possession can be a guided, conscious choice” (16). Further, Alexander offers an analysis of the body that figures it as exceeding the merely cultural and material. Rather, the body provides the base that knits the body, mind and spirit together. Interestingly, this question of subjectivity is also a question of “How does spiritual work produce the condition that brings about the realignment of self with self, which is simultaneously a realignment of oneself with the Divine through a collectivity? These questions lead us to foreground practice… through which the Sacred becomes a way of embodying the remembering of self, if you will, a self that is neither habitually individuated nor unwittingly secularized” (298).

Like Bodily Citations, Alexander’s quotation above reveals how a focus on practices of “divine self-invention” figures the sacred as performative. Practices that are encoded with spiritual affect link the “self” to others across time and space through practices of re-membering and they connect selves to a collectivity that is conceived of as divine. And like Pulido, Alexander does not attempt to close off becomings of the divine by characterizing it in any final way, but points to the ways in which orienting ourselves to the divine may draw us together, refresh us after the exhaustions of resistance efforts, and stage practices of intersubjective becoming-revolutionary as a response to the social fragmentation produced by empire.

A tradition of politicizing spirituality can be seen widely within the art and literature of Chicana studies. Laura Pérez’s study of Chicana art in “Spirit Glyphs:
“Reimagining Art and Artist in the Work of Chicana Tlamatinime” highlights the role of memory (or re-memory) of Aztec practices wherein the artist becomes a social healer capable of creating images, or glyphs, that point beyond themselves and call upon the presence of the natural and spiritual world (1998). In the Aztec tradition that has been remembered by Chicana feminists, artistic work is at once political and spiritual. Pérez writes, “The visionary and prophetic quality of their work is politically and historically significant, as is their returning to our field of vision a politically oppositional spiritual consciousness of the interconnection and meaningfulness of all being” (1998, 65). Pérez emphasized that there is nothing essentialist about this rememory of the past because it reworks important elements of Aztec culture and hybridizes it with different elements from Chicano/a, African-American and other cultural heritages. The performative work of the Chicana artist or, as Pérez calls her, a tlamatini, draws readers and spectators to see beyond the immediate and material world and to vision it as it could be in ways that put spirituality and spiritual healing at the center of one’s life and one’s struggles against oppression.

In subsequent chapters, I follow Alexander, Pérez, and Pulido and strive to retain a non-essentializing and non-reductionist approach to the role of spirituality in the ritualized performances of ecological intersubjectivity. In particular, I explore how Chicana and Mexican-American scholars, artists, and activists cite spirituality as a technology of intersubjectivity that both reworks what Davies has named body/landscape relations and expands them via body/landscape/spirit relations, offering a comprehensive effort to deterritorialize subjectivity from the secularized and individuating practices that
are produced by dominant discourses.

**Decolonizing Possibilities**

How do we decolonize ourselves without returning to a static and utopic precolonial past? How do these decolonial practices (re)claim and create enunciative spaces… that challenge the violence-driven technologies of imperial and patriarchal subjection?... What strategies of decolonization allow our struggles for identity to engage in nonbinary, nonhierarchic, and nonhegemonic articulations of metiza/o consciousness…?


This chapter concludes by pondering the possibility for deterritorialization to serve as a strategy for decolonizing politics. In thinking through decolonization, I follow the efforts of those such as Franz Fanon (1963), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2004), Emma Pérez (1999), Chela Sandoval (2000), Arturo Aldama (2001), and many others. The term “decolonization” has a history of its own that encompasses more than the achievement of formal political independence. Indeed, the term has been usefully deployed by theorists writing in the borderlands of the U.S. Southwest to describe a process of attaining autonomy from within the internal, largely unrecognized colony that relies on hierarchies of gender, race, class and nation in order to exploit Chicana/os, Mexican-Americans, immigrants and other indigenous Americans (Córdova 1998). I highlight the role of decolonizing theory as central to the political project of Chicana/o studies that entails not just an investigation of which kinds of stories have been told about which Chicana/os, but it requires a look at how the concept of decolonization has challenged cultural theorists to ask new questions, seek out new methodologies and probe alternative research sources.

I argue that deterritorialization offers a politics adequate to the task of shifting the
grounds on which colonizing enunciations proliferate. The concept of deterritorialization both urges that our problematic representational patterns are dislodged and that we begin to think in new ways. In focusing on the performative micropolitics of daily practices that push us to new associations with human and non-human others, deterritorialized notions of (inter)subjectivity are precisely those that “allow our struggles for identity to engage in nonbinary, nonhierarchic, and nonhegemonic articulations of metiza/o consciousness” as Aldama suggests is necessary for decolonization. This chapter has foregrounded theories of deterritorialization and performative intersubjectivity that may move us toward new directions in organizing for social and ecological justice that each of the following chapters explores in a variety of ways. To conclude, I point to some ways this research fills a current gap in scholarship and offer some suggestions for ways to approach the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

This project is as much about methodology as it is about feminist approaches to ecological justice. One of the key premises of this dissertation is that feminist thought is limited by its refusal of ecofeminism and the characteristics that haunt ecofeminist genealogies, such as: disciplinary divides between the social sciences and the humanities-based theoretical approaches; and tensions over criticisms of essentialism linked to theories of the body, spirituality, and the character of the women-nature link. Moreover, the literatures of Chicana studies remain marginal to both feminist studies broadly and ecofeminist philosophy in particular. In bringing the fields of ecofeminist philosophy and Chicana studies together with poststructural philosophies that theorize how the connections among the fields might produce new ways of knowing and of being in the
world, this project aims to join scholarly efforts at decolonization. Not only does this
project work to diffuse boundaries between canons and disciplines, but in drawing
together research on cultural production, historical and intellectual genealogical analysis,
and ethnographic observation, this project aims to bridge the divide between the
humanities and social sciences that limits our understanding of “best practices” for social
and ecological justice.

To take this point further, the interdisciplinarity of this project is necessary to
address what Chela Sandoval theorizes as “inner and outer technologies that construct
and enable the differential mode of social movement and consciousness” (3). In
highlighting psychic, or inner, technologies and social, or outer, technologies that drive
social change Sandoval proposes that a “methodology of the oppressed” enacts a
democratic move toward coalitional consciousness that serves my project well; it justifies
my investigation of both Chicana cultural production and environmental activism. The
cultural production under examination in chapters two and three critiques modes of
representation that currently give shape to thought and which, in turn, materialize our
realities. Interventions in colonizing representations challenge us to critique oppressive
systems and begin to vision ourselves outside those subjugations—that is, analysis of
cultural production demonstrates how we might put “inner technologies” that create
oppositional consciousness to work. Investigation on environmental activism in chapters
four and five explores movement politics, including “outer technologies” that create new
subjectivities, new communities and new movements for social and ecological justice.
However, as I show, practices that demonstrate “outer technologies” are not distinct from those that employ “inner technologies”; in fact, as this chapter has suggested, it is fruitful to challenge dichotomies between mind and body, inside and outside. Thus, while Sandoval’s technologies differentiate between strategies, my project both recognizes their usefulness and theorizes the interaction and even co-extension between those technologies in ways that do not place so much distance between the inside of the self and the outside, between the self and the community. For example, cultural production both shapes how we think about ourselves, our relationships, and our environments (i.e., its interpretation acts as an inner technology), but the reading of cultural production also draws us together for collective action and galvanizes us to movement. The affect that can travel between an artist and her spectators, or among spectators, can connect the inside of one self with multiple others (other spectators/artists, the cultural production in question, and the objects, memories, emotions, landscapes, futures, etc. that it conjures). Despite the co-extensiveness of inner and outer technologies, the inside and outside, those chapters on cultural production and those chapters on direct action each set to motion new deployments of environmental feminist thought; and each focuses on different technologies of intersubjectivity that might motivate coalitional activism for social and ecological justice. Taken together they also carry implications for ecological models of radical democracy, which is a point that begins to emerge in chapters four and five and which I investigate in more detail in this dissertation’s conclusion for further directions for research.

To close, I leave the reader with a method to approach the remaining chapters of
this dissertation. Chapter one’s emphasis on genealogy offers a methodology that can carry over to how the reader understands and appreciates the remaining chapters. Chapters two and three work well together due to their focus on cultural production and chapters four and five work well together because of their focus on direct action activism. However, the chapters can also be read according to their geographical commitments wherein the reader can find interesting parallels between chapters three and five that are concerned with border territories; similarly, chapters two and four offer a broad survey of activism across the U.S. Southwest. Finally, the introduction and conclusion bookend these chapters, and though elements of them are reflected throughout the entire dissertation, they can be read fruitfully together by virtue of their complementary emphases on deterritorializations of the self (introduction) and deterritorializations of collective politics (conclusion). The introduction and conclusion act as a means to both highlight and trouble the difference of scale between the bodily inside and outside, self and community, individualized resistance and collective movement politics for social and ecological justice.

This dissertation is purposefully constructed in a non-linear manner so as to further fracture and multiply the “truths” that any one chapter might contain. For example, chapter one’s focus on ecofeminist genealogies shows a deterritorialization of ecofeminism that challenges the dominant genealogies that have come to stand in for the field. The goal is not only to show the political investments that guide canon-building, but to point out tensions around the body, spirituality, and the women-nature link that are then taken up and challenged in chapters two, three, four, and five. Upon reading those
chapters, my hope is that their findings reframe how we understand ecofeminism, yet I also hope that the questions raised in the deterritorialization of ecofeminism might permeate the other chapters, enabling readers to think their own ways to deterritorialize the analytical narratives that I weave. That is, I invite the reader to engage directly in the process of decolonization with me. As such, this dissertation is written as a Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome that expands and folds back onto itself in many directions (1987) and the reader is invited to start at any point in the dissertation.
CHAPTER ONE
GENEALOGY: A STUTTERING WITHIN ECOFEMINISM

Introduction

A key premise of this study is that ecofeminism as an academic field is limited by disciplinary and geographical divides that are repeatedly rehearsed in the historiography of ecofeminism and that these limit the field’s potential. This chapter analyzes several key debates in the field of ecofeminist studies in the Western academy to point out areas of contention among ecofeminists and their critics. To do so, genealogical analysis is employed to address how the discursive formations of ecofeminism have emerged and developed their own regimes of truth, privileging certain strands of ecofeminist theory while silencing others. By examining the theoretical and applied examples of women’s environmentalism that have been included in the ecofeminist canon as well as the politics behind the exclusions and refusals of “ecofeminism” as a label, genealogy reveals the historical construction of what has come to stand for “ecofeminism.” This deterritorializing move denaturalizes the history of ecofeminism and allows alternative accounts to be embraced.

In particular, I consider genealogies that reduce ecofeminist philosophy that derives from a variety of contexts to their compatibility with Western feminist theoretical traditions (e.g., liberal, radical and socialist feminism), so that theory and practice cannot
be read outside those limiting frames. This is particularly problematic for some formulations of Chicana and Mexican-American feminist environmentalism, which as I argue, does not fit easily within such hegemonic feminist categories. Questions about the nature of identity and the relationship between “women” and “nature,” the theorization of women’s embodiment, and the role of religion or spirituality in women’s environmentalism are highlighted as unresolved debates in ecofeminist philosophy that require further theorization. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation take up these debates that I begin to untangle here and rework them with insights from Chicana studies and French poststructuralist philosophy.

Following Michel Foucault’s method, this chapter provides not a linear history, but a genealogy that traces both the “proliferation of ecofeminisms” (Sandilands 1999) as well as what I refer to as the “flight from ecofeminism.” I revisit the given history of ecofeminism to look for how it has been understood as intractably problematic and, as a consequence, is now looked upon as a site of abjection in contemporary feminist thought (Moore 2008b, 320). Ecofeminist philosophy has been marginalized by its history of essentialism, including its reification of “woman” and “nature,” as well as by its supposed Western origin that imposes a hegemonic and universalizing ideological frame onto women’s relationships with their environments. However, these criticisms do not accurately reflect the complexity and breadth of the field and this too easy dismissal forecloses important questions ecofeminist thought raises regarding women’s environmental activism and theorization of their concerns. As one writer recently noted,
the marginalization of ecofeminist thought in the Western academy is a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater (Thompson 2006, 208).

After a brief introduction to key ideas that frame this analysis, this chapter opens with an interrogation of ecofeminism that follows the debates and locates the politics behind competing conceptualizations of “ecofeminism.” In particular, I consider the overdetermining limitations of addressing ecofeminism with reference to divisions in Western feminist theory (e.g. liberal, cultural, socialist, and postmodern feminisms; see Tong 1998). Karen Warren’s approach (2000), which looks to the ways in which theorists and activists have characterized the links between women’s interests and their understanding of the environment, offers productive alternatives. This serves as one means by which to interrupt the dominant genealogy of the field, yet this framework also requires troubling in order to both uphold Warren’s important points and offer a partial challenge that I hope will open up new “lines of flight” within the study of ecofeminist thought (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Last, I provide some final caveats regarding the potential of these lines of flight for an ecofeminism adequate to the task of describing the work of Chicana environmental actors. It is my hope that the remaining chapters of this dissertation will offer interventions into my framing of ecofeminism and will further disrupt and revise the canon while also providing conceptual grounds on which to build an alliance between Chicana Studies, ecofeminism, feminist and environmentalist thought.
Part I: Genealogy and Stuttering as Deterritorializing Functions

In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault characterizes genealogy as a palimpsestic, nonlinear documentary rather than a search for origins (1984, 76-77); it is a search for how truth is constructed rather than a search for Truth itself, a search for historicity rather than History. Foucault writes, “The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin… he must be able to recognize the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats—the basis of all beginnings, atavisms, and heredities” (80). A genealogist identifies and critiques the values that structure certain histories and the subject positions created by them. A genealogist recognizes that there are always resistances and multiple discourses, contestations and practices in play—her task is to avoid simplicity and to favor disruption and perspective or locatedness in her account of history. Foucault concludes, genealogy “does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all those discontinuities that cross us” (95).

This chapter highlights those discontinuities—the stuck places that got ecofeminism in the Western academy in trouble, including those sites of contestation that have experienced a turning away from—and probes them more thoroughly. Ultimately, the aim of this chapter is to “deterritorialize” ecofeminism, shifting its signification and opening the field up to revision and revitalization through the genesis of new directions (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 1983). Genealogy provides one strategy to enable deterritorialization because it reveals those discontinuities that act as stumbling blocks and that shift theorizing into alternative directions, but I also want to make the most of
the critical capacity of genealogy by pairing it with another of Gilles Deleuze’s notions: stuttering. Deleuze conceptualizes “stuttering” as a style of writing that resists language’s ordering function. Deleuze and his sometimes collaborator Félix Guattari explore the structuring mechanism of language for the ways in which “ordering words” shape not only our speech and writing, but the thought that is available through them and the limitations such ordering words may place on thought (Deleuze 1994, Albrecht-Crane 2005). Christa Albrecht-Crane describes Deleuze-Guattari’s work that strives to move against language’s ordering function. Their aims are as follows: 

The first is to provide concepts with which to better understand and resist the dynamic effects of official thought and conventional ways of ordering society (territorialization) which, by way of including only certain discourses, must exclude others. Secondly, Deleuze’s project makes possible an understanding of how in everyday life, by way of using official language and ways of thinking, individuals themselves perpetuate and cling to potentially oppressive mechanisms. (129)

Stuttering makes words work in new ways and interrupts conventional linguistic and discursive norms. Although ultimately, I hope “ecofeminism” can become a stutter within discursive formations of philosophical, environmental and feminist thought, I hope to create stutters within the field as well by pointing out its tensions and juxtaposing it with Chicana environmentalisms. That is, in tracing the genealogies of ecofeminism, I aim both to highlight those discontinuities that theorists and critics have turned away from, and make stutter those feminist histories about ecofeminism that have gone largely unchallenged and which continue to stand for the story of ecofeminism.
Part II: Ecofeminist Genealogies

This account of ecofeminism begins with a sketch of the broad landscape of the field before turning to the specific trajectories most ecofeminist genealogies follow. In the United States, the term “ecofeminism” describes many things, including how the domination of women may be linked to the domination of nature, examination of women’s environmental activism, and exploration of the spiritual ties between women and the natural world. While ecofeminist theories criticize the historically negative image of women and nature that exists in patriarchal cultures that measure nature by its market value, some ecofeminist thought also posits a positive identification of women with nature. Some ecofeminists have pointed to women’s greater contact with the environment due to farming and conservation work, their reproductive capabilities and care work, or their sense of a spiritual connection with “mother nature” in order to describe the origin of a woman-nature identification and to argue that women are well-positioned to protect nature.

While the character of the link between feminism and environmentalism (or, alternately, women and nature) has been under debate, ecofeminists from a variety of cultures and contexts have generated a diverse body of work that explores ways to think about the historical, material, symbolic, and theoretical links that connect the two within an oppressive framework as well as the ways in which “link” thinking fails in certain contexts. Indeed, there is a growing body of literature that is identified as ecofeminist, however, recent years have also shown a proliferation of literatures that have refused the name as a means to disassociate from any assumed linking of “women” and “nature.”
Why has ecofeminism received so much criticism? To begin with, like “feminism” and other large umbrella terms, “ecofeminism” is a highly contested term that has accumulated a variety of definitions. This stems from the already multiplicitous notions of “ecology” and “feminism” such that their conjunction makes for an exponentially more tense relationship. Tensions among theorists and activists yielded lively debate, yet while a clear notion of what ecofeminism may not have reached consensus within the emerging field, ideas about the field of ecofeminism have consolidated as much through the textual constructions of its critics as through those that write from within the field. As contemporary theorists looking to revitalize an overlooked branch of feminism frustratedly note, many critics of ecofeminism have conflated authors and approaches or decontextualized key claims, offering ecofeminism up as a “straw woman” (Cudworth 2005). Their criticisms have been widely heard, circulating with a peculiar vehemence through the refrain of “essentialism” (Cudworth 2005, Thompson 2006, Moore 2008a, 2008b). Here, I look to the given history of ecofeminism, that which is most often cited by ecofeminists and their critics alike to get a sense of where these criticisms have come from and how they function in the literature as ordering mechanisms that limit thought and reproduce a problematic logic.

The Given History: Exposing Disciplinary and Geographical Divides

Ecofeminism is an outgrowth of the feminist, ecological, peace, and decolonization movements around the world, but began to build theoretical momentum during the 1980s, as a critique of neocolonialist development efforts during the rise of neoliberalism. Despite the multicenteredness and necessarily transnational roots of the
convergence of feminist and ecological concerns, many texts that address themselves to
the topic of ecofeminism offer the same origin story, noting that the term was coined in
1974 by Francoise d’Eaubonne to express the idea that “there exists a direct link between
the oppression of women and the oppression of nature” (Tong 1998, 251, see also Gates
1998),9 moreover, if they cite activist histories at all, then they may reference Rachel
Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) or Lois Gibbs’s activism at the Love Canal (1979), which
leaves a sense that ecological feminism did originate within a Western context.10
However, such histories often do not account for the Green Belt Movement in Kenya or
land rights activism in the U.S., for example. Rather, they begin here and then include
several early theorists in the U.S. such as Mary Daly, Ynestra King, Carolyn Merchant,
Karen Warren and Val Plumwood, emphasizing two things: (1) a focus on theory rather
than activism or fieldwork (which often mirrors a disciplinary divide between the
humanities and social sciences) and (2) Western centrism, or more accurately, U.S.
centrism as accounts from the U.K., Canada, and Australia are often left out. Perhaps
because of these foci, contemporary ecofeminist writers and critics tend to categorize
ecofeminist theories according to the tenets of particular threads of Western feminist
theory, a trend I will demonstrate shortly.

One telling exception to the Western centrism in most accounts of ecofeminism is
the inclusion of Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, who wrote the often-cited *Ecofeminism*
(1993). While Shiva and Mies are included in the canon, they too catch the criticisms of
essentialism and universalism that are lobbed at Western ecofeminists, though curiously,
few consider that a cultural feminist lens may not be the most accurate filter through
which to understand their respective Indian and German standpoints. Texts such as this are considered in isolation rather than in context and, as such, not only is it the case that they are overdetermined by Western feminism in judging their aims, but that the supposed Western origin story also occludes the collaborative and multi-centered environment within which diverse theories and accounts of ecofeminism grew from both within and outside the U.S. What follows is a divide between theory and practice and a divide between “the West” and “the rest” that are assumed not only by critics, but by ecofeminists as well.

Echoing these given dichotomies, in *Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis* (1994), Rosi Braidotti writes that for sustainable development, “recognition of the connections between the domination of nature and of women provided important insights. In the South this recognition stimulated the debate on women, environment and sustainable development (WED) within the development context while in the North it has given rise to nature feminism and ecofeminism” (1994, 1). This origin story as well as the repetition of a historiography of ecofeminism that positions it as a feminist paradigm with its origin, central claims and objects of study grounded in the “West” needs to be interrogated in order to see what accounts are precluded from this framing. I argue that theory about the symbols and meaning of ecofeminism was not created merely from cultural ecofeminist theorizing, but from a variety of activist strategies as was seen in activism at Clayoquot Sound in Canada (Moore 2008a) and by the women of Chipko in India (Mies and Shiva 1993) for example. Moreover, as the evolution of the Women’s Environment and Development Organization
(WEDO) illustrates, ecofeminism was not merely a Western phenomenon and the divide between theory and action was not nearly so clear-cut (Sturgeon 2003). I have provided an overview of what is at stake in current histories of ecofeminism. I turn now to some of the central genealogies by current ecofeminist theorists who share my aim of revitalizing ecofeminism and writing against fatal claims of essentialism, but who ultimately reproduce some of the problems they are struggling against.

Limiting Revisions

Catriona Sandilands’s *The Good-Natured Feminist* (1999) offers a genealogy of ecofeminism with the explicit purpose of tracing a resilient thread of identity politics within ecofeminist thought. She cites an origin story complicit with that above and argues that ecofeminist thought has not been able to break free from the radical and cultural feminist debates on the “nature question” of the 1970s and 80s (1999, 5-6). In addition to d’Eaubonne, who celebrated a woman-nature connection, but who some have argued was less influential on U.S. ecofeminism than supposed due to the unavailability of English language translations (Gates 1998), Sandilands cites Sherry Ortner’s 1974 article “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” as formative for the development of ecofeminism in the West. However, in contrast to d’Eaubonne, Ortner links women’s cultural devaluation (and the source of patriarchy) to their association with nature and thus argues that women need to be seen participating in more creative projects so as to shift their alignment *from* nature *to* culture. Importantly, Sandilands figures these two poles as the grounds on which ecofeminist debates regarding women’s difference from men and their difference or similarity to “nature” were waged. What is perhaps most
significant is that she describes these debates as linked more closely to the radical
feminist search for the origins of patriarchy than anything else. She does not argue, for
example, that a reaction to toxicity in women’s environments is the foundation for
American ecofeminism, as Rachel Carson and Lois Gibbs have argued, and in so doing,
reasserts the dominance of (cultural feminist) theory over activism while implicitly
presuming there is always already a division between them.

Her genealogy remains linear, charting the course of radical feminist debates from
Shulamith Firestone’s (1970) identification of patriarchy as rooted in women’s
reproductive differences, a theory that advocated reproductive technologies to address
reproductive difference and free women from their association with the natural world and
the biological processes that limit women (1999, 8). Again, framing the debate in terms
of poles, Sandilands contrasts Firestone’s text with Mary Daly’s Gyn/Ecology (1978) that
argued that women’s reproductive capabilities were devalued along with the natural
world. Yet, women’s difference from men, far from being seen as a failure or lack,
should be celebrated as a source of strength (1999, 9). Daly, Sandilands argued,
represents the larger trend in the 1970s to reject liberal or equal rights approaches to
ending women’s oppression. The alternate and more radical aim was to revalue women’s
inherent difference from men and to create separate spaces where women can discover
their full potential: Sandilands surmises, “New relations to nature were an integral part of
this culture; women’s ‘special’ knowledges of reproduction and their experiences of
mediating between nature and culture were part of their difference from men and thus
needed to be discovered and freed” (1999, 10).
While cultural feminism is not the only or even the best frame with which to understand ecofeminism’s emergence, feminist discourses on religion and woman-centered spiritualities that grew within cultural feminism did give shape to some of the strands of ecofeminist thought that emerged at the time. Some spiritualist accounts turned away from a search for the origins of patriarchy toward an alternate story of pre-patriarchal bliss in a nature-centered, matrifocal society (Starhawk 1997). Sandilands claims that the identification between women, particularly their special knowledge rooted in their biological and spiritual connections with nature, provided ground on which to root an identity politics and give political weight and legitimacy to their arguments. This identitarian woman-nature connection, she suggests, permeates all the explicitly and self-identified ecofeminist literature that followed those cultural feminist debates regarding the “nature question.” I will address the role of epistemic privilege and the notion of identity politics Sandilands is articulating, but before picking up the remaining threads of Sandilands’s genealogy, I want to interrupt her conclusions regarding spiritual ecofeminisms.

As suggested above, spiritual ecofeminism is one of the most contested nodes of feminist thought and is often minimized in feminist histories as well as contemporary ecofeminist histories, a tradition that is evident across the mostly secular academy. Significantly, even though Sandilands cites Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *New Woman/New Earth* (1975), noting both its symbolic cultural elements as well as its materialist analysis, she concludes that, ultimately, she finds “the primary logic of women’s oppression in Western societies operates through their conceptual linkage with
nature and vice versa” (Sandilands 1999, 13). While Sandilands does not criticize Ruether for biologically determinist or universalizing overtones, she is wary of the slide into identity politics she sees possible in the logic identified above. It is important to note that a logic of identity is not always and in every context a bad thing, yet what I am concerned about here is that Sandilands has overlooked the complexity of Ruether’s arguments. Ruether’s text destabilizes rather than consolidates the idea of “women” (as Sandilands notes, Ruether gestures toward a genderless reality) while destabilizing what Christianity signifies. Ruether strategically works both within and against gender norms and religious understanding from within the specific disciplinary borders of theology.

Losing sight of the broader project Ruether is engaged in and the disciplinary context in which she works, Sandilands accommodates spiritual ecofeminist trends that might be read otherwise to the hegemonic and over-simplified cultural feminist framework in which ecofeminist spiritualities are most often interpreted.

Moreover, Ruether was not alone in her efforts at making interventions into mainstream religions though critics have focused their attention on goddess-worship rather than attend to the ecofeminist rewritings of Christianity and Judaism, for example.12 The phenomena of “greening religions” has become widespread only in recent years, yet some such as Ivone Gebara have long self-identified as ecofeminist and offered ecofeminist theological insights that fall outside the theoretical and geographical realms Sandilands outlines. Writing from Brazil, Gebara’s “The Trinity and Human Experience: An Ecofeminist Approach” (1996) uses the notion of the trinity to think beyond confining and oppressive interpretations of Christianity. Gebara adopts an ecofeminist perspective
“to show that there is a need to rediscover and reflect on the truly universal aspect of life, on dimensions that reflect what the earth and the cosmos are telling us about themselves, and the things women are vehemently reaffirming with regard to their own dignity and that of all humanity” (1996, 14). Though Sandilands and others might read this statement with the critique of universalism and essentialism tied to (American) cultural feminism in mind, Gebara is better understood by situating her writing and workshops (where she centers the role of poor women’s experiences) in relationship to the popular education and liberation theology movements lead by Paulo Freire and others.

Moreover, as Mary Judith Ress’ *Ecofeminism in Latin America* (2006) suggests, theology such as Gebara’s is derived from the interplay of indigenous traditions and knowledge and the liberation theology they often inform as well as the union of thought and activism that comes out of popular education praxis. In the tradition of liberation theology and popular education, individuals engage in a process of coming to critical consciousness through analysis of the experience of oppression (Freire 1970). While both the process of consciousness-raising and the content of her essay suggest that Gebara is looking for universal understanding and a unitary oppositional identity based on a shared critical consciousness, her interpretation of the Christian trinity emphasizes multiplicity. Her ecofeminist understanding accommodates the tension between the communion of multiplicity and unity. Consequently, the “revolutionary subject” is not necessarily presupposed or stable; it is not a bearer of normative gender characteristics, but it is oriented toward a subversive gender, class and race politics. Not only does such an approach reject essentialism, but Gebara’s work also stands in direct contradiction to
most readings of ecofeminist spirituality, which understand them to be apolitical and merely celebratory (Cudworth 111).

Productive Co-Constructions: Proliferating Ecofeminisms

I have been following Catriona Sandilands’ genealogy of ecofeminism in the Western academy by working both within and against her U.S. centrism and, related, her underscoring of its roots in cultural feminism as a means of understanding the identitarian logic that she finds so problematic in the field. Having sketched the earlier, radical foremothers, Sandilands follows with a genealogy of the proliferation of ecofeminisms that have written against or sought to complicate the earlier literature. She writes that, through taking up the insights of black feminist and postcolonial theory, “By and large this proliferation circulated around the problem of developing a better standpoint from which ecofeminists could speak of the specific relations between women and nature” (1999, 50). As such, the reader can see the growing role of identity politics and standpoint theory that comes into play, but I distinguish Sandilands’ work here regarding the “proliferation of ecofeminisms” and my own thoughts on the “flight from ecofeminism.” The relevant distinction is that Sandilands remains interested in narrating the given story of ecofeminism, including those works and theorists that stand under the sign “ecofeminism,” without looking to those works that explicitly define themselves against what they understand ecofeminism to be, thereby shaping the field from without. This co-construction of the field is an important key to understanding ecofeminist thought; looking more closely at those discontinuities that created breaks in the field is equally important, if not more so, than looking at the conversations that are negotiated.
within the field itself as though they were occurring in isolation. It also calls into question the strict focus on identity politics as the most troubling trope in “ecofeminism.”

To unfold the remaining story of ecofeminism’s given genealogy, I will sketch Sandilands’ identitarian focus as well as Erika Cudworth’s genealogy, which moves with similar strides, but shifts focus. Cudworth, though yielding nearly the same genealogy, investigates the different understandings of systems critique offered by the authors. Though ultimately, Sandilands aims at a poststructural, post-identity ecofeminism and Cudworth seeks a more complex, structuralist approach to ecofeminist theorizing, both largely reiterate the debates contemporary theorists now look back upon and see as the socialist response to radical feminism. In doing so, both authors risk (despite their own desires and best intentions) situating themselves as more thoroughly enlightened, more thoroughly informed by poststructural thought, and located further along the linear trajectory of progress. After an introduction to their mutually supplementing accounts, I hope to interrupt this narrative with an alternative understanding of ecofeminism’s development during the “proliferating” years by injecting my understanding of the “flight from ecofeminism” into the conversation.

Despite the growing complexity of radical feminist texts that sought to theorize patriarchy in more concrete terms, Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* (1980) broadened the argument regarding patriarchal roots of nature-woman oppression by showing that *capitalism* and development also play a role. Merchant writes of a shift in thought that saw nature not as organic and mysterious, but as instrumental and alterable via mechanical technologies. Here, the dual control of women and nature through
technologies and circulation through a capitalist system links women and nature in a
devalued relationship. Early theorizations struggled to make sense of this shift, yet
Sandilands cites Merchant’s later work *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World*
(1992) as the origin of socialist ecofeminism. For Merchant, Bina Agarwal (1997) and
others who identify with socialist ecofeminism, Sandilands suggests that though they
shift from a biological association of women with nature, in emphasizing the sexual
division of labor and an understanding of reproduction not as “natural” but as socially
organized but central to women’s understanding of the environment, they continue to link
women and the natural world as having a relationship of identity based a privileged
epistemological standpoint (Sandilands 1999, 61).14 It is assumed that women, by virtue
of socialization and reproduction, have a closer, better understanding of the natural
environment and are better able to protect it.

Further in Sandilands’ evolving story of ecofeminism, she distinguishes a trend
among socialist responses to cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminist responses to
ecofeminism wherein social philosophers aim to move beyond the reductionist efforts of
the cultural theorists, but also seek to avoid economic reductionist tendencies in some
socialist accounts (62). In characterizing “social ecofeminism” Sandilands cites Ynestra
King’s “The Eco-Feminist Imperative” (1981), Val Plumwood’s “Ecofeminism: An
Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments” (1986), and Judith Plant’s
“Ecofeminism” (1991). Importantly, each theorist offers a theory of interconnectivity or
intersubjectivity while critiquing hierarchical dualisms in Western culture. This approach
is best summarized by Karen Warren’s (1990) theories on the “logic of domination.”
Warren’s thesis is that there is a tradition of dualist and hierarchical thinking that undergirds Western patriarchy in which binaries such as man/woman, mind/body, culture/nature and a host of others are subject to a logic such that the first term in a binary pair is culturally privileged, naturalized, and seen to be morally superior to the second term, which justifies its domination (Warren 1990, 175). This logic, though symbolic, is thought to permeate institutions where the dominatory logic manifests materially and systematically in the lives of individuals.

Given their understanding of binaries and dualist thought, social ecofeminists often see the distinction between socialist and cultural ecofeminisms as a false dichotomy where cultural feminism simply maintains patriarchal dualism via reversing the valuation of binaristic terms yet socialist strategies proved too rationalist and culture-centered; in this, theorists saw masculinist values being propped up under the guise of socialist feminism. For social ecofeminists, Sandilands proposes, dualism is transcended by taking the best of both strategies and incorporating them into a more inclusive ecofeminist worldview:

To social ecofeminists, this practice does not mean that women are closer to nature than men; it means that, for a variety of reasons, women have been placed as ‘Others’ in a position that does not produce the same destructive separation from nature, the other Other, that men experience. Thus, a process of respecting, and working from the voice of this connected Otherness is the key to a new ecological and social ethic. (1999, 66)

Despite the seeds of poststructural thought in the social ecofeminist literature that seeks to deconstruct and transcend binaries through embracing a position of radical otherness, Sandilands finds a problematic deployment of standpoint theory and resultant identity politics to be embedded in all three positions. This is a problem, she writes, not
just for the vague and idealized conceptualization of women, but for that of nature as well: “In accounts that emphasized dualistic conceptual frameworks, such as that in which what is ‘not masculine’ became the truth of essential femininity, so too did that which is ‘not culture’ become the natural state from which we came and toward which we must aspire… the particular social creation of nature that many ecofeminists wanted to promote and politicize was misrecognized as a nature given in nature” (1999, 68-69).

And even among those purportedly anti-dualist positions, theorizing started from the position of human injustices, human identities and notions of the subject rather than a more complex understanding of an agential non-human world that is not transparently knowable to human subjects. Thus, for Sandilands, a posthumanist destabilization of both human and nature identity and subjectivity is the preferred ecofeminist strategy.

Ultimately, ecofeminism is best served by a posthumanist agenda that I hope to flesh out in future chapters; however, counter to Sandilands, I ask whether post-identitarian strategies are always the best given the historical and political landscape of particular regions and communities. Similarly, I question whether or not some deployments of cultural identity are compatible with her posthumanist agenda. As I show in the remaining chapters, some theorizations of identity by Chicana scholars claim an open and relational identity that is also politicized with respect to gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and region-specific (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987).

Erika Cudworth offers a genealogy similar to Sandilands’ but framed according to Mary Mellor’s categories of “affinity” and “social” explanations of the women-nature link (Mellor 1992). While Cudworth is quick to emphasize that these divisions are
somewhat arbitrary and that texts within each category do tend to overlap in many of their interests, they are distinguished based on the assumption that affinity ecofeminism emphasizes “spirituality, and the physical bodily experiences of women, which encourage identification with ‘nature’” and social explanations, which emphasize “ecofeminist ethics and engage more closely with free social and political theory” (102). Her dichotomy is similar to the cultural and socialist ecofeminist distinction that Sandilands and others draw while Cudworth also appears to reveal key disciplinary differences with respect to each mode of thought.

Affinity ecofeminism, according to Cudworth, encompasses a variety of connections, from Daly and Griffin’s positive valuation of the biologically female-nature connection to King’s valuation of interconnectivity. Cudworth’s main efforts in describing affinity ecofeminism are to dismantle the power of critiques of essentialism, which strike this particular branch of ecofeminism more often than any other and speak as though affinity (or cultural) ecofeminism stands in for the whole field. Cudworth rereads Daly and Griffin’s bodies of work to locate a certain problematic universalism present while displacing claims of essentialism. It is an effort to call critics to both get clear on their language and to get careful about thinking through the potential of the work from its own context rather than stripped from it. In so doing, this would lead to a more sustained and engaged dialogue with ecofeminism rather than a flight from it. Central to this argument too, is her claim that among spiritual ecofeminisms in particular, essentialism is a product of theorizing “normative truths about social life” as all religious philosophies do (2005, 111). Ultimately, her reframing reads these ecofeminist trends not
as essentializing ideas about women and nature, but as an exchange of symbols in a
discourse that has political utility at a certain historical moment. Essentialism is a
discourse that cannot be presumed innocent or guilty. Writing in a Foucauldian vein, she
offers,

Ecofeminism is engaged in providing a set of contesting discourses to describe
and rescribe our gendered relations to nature. I use the term rescribing because I
think they attempt to do just that, and that such rescribing is not ontologically
“essentialist.” The questioning and problematizing of our prevailing notions of
gender, of the links between these and what we think of as nature opens up
conceptual possibilities for new definitions and concepts. (114)

Cudworth, whose main aim is to construct a genealogy not about identity, as
Sandilands does, but about theorizing ecofeminism through a systemic approach to
understanding oppression, traces affinity and social ecofeminisms according to how they
understand the nature of women/environment oppression. Affinity modes tend to see one
system, patriarchy, as all encompassing. Cudworth’s turn to social ecofeminism offers a
somewhat more expansive picture. She cites Merchant as developing an understanding of
how patriarchy and capitalism intersect to oppress both women and nature, and Vandana
Shiva, who theorizes the intersection of capitalism, colonialism and the gendering of
nature. However, while both offer more complex understandings of structural domination
than Cudworth finds in affinity approaches, she argues that both subsume capitalist and
colonialist oppression under patriarchy, citing Shiva that “gender subordination and
patriarchy are the oldest of oppressions” (116). This echoes Sandilands claim that though
ecofeminist thought diversified to look at the ways in which racial and caste oppression
affected women, women were first and foremost oppressed as women, reinforcing the
formula of identity politics that is in play.
Likewise, though Warren and Plumwood offer more complex understandings of oppressive systems, they fall short in their efforts. Warren theorizes a logic of domination that posits a singular hierarchical logic that permeates man/woman, culture/nature, us/them without thinking through the differences between sexism, naturism, or colonialism, for example. Plumwood argues that there is a web of oppressive systems that function both autonomously and in connection with each other, but that they share a “unified overall mode of operation, forming a single system,” a system that is based on the ultimate valuation of reason which hierarchicalizes all that is not associated with reason (Plumwood 1986 quoted in Cudworth 2005, 121).

These arguments and others like them are troubling not because of claims of essentialism—a fear that Sandilands maintains in her own identity-based genealogy—but due to their universalizing and reductionist quality. Cudworth writes, “Difference has been unwittingly marginalized when ecofeminism is so well placed to capture the complexity and power dynamics of its dominatory functions” (127). As a consequence, Cudworth advocates a context specific, structuralist understanding of related oppressions. Invoking complexity theory as a means to understand social life, she asks ecofeminists to think carefully about the ways individual systems (e.g. racism, sexism, speciesism) have evolved and the ways in which they may or may not work together in specific instances. As such, she advocates an intersectional multiple systems approach that displaces the overemphasis on patriarchy and/or capitalism as the overdetermining site of oppression for women and the natural world while not necessarily questioning the identity politics that inhere in such approaches to critiquing social systems and structures.
Given this genealogy of the “proliferation of ecofeminisms,” I turn to my own review of the “flight from ecofeminism.” Sandilands and Cudworth rehearse the dichotomy between materialist or socialist and cultural ecofeminist approaches, accepting the given frameworks of cultural and socialist feminism that some, notably Clare Hemmings in “Telling Feminist Stories” (2005), have thoroughly troubled. I look to further fracturings within the field of ecofeminism to see what those texts that refuse the name, but engage in similar politics have to tell us about their own theoretical frameworks (including why they are thought to be superior to what stands for ecofeminism) as well as where they see the boundaries of ecofeminism sitting.

Ecofeminism has been distinguished from or now goes by the names of: ecological feminism (Cuomo 1998), feminist environmentalism (Agarwal 1997), environmental feminism (Steady 1998), socialist ecofeminism (Salleh 1997), spiritual ecofeminism (Starhawk 1999, Christ and Plaskow 1992), feminist political ecology (Rocheleau et al. 1999), and women in environment and development (Braidotti et al. 1994, Harcourt 1994, Visvanathan et al. 1997, Hawthorne 2002). What is at stake in this multitude of discourses and what was so unruly within that unstable category “ecofeminism” that it could not be contained? A primary concern of mine is that whatever sins of essentialism ecofeminists may have committed are thought to have been addressed in the refusal of “ecofeminism” and the taking up under a more innocent umbrella term. Concurrently, there is a danger that the dismissal of ecofeminist philosophy will yield a turning away from projects that interrogate the connections
between the construction of ecological and gendered subjectivities, a philosophical interest that is woven throughout this dissertation. While it is impossible within the scope of this chapter to investigate all of the newly branching fields above, what is most concerning is the fact that the authors included thus far have failed to discuss the co-evolving, co-constructing histories of development-oriented approaches. Because the critique from development scholars has had and continues to have so much more institutional support and power than more humanities-based or philosophical approaches to ecofeminist theorizing, it is necessary to address it openly rather than remain within the recognized bounds of what understands itself to be “ecofeminism.”

As noted above, the most critical responses to ecofeminist philosophy have come out of development literature, including women in development (WID) and women in environment and development (WED). The common thread within the WED approach is that, in lieu of the abstract logic of domination to draw connections between gender oppression and nature domination, researchers rely on empirical evidence that the world’s poorest individuals live in the most ecologically fragile zones, and that women constitute the majority of the world’s poorest people (Hawthorne 2002). This perspective pays less attention to how women and nature are symbolically linked, focusing more on how the sexual division of labor positions women such that work responsibilities bring them in greater contact with the natural world. There is recognition that women are affected by the current ecological crisis in gendered ways, but that the ways in which they experience those effects will depend on each woman’s particular social location and her relative access to power (Steady 1998, 19). Some theorists argue that based on women’s
presumed privileged knowledge and experience of working closely with the environment they should be sought out as environmental managers to solve the environmental crisis (Steady 1998, Zweifel 1997, Low and Tremayne 2001). Others offer a deeper critique of the development process, suggesting that we need more than just change in policy, but a “recasting of the development enterprise” (Harcourt 1994, 4, see also Agarwal 1997, Braidotti et al. 1994, Visvanathan et al. 1997). While the WED contributions have been extensive and have provided empirical studies that attempt to offer sensitive, intersectional accounts of women’s relationships to the natural world, there are some important limitations that become increasingly problematic given their dominance over the field.

Vandana Shiva is one of the most recognizable names in ecofeminism and though she focuses on colonialism and development in her work, her early work (Mies and Shiva 1993, Shiva 1997) is more closely identified with the failings of ecofeminism in some of the WED literature than with the field of development; critiques of her work can illustrate my point on the shortcomings of the WED approach. First, Bina Agarwal (1997), who favors the label “environmental feminism,” suggests that the strong ideological focus within Shiva’s spiritual ecofeminism fails to address the material sources of the domination of women and nature; she believes it fails to account for women’s lived relationship with nature and ignores the intersectional nature of identity, where race or caste may, for some women, play a larger role in their subordination than gender (Agarwal 70). However, while Agarwal advocates greater balance between ideological and materialist analyses, few examples from within the WED literature grounded in the
social sciences offer careful cultural critique as Meera Nanda’s argument below will demonstrate. Second, following Agarwal, Nanda (1997) criticizes what she takes to be the ahistorical, uncritical celebration of the feminine subject of traditional patriarchal communities in India that she finds in Shiva’s work. She notes that the emphasis on the “subsistence perspective” as an alternative to global capitalism ignores traditional forms of patriarchy, including those associated with Hinduism, from which Prakriti as an ecofeminist principle derives. This is no small matter as Nanda suggests that this perspective works hand in hand with both traditional patriarchal modes as well as new ones that incorporate women’s invisible work into development schemes (378).

As a corrective Nanda offers a materialist analysis that avoids monolithic understandings of “modernism,” “the west,” “capitalism,” and “Third World women” that she finds ecofeminist work (some ecofeminist work… she fails to make distinctions). She mobilizes Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities model that establishes a basic universal minimum standard for well-being. Nanda suggests that women are more likely to reach their potential in waged labor and land ownership than in “traditional relations” of the sort encouraged by Shiva. She writes, “The personal liberties and autonomy that this change from private to public patriarchy affords women are limited…. But, limited though they might seem against an as yet unborn future, these liberties are by no means insignificant when compared to the far more oppressive limits that the classical, private forms of patriarchy have imposed on women in Third World societies” (391).

Nanda delivers some important points; however, as with Agarwal, there are weaknesses within her argument: she cites the “phenomenal success” of Grameen Bank
microlending policies for women as an alternative to mining the “subsistence perspective,” but microlending has been widely critiqued for the same reason she faults ecofeminism’s fold into conservative political and economic regimes (384). Such schemes do not guarantee women’s empowerment and may act as an undue burden on them by adding a second shift of labor to their day, by cornering them in a debt-trap or by disrupting relationships in the home due to tensions over finance management (Feiner and Barker 2007). Moreover, Nanda does not address criticisms regarding the complicity of development projects that have had a hand in what some see as a loss of sovereignty among nation states in the South (Mendoza 2002, Hawthorne 2002). She also mobilizes an instrumental concept wherein “well-being” is theorized in terms that do not consider environmental well-being. More important from the standpoint of feminist critique, she commits the error she sees in ecofeminism of failing to cite which women’s lives she thinks may be improved. Nanda’s universalizing liberal humanist approach reiterates the lack of intersectional analysis many have found lacking in some ecofeminist writing while offering a theory that does not attend to the natural world on its own terms or in relation to women unless it is packaged as a commodity.

There is room for Nanda to retain her critique against Shiva while also creating space for alternative ecofeminist interventions in her own work, yet Nanda responds with a primarily materialist analysis that has not addressed the kind of symbolic capital that Shiva offers and that nonetheless may fall short in delivering women’s economic freedom and empowerment. Nanda’s analysis, like many of the WED-driven accounts, fails to bridge the gap between material and symbolic resistance. For example, Nanda advocates
local hybridizations of western cultural and economic models that defy the good/evil binaries of the developed and developing world that she attributes to Shiva’s work, but she leaves little space for what might arguably be a similarly hybridized, or at least locally resignified and strategically deployed, use of the concept Prakriti that she has found so troubling.

Religious reclamations and resignifications are central to many feminist struggles, particularly within Latina and Chicana feminisms, yet divisions between cultural and materialist feminisms have prevented WED-based environmental approaches from recognizing this important tool. The role of religion in particular, but also of art and other markers of symbolic and cultural currency remain under theorized within WED approaches. Though cultural approaches are being explored in the humanistic fields that offer literature on eco-criticism (Gaard and Murphy 1998), greening religions (Ruether 2005, Eaton and Lorentzen 2003) and environmental anthropology (Haenn and Wilk 2006), these fields are more marginal and less well-supported in the U.S. academy and have less transnational reach than WED–driven research. Further, that these approaches remain parallel rather than in dialogue is a detriment to both the humanities and social science-based approaches.

I map these trends in symbolic/radical cultural and materialist or socialist/development focused feminist approaches to the environment not as a means of judging one more or less useful, more or less progressive, more or less feminist than the other and thus reifying the genealogies others have given, but to reveal the stakes of the field. As Niamh Moore explains, “Genealogy is a particularly appropriate tool from an
ecofeminist perspective because of its rebuttal of dualism and its refusal to declare
discourses such as essentialism or anti-essentialism as either good or bad, but as always
dangerous, always requiring attention to the moment of the emergence of the discourse
and to its mobilization” (2008a, 285). I am concerned that what is perceived to be cultural
ecofeminism has been oversimplified, demonized and discarded while being made to
stand in for all of ecofeminism. Socialist ecofeminisms such as those documented by
Sandilands and Cudworth remain marginalized because of their association with
“ecofeminism” yet have given way to “feminist environmentalism” and “women,
environment and development.” Theorists in those fields gain legitimacy in part through
their dismissal and distance from the label “ecofeminist,” but they do so not just at the
cost of the field of ecofeminism—I believe the stakes are higher than that. In both
cultural and materialist approaches, each strategy has its pros and cons; materialist
ecofeminism points to the ways in which women and nature are often linked as a result of
the material consequences of patriarchal, racist and colonialist systems of domination and
neoliberal development ideology; the symbolic/cultural ecofeminist strains of thought—
though problematic under certain circumstances—could lend women cultural capital that
might strategically reinforce the need to draw women into conservation planning, give
them greater visibility in environmental and/or women’s organizations and give their
protests more credibility. Each creates different subject positions where women can
become legible in their struggles for social justice.

However, there is something significant in the trend that sees gender and
development discourses around sustainability proliferating while texts classified as
“ecofeminism”—or worse in the eyes of many, “spiritual ecofeminism”—are dismissed out of hand with an easy reference to essentialism. One lingering concern with respect to materialist ecofeminism is that it largely conceives of the natural environment as a resource that is in more or less danger of disappearing or being degraded. Such views do not challenge individuals to see the natural world as inherently valuable, and thus do not call for a radical rethinking of subjectivity or behavior. Equally important, the role of spirituality itself is at stake. Ecofeminisms of all shades need a better, more generous and more complex way to understand women’s religious engagement that moves beyond accounts that reduce religion to culture as either idealized celebration religious symbols or as merely something that positions men and women differently in relation to social and material resources. Rather, studying the ways in which spirituality may offer a unique engagement with the natural, material, and spirit worlds that exceeds secular academic framings that figure it as irrational or pre-modern can yield important insights about the nature of the self, our connections with others and the ways we gain strength to continue difficult resistance efforts. 

Part III: Contesting Ecofeminist Genealogies

Thinking through the implications of Sandilands and Cudworth’s work as well as my own extension of their arguments underscores some enduring problems with ecofeminism. The homogenizing identitarianism and universalism remain problems within ecofeminism. However, I am concerned with the limits on thought that are imposed by useful, but overdetermining conceptual frameworks such as the cultural versus socialist conceptions that dominate most genealogies. As such, I would like to
shift the focus away from what must be fit into a Western feminist theory paradigm
toward Karen Warren’s analysis of ecofeminism that explores instead the manifold ways
in which theorists and activists describe the woman-nature connection across the varieties
of ecofeminism. Admittedly, this holds to Sandilands and Cudworth’s worries in
presupposing that there is indeed a connection of some sort—no matter how differently it
might be conceptualized—and thus we remain trapped within identitarian logics. Yet
Warren’s framing does make some theoretical moves that allow for other conceptual
shifts to be had; namely, it showcases the diversity within ecofeminist thought, while
revealing the multiple connections between and among categories that are often hidden
from view by the ordering and exclusionary logic that mobilizes the cultural/socialist
binary.

In *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It
Matters* (2000), Warren explores the theoretical concerns of Western ecofeminist
philosophy. She is clear that she is a philosopher and that, consequently, her interests lie
much more in the conceptual landscape of ecofeminist thought than in the grassroots
expressions it takes; moreover, her interest is explicitly in Western theory rather than
elsewhere. As with Sandilands and Cudworth, such a limited focus on philosophical
approaches rather than an analysis of ecofeminist direct action or literary expressions
carries its own limitations; these limitations will be explored throughout the remainder of
this dissertation with respect to Chicana studies, including theoretical and cultural
productions as well as Chicana direct action environmentalism.
Warren’s ecofeminist genealogy begins with the following: “All ecofeminists agree that there are important connections between the unjustified domination of women and nature, but they disagree about both the nature of those connections and whether some of the connections are potentially liberating or grounds for reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women” (2000, 21). In response to Warren, we must ask under what circumstance and in whose eyes are we to judge whether the connections are “potentially liberating or grounds for reinforcing harmful stereotypes about women?” This difficulty remains the central preoccupation within the discourse of Western ecofeminism and one wonders if the identitarian focus that this question may come down to really is what is at stake here, as Sandilands suggests. Surely, the answer to whether a woman-nature connection is liberating or oppressive can only be a provisional one that depends on the particular community and historical moment under consideration. The remainder of my dissertation, therefore, seeks to investigate this link as it is perceived by Chicana and Mexican-American theorists, artists, and activists and looks for the best course of action to dismantle or strategically utilize such a link. At the moment, however, it is important to note that while Warren’s approach has its problems in its potential for universalism and its limiting focus on Western contexts (absent a strong minoritarian perspective within those Western contexts such as perspectives from Chicana scholars and activists), it also has some positive features and does some important work.

Warren manages to move beyond the strict confines of cultural approaches (which Cudworth finds to be lacking in structural critique and Sandilands finds to be too universalizing or even essentialist) and materialist critiques (which often attempt to posit
themselves as more critical and sophisticated than symbolic analyses). Instead, Warren offers a more pluralistic taxonomy of the interconnections between “human-Others” and “nature-Others” based on “historical and causal, conceptual, empirical, socioeconomic, linguistic, symbolic and literary, spiritual and religious, epistemological, ethical and political interconnections” (xv). What is significant about Warren’s taxonomy is that it interrupts the conflation of an undifferentiated notion of ecofeminism with a simplistic understanding of “cultural feminism,” allowing for a more complex understanding of individual theorists than is usually afforded. It also allows a reader to see how Shiva’s work, for example, can be read as at once spiritual, symbolic, epistemological, and socioeconomic. Moreover, while Warren’s ultimate interest is a philosophical one, her taxonomy does trouble the dichotomy between theory and activism and highlights how important disciplinary divides have been in limiting the conceptualization of ecofeminism. This conceptual clarity is, arguably, more useful than the historical genealogies that Sandilands and Cudworth offer as each of their histories trap ecofeminism within a partial history that presents itself as the full truth. This is the case despite the authors’ suggestions that theirs are just one of many possible stories. In failing to disrupt their histories or gesture at alternative or multiple accounts, they do little to trouble the progressive linearity of their genealogy.

There is a destabilizing function in thinking outside the schools of Western feminist thought that certainly goes some way in decentering the western origin story and imposed interpretive framework. Nonetheless, as Sandilands shows, there is a particular logic that remains throughout her elaboration of the “link thinking” that can be seen in
varied approaches to ecofeminist theory: it is a logic rooted in a resilient identity politics and the notion of epistemic privilege that is thought to inhere. I agree with Sandilands that we need to be able to deconstruct the potency of such thought, but I would not want to disable claims rooted in epistemic privilege and a weak sense of identity altogether. As I detail throughout the dissertation, theorists and artists working in Chicana studies mobilize claims of identity in multiple and complex ways while nevertheless staking important political claims to identity and epistemic privilege. While the following chapters of this dissertation review identitarian “link thinking” and attempt to provide non-essentialist and non-universalizing accounts of link thinking, the remainder of this chapter digs a little deeper into the stakes of “link” thinking to consider its utility in direct action ecofeminist work.

Part IV: Lines of Flight

Rather than see a link between “women” and “nature” Noël Sturgeon prefers to frame ecofeminism as a link between feminism and environmentalism as political movements (1997). By extension, rather than focus on ecofeminism as a theory of identity, Sturgeon considers it a social movement, opening it up to a much broader understanding. She defines social movements as “contestants in hegemonic power relations, through which change is produced by numerous kinds of ‘action,’ including that of the deployment of symbolic resources, shifts in identity construction, and the production of both popular and scholarly knowledge—as well as direct action, civil disobedience, strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, lobbying, and other more traditionally recognized forms of political action” (1997, 3).
This broad frame of understanding partially displaces the focus on identity and, most importantly, contextualizes identity within its proper historical frame and strategic deployment; identity is understood to remain just one aspect of social movement rather than the entirety of ecofeminist thought. Sturgeon aptly demonstrates her position in “Ecofeminist Natures and Transnational Environmental Politics” (2003). This article documents how different themes and theories of ecofeminism have informed development discourses and organizations, including the ways in which strategically essentialist versions of ecofeminism have been called upon by groups such as WEDO (Women’s Environment and Development Organization) to combat other strategic essentialisms. In particular, WEDO responded to a hegemonic discourse of global environmentalism that deployed universalist language linking environmentalism to neoliberal “democracy,” development and militarism. Sturgeon’s research on WEDO offers several significant insights. First, it decenters the U.S. context by assessing the discourse of ecofeminism that emerged from an organization that, though founded by two women in the U.S., brought women leaders from all over the world to chair WEDO and who each had “long-term commitments to the intersections of development, environment, and feminism” (2003, 107).

Second, following a trend in WED-based approaches outlined earlier in this chapter, though the U.S. founders openly rejected the identification of WEDO with ecofeminism, some of the co-chairs displayed an explicit ecofeminist perspective and all deployed the rhetoric of ecofeminism if not the identity. It was the language of “women’s nurturance” and knowledge of nature that allowed the group to come together, to receive
funding and to make legible political demands yet in practice Sturgeon’s research shows that the women did not focus on a narrow and universal women-nature identity. Rather, WEDO-sponsored caucuses at the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing drew women together who focused on the linkage of issues (deforestation, increasing toxicity, etc.) rather than on their shared identity as women (2003, 110-112).

Furthermore, though the rhetoric may sound essentialist on its surface, it provided a strategic means to bring diverse groups of women together at conferences, tribunals and workshops such as those in Beijing where their varied backgrounds, experiences and demands undermined any assumptions of essentialism or universal sameness while nonetheless providing a solid ground for them to meet and work from in ways that contest Western imperialism, sexism, militarism and racism. Importantly, as with WEDO and the conferences it organized, Sturgeon explains, “Just the construction of these arenas creates new opportunities for the less powerful to gain political leverage” (2003, 118).

This article provides a key intervention in the genealogies I have traced due to its disruption of the supposed U.S.-centeredness of ecofeminist thought, its troubling of the theory/direct action divide, and its bridge between symbolic and materialist analysis or alternately, cultural versus development focused approaches. Lastly, Sturgeon’s study displaces claims of essentialism, which the author suggests are often made by ignoring the diversity and context of ecofeminist thought and by creating of it a straw woman argument (2003, 94-95).

Sturgeon disrupts the essentialist identity narrative in ecofeminist thought that Sandilands’ genealogy is premised on and which she writes against in her call for a post-
identitarian ecofeminism. The empirical research on WEDO adds much to our understanding of how identity claims do work in unstable and strategic ways, but I want to add to this discussion another intervention into Sandilands’ work. Though Chris Cuomo is very supportive of Sandilands’ *The Good-Natured Feminist*, she rightly critiques a short-sighted understanding of identity politics that she finds in the text. Sandilands’ chapter, “Identity: Another Genealogy,” traces claims to epistemic authority based on the workers’ movement and the social movements that have taken its place upon its decline. Sandilands offers an astute analysis of identity politics as theorized by roots in Marxist “class consciousness” and later taken up by feminist standpoint theorists such as Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding. As she interrogates identity politics, she outlines the ways in which identity serves as grounds on which subjects claim epistemic authority that justifies their insights and political demands. However, as identity is not a given, but must be achieved, Sandilands argues that the *aim of politics becomes* identity construction. In other words, the reasoning reveals that identity is not a means, but an end that must retroactively be made to seem originary in order to foster claims of legitimacy. There are two fundamental problems with this approach to politics, according to Sandilands: first, “The desire for order within obscures diversity, obscures the moments where floating signifiers are articulated with other elements in a different (and potentially conflicting) chain of meaning” and second, “identity necessarily fails to reach its desire for self-completion and [thus] identity itself cannot be the point of politics” (2003, 46-47).
This analysis is troubling in terms of ignoring how identities may be strategically and temporarily deployed, as Sturgeon notes above. Cuomo takes the point further, critiquing the narrow understanding of identity politics that comes out of the workers’ movement. She writes, “Sandilands fails to get curious about the many shapes of feminist identity politics and feminist female subjectivities—and of the fascinating convergence in ecofeminism of these subjectivities and ethical regard for the more-than-human world” (2001, 154). Though Cuomo does not offer any examples to illustrate her point, Sandilands’ theory of identity as a closed and exclusionary mode of conceiving of oneself fails to account for the open, multiply-situated and fractured, traveling subjectivities Chicana theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), María Lugones (2003) and Chela Sandoval (2000) theorize. As shown in later chapters of this dissertation, Chicana and Mexican-American theorists, artists and activists contest the narrow understandings of identity that some ecofeminist theorists and critics find so problematic. They question the call for an abandonment of identity and show the importance of considering tentative and open identities drawn with a keen historical and political awareness and that can allow for coalitional engagements rather than the exclusionary politics Sandilands fears.

Lastly, in my attempts to disrupt given genealogies that center identity, essentialism, and Western feminist paradigms and origin story, I turn to Niamh Moore, whose work exposes the constructedness of the debate on essentialism and the politics of feminist historiography, effectively retaliating against the criticisms that have sidelined ecofeminism within feminist thought. Moore’s research reads the struggle by the Friends of Clayoquot Sound (FOCS) as a particular site of contention within ecofeminism and
feminist thought. She is concerned with the contempt for ecofeminism and peace activism found in feminist studies, often brought about by claims of essentialism, but which Moore finds extremely problematic both for the way it obscures attention to the complexity of ecofeminism and women’s activism and for the way it uncritically upholds a progress narrative celebrating the supposedly post-essentialist, poststructural present. A more useful approach is to recognize that essentialism and anti-essentialism are co-constructed and that a genealogical approach to understanding the meaning and practice of ecofeminism can tell us more about specific ecofeminist strategies than the criticism of “essentialism” can. Citing two key moments at the peace camp, Moore shows that despite deploying discourses of maternalism and non-violence publicly, the meanings were constantly contested and unevenly taken up among the camp dwellers:

By foregrounding the ongoing re-negotiation of the meanings of “women,” “feminism” and “eco/feminism” at and through the camp, I point to the limitations of essentialism as a framework for theorizing and understanding non-violent eco/feminist activism, and the possibilities afforded by a genealogical approach which focuses rather on how the categories of woman and essentialism are invoked and to what ends. (2008a, 284)

Moore is, of course, writing about a phenomenon bigger than what she witnesses at Clayoquot. She is writing about feminism’s relationship with itself, and particularly the politics surrounding the abjection of ecofeminism from contemporary feminist thought (2008b, 316, 320). Her argument not only clarifies how to read the articulation of feminist and environmentalist concerns for contradiction and complexity, but suggests that refocusing attention on activist and spiritual ecofeminisms—the sites of most scorn from anti-essentialists—has a lot to teach feminist studies about its own tensions and anxieties. Citing Jana Sawicki, Moore asks scholars to re-evaluate ecofeminism and to
recognize that criticisms of essentialism are not sufficient to dismiss the field: “we cannot
tell if any theory is liberatory by virtue of exploring its theoretical potential and pitfalls,
but through historical inquiry” (2008b, 319). Her rereading of feminist debates and
dissimilars of ecofeminism and peace activism at Clayoquot not only provides theoretical
insights regarding the importance of genealogical understanding, but as with Sturgeon,
demonstrates the importance of reading symbols (e.g. visual, written and spoken
deployments), ethnographic observation of behavior, and broader analysis of the political,
economic and historical context in which the ecofeminist struggles are waged to gauge
their relationship to each other and to gain an understanding of ecofeminism’s liberatory
potential. This aim, one I pursue throughout this dissertation, not only provides historical
and geographical context to ground analysis, but also bridges the disciplinary gap we
have witnessed growing within ecofeminism.

This genealogy has sought ecofeminism’s discontinuities and dead ends as well as
the threads absorbed into more mainstream fields such as gender and development studies
in order to make visible the politics of ecofeminism’s marginalization, including the ways
in which the incoherences contained within ecofeminism continue to haunt newer
discourses while hiding their political stakes. In so doing, I refuse a progress narrative
within feminist theory. Rather than offering a new, more accurate history of
eco-feminism’s development, this chapter has attempted to disrupt accepted histories
responsibly in hopes of creating new “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The
argument is that, despite the questions many critics and genealogists raise, the repetition
of certain histories and criticisms do not make the critical interventions that are sought.
On the contrary, such repetitions reproduce a problematic way of thinking that is implicated in what is seen to already be at fault in ecofeminism. In this dissertation’s introduction, I posed one of my major research questions as “What are the key debates in ecofeminism that need to be revisited in order for feminists to grapple with the question of environmental justice once more?” I believe that the “stuck places,” such as the disavowal of religion and the materiality of the body that were so closely associated with cultural feminism and thus, have been marginalized within feminist and ecofeminist theory, reflect those discontinuities Foucault emphasizes as the most critical spaces for review. Additionally and related, “link-thinking” remains a site of contestation within the field. These foci, abandoned for the embarrassment they have caused feminist and ecofeminist thought, may yet have something new to teach us, and as such, they will be central to my exploration of environmentalist thought in Chicana and Mexican-American theory, art, and direct action social and ecological justice work.
CHAPTER TWO
ECOLOGICAL NARRATIVES IN CHICANA CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Introduction: Ecological Narratives amidst a Landscape of Misrecognitions

It began with a dream where I was physically transformed. I was no longer body and flesh, eyes, hair, and teeth, but hills, valleys, orchards, forests. I had metamorphosed into a mountain range with eyes and volcanoes and bodies of water surging through me. As I extended my arms, I was a whole coast, and then I stretched into a continent. I was my own continent with many geographies. I could see lush forests, fields of abundance, the sands of desert terrain that were me. This was my physical landscape.

I began to think about that continent in my dream, that self, and about how my writing and poetry have been a discovery, and ongoing exploration of that self-territory. My writing has been a way to name the landscapes of emotions, to recognize those layers of experiences that have sculpted my ecosystem and have chiseled my herstory. As well, writing has been a path to forging my spiritual cosmology. (Sánchez 2003, 19)

In this passage Elba Rosario Sánchez articulates her subjectivity as a landscape, a territory that is natural and earthy, shifting and eroding, and one that is constructed through her writing. In my estimation, Sánchez notes how becoming oneself is an ecological, cultural and spiritual process of deterritorialization in which the subject constantly evolves. Like Bronwyn Davies’ findings in (In)scribing Body/Landscape Relations (2000) that I explored in the introduction to this dissertation, the passage above shows the ways the author understands herself through her relations with her landscape. Moreover, writing is not an individual endeavor, but in writing herself and discovering her landscape, Sánchez invites others to recognize themselves in her poetry: “In this
encuentro between writer and reader/listener, ser a ser, there occurs the possibility of a powerful process” (24). The writer develops a collective sense of self that is in relation with both the natural and built environment as well as with her human allies.

Sánchez’s aim in this essay is to develop a framework of “cartohistoriography” that situates her work within a broader context of other Chicanas to explore important experiences and the development of multiple identities through the documentation of her life. More than autobiography, Sánchez is explicitly drawing out an ontological connection between her personal experiences, her intersubjectivity with others who may recognize themselves in her work, and the “physical, material space with its own geography, ecology and cosmology” (26) that she lays claim to in the materialization of herself through writing. The writing of self into history and onto the land is key in much of the writing emerging in the canon of Chicana/o studies. What I want to emphasize here are the multiple connections among the body, the relationship between the human and the natural world, and spirituality woven into the notion of cartohistoriography; at the heart of Sánchez’s passage is a desire for the self to grow co-extensive with human, nature and spirit others that is bolstered by her desire to share her experiences with others and invite them to see themselves in her writing.

The role of the body, of spirituality, and of the women-nature link (or the relationship between humans and their environments) featured heavily in the prior chapter’s discussion of debates in ecofeminism. There, I detailed how varying genealogies present these debates and pointed to the ways in which these three areas of ecofeminist philosophy tend to draw criticisms of essentialism. In this chapter, I suggest
that these topics are central themes in both ecofeminist philosophy and Chicana studies; yet while they have been largely dismissed as some of the most problematic elements of academic ecofeminism, Chicana cultural productions provide space for non-essentialist understandings of the body, the natural world, and a sense of spiritual connection. The discursive distance between Chicana studies and ecofeminism in the academy inhibits greater understanding of each of the fields, yet much can be gained from putting ecofeminist criticism and Chicana cultural studies into conversation.

To illustrate this disconnect, consider Renato Rosaldo’s response to Sánchez, in which he writes, “I’m not enamored of cartohistoriography as an organizing concept for your essay. I know what you mean by the term and I know how much you like to hold opposites in tension (like hot/cold, death/birth), but mapping a landscape and grasping a history/herstory do not fit together very easily as activities or forms of understanding” (2003, 53). Rosaldo grasps this concept as a metaphor only and, as such, fails to understand the ontological drive behind writing oneself into being and into history through the legitimizing trope of the land. Indeed, such writing does not merely use the trope of the natural self that is tied to the land to legitimize a subaltern voice, but acts as a decolonizing means of staking territorial claims in a neo/colonial landscape.

Rosaldo goes on to say, “Your concept of histocartography is more cerebral than your wonderful poem ‘Me siento continente/I Feel Myself a Continent,’ which is so sensuous and womanly” (53). Rosaldo has not recognized Sánchez’s key points that hinge on her struggle with multiple and conflicting identities, her sense of relationality to others and the non-human world through writing, and her coming to political
consciousness as an activist in support of the United Farm Workers resistance to poor wages, toxicity and environmental damage as a result of the racial, gender and classed injustice that she details in the same essay. Instead, he has drawn links between “woman,” “nature,” and sexuality that he directly contrasts with the all-too-cerebral understanding of self that Sánchez has arrived at through reflection on her experiences.

The failure to fully recognize the role of ecological narratives within Chicana cultural productions occurs across Chicana studies. Priscilla Solis Ybarra explains, “Chicana/o literary study has been complicit with overlooking Chicana/o writers’ environmental insights, largely because the environment has been perceived to be a lesser priority than the seemingly more immediate needs of social equity” (2006, ii). As I show in chapter four, there is a strong presence of Chicana/o studies scholars and Chicana/o and Mexican-American activists in the field of environmental justice—a field that recognizes the interconnections between social and ecological justice. However, scholarship in the field of environmental justice is largely situated in the social sciences and has a strong policy-orientation (Sze 2002, Peña 1998). In this chapter, I contribute to a growing body of literature that brings an ecocritical lens to visual and narrative cultural productions in Chicana studies.

Methodology

This chapter opens with the concept of cartohistoriography to show how limiting dominant readings can be and to point not only to the politics of production in visual and narrative media, but to patterns of reception and criticism. This chapter offers textual and iconographic readings of Chicana cultural productions such as literature, murals and other
paintings, and installations such as altars. I analyze cultural texts with reference to their genre and the social and historical context of their production. Chapters two and three focus on ecological narratives in cultural production while chapters four and five focus on activist histories of environmentalism. Though I employ different methods to gather research for each chapter, I avoid privileging any methodological strategy. Rather, the chapters complement each other. Historical and ethnographic research with activists and organizations can reveal women’s daily beliefs and practices with respect to their work for social and ecological justice. However, the texts taken up in this chapter as well as the next frame ways of seeing and mediate our experiences and understanding of the human and non-human world; they can also play an important role in visioning not only what is, but what could be.

Part I: Ecological Themes in Chicana/o Literature

Aztlán: Place-Making in the Chicano Nationalist Movement

From the beginning of the Chicana/o movement, artists and writers have been called on to help unify the community, build identity and envision new futures. For example, in the early 1960s, artists recruited by the United Farm Workers (UFW) created posters, banners and other artifacts that bore indigenist (Latorre 2008) and catholic imagery to draw allies and unify support for those working closely with the land who work long hours, are paid little, and work in dangerous and toxic conditions. Drawing on the successes of the UFW and the growing politicization of Chicana/os and other marginalized groups throughout the 1960s, El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán was drafted in 1969. This manifesto reiterated and expanded the initial connection drawn out by the
UFW, that toxicity and degradation of the environment were related to the oppression of those who worked it. Understandings of place and representations of the land continue to serve an important function in Chicana/o activism and cultural production since El Plan voiced a connection between contemporary Chicanos and their spiritual and cultural ties to indigenous communities that have long lived in the territory now defined as part of the U.S., but from which they are denied full citizenship. In the declaration that “Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans,” movement activists stake a claim on territory in the U.S. Southwest (El Plan). The manifesto both points out the artificiality of the U.S.-Mexico border and the injustice of colonization that renders Chicana/os suspect with regard to citizenship status, leaving their legal, economic and political status precarious. By claiming an alternative form of belonging to the land that predates Spanish and U.S. imperialism as well as a continued closeness to the land based on daily interactions and a spiritual connection to the forefathers, El Plan offers a model of nationalism rooted in the land.

In keeping with the strategy of indigenism that emphasized territorial belonging and memory that functions outside colonialist histories of the United States, indigenous and particularly Aztec cultural and religious symbols were heavily featured in movement literature and art. Chicanas have criticized such images as patriarchal with stereotypical depictions of heroic men and passive or overly sexualized women. As Guisela Latorre notes, Chicana artists strived to reclaim an indigenist aesthetic, but offered an “alternative to the previous notions that indigenism could only be articulated through the body, culture, and the history of the male Indian” (2008, 26). Chicana writers and artists were
quick to point out the erasure of women’s experiences in the nationalist movement; they began to produce texts that were more relevant to women’s lives, yet the theme of place continues to loom large in their cultural production.

Chicana place-centered visual and narrative cultural productions represent many things, including the quest for alternative communities as seen in El Plan and in Cherrie Moraga’s “Queer Aztlán,” (1993), a history of displacements due to migration and changing borders as seen in works such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands/La Frontera (1987), as well as those spaces that are traditionally considered women’s domains as seen in Pat Mora’s House of Houses (1997) and Sandra Cisneros’ House on Mango Street (1984), for example. Similarly, Chicana artists and writers question women’s roles in each of these spaces and often make use of paradox and contradiction to discuss their complex positionalities—as women who support their cultural heritage, but not its patriarchal elements, as women who embrace the domestic, but not its confining nature, as women who speak their own histories from specific sites, but do not attempt to speak for everyone as they struggle to build community. While there have been scholarly discussions regarding spatial politics in Chicana feminist writing that I will not reproduce here, (see Klahn 2003, Oliver-Rotger 2003, Parra 2003), I do note one writer who has reworked the important symbolism of Aztlán in ways that open up a Chicana environmentalist ethic.
Queering Aztlán: A Chicana Feminist Response

Cherrie Moraga opens “Queer Aztlán” with an account that establishes her positioning: she became politicized through the recognition of her lesbianism. She writes, “Coming to terms with that fact meant the radical re-structuring of everything I thought I held sacred. It meant acting on my women-centered desire and against anything that stood in its way, including my Church, my family, and my country” (1993, 146). While addressing those three areas, the essay critiques the racism of the mainstream women’s movement, the homophobia of the Chicano movement as well as the sexism of gay Chicanos and their refusal to yield male privilege. Within the movement, issues of sexuality and the specificity of concerns grounded in women’s experiences have constantly been subordinated in order to focus on class and race. Thus, remembering the insights of Sojourner Truth and the Combahee River Collective, Moraga suggests no movement will achieve success unless it takes into account all its others. Her vision of liberation through the creation of a “Queer Aztlán” goes far in breaking the silence around Chicana/os and queer desire.

Yet Moraga shows as much concern for nature-others as for human-others. She writes, “The earth is female… like woman, Madre Tierra has been raped, exploited for her resources, rendered inert, passive, and speechless… how will our lands be free if our bodies are not?” (172-3). Moraga notes the interlocking nature of systems of oppression and insists that until the most disenfranchised and voiceless among us is included, social and ecological justice will remain out of reach. Here she creates space to resist the human-centeredness that, in concert with colonial and capitalist endeavors, has ravaged
the earth and its non-human inhabitants. She concludes with the suggestion that Chicana/os return to indigenous roots (re-enacted and remembered selectively rather than a return to a static and authentic culture) where an alternative socioeconomic structure and inclusive mode of community-building supports more responsible relations among people and between people and the non-human world. In her vision, indigenous religions support this cultural model by honoring female deities alongside male deities: “Native religions have traditionally honored the female alongside the male. Religions that grow exclusively from the patriarchal capitalist imagination, instead of the requirements of nature, enslave the female body… Bring back the rain gods, the corn gods, father sun, and mother moon and keep those gods happy (172). Following El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, her conclusion is part of a tradition of decolonization through the imagining of alternative futures and the resignification of the past in ways that might propel us toward that future.

Moraga’s ecological connections are strategic rather than essentialist; they underscore the link between women and nature because indigenous spirituality offers women a position of authority through association with nature goddesses and the land, and therefore would authorize women as the privileged founders of a new land, a Queer Aztlán. Moreover, founding that land as a queer space for queer citizens inherently troubles an essentialist reading and opens the door to readings that find a multi-tactic methodology of the oppressed such as Sandoval expresses in the idea of a differential consciousness. Although Moraga wants to claim Aztlán as a space that offers and fosters celebration of Chicana/o identity and culture, she also recognizes the dangers of
nationalism, writing “Its tendency towards separatism can run dangerously close to biological determinism and a kind of fascism” (149). In its place, this utopia would embrace the multiplicity of its inhabitants’ positionalities. In short, while the nationalist call for a return to Aztlán may exemplify a deterritorialization of the current hegemonic social imaginary of the U.S. Southwest in order to reinscribe and *reterritorialize* it as the Chicano homeland, Moraga deterritorializes that utopia once more while keeping its borders more open, more inclusive.

Chief among the multiple strategies employed by Sánchez, whose work opened this chapter, Moraga and landmark works by other Chicana feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa is the notion that identities and their rootedness in place are both deeply felt and malleable. The need to articulate one’s experiences yet avoid exclusionary and essentializing personal and collective identities is rooted in a particular historical moment and geographical location shaped by relations of power that always remake an individual and her environment. Nonetheless, as these writers show, specificity of land-based and politicized identities does not signify claims of authenticity or an essential sense of oneself and surrounding world; it does not foreclose openness. As Maria Antònia Oliver-Rotger suggests, “The interrelated, real social conflicts that Chicanas describe have given rise to images of space that challenge geographical, cultural, and social divisions. The simultaneity of discourses that constitute the spatial power relations of society is the basis for a new aesthetics forged by hybrid subjectivities committed to multiple issues” (2003, 18). Moraga’s writing exemplifies this: her critique of Chicano nationalism points to both its sexism and homophobia, but she also challenges her allies to take up an anti-capitalist
and spiritually reinvigorated resistances that can enfold care of the land into their struggle. Herein lies the coalitional impulse of this work—an impulse that, as we will see, links ecological justice to other social concerns and that opens intersubjective relationality not just to human-others, but to nature-others as well.

\textit{Part II: Visual Culture:}

\textit{Ecological Themes in the Work of Alicia, Cervántez and Lopez}

Many of the themes explored in Chicana literature are also taken up in other mediums. In this section, I interrogate notions of place and identity as they emerge from narratives around the body, land-rootedness, and spirituality. I explore the community murals of Juana Alicia, the paintings of Yreina Cervántez and the digital arts of Alma Lopez. The works under analysis share the distinction of not only building from the prior work of Chicanas such as Anzaldúa and Moraga that responded to the Chicano nationalist movement and the mainstream feminist movement, but are responding to politics in the U.S. Southwest after the institutionalization of globalized and militarized capitalism in the region post-NAFTA.

NAFTA, or the North American Free Trade Agreement, was initiated in 1994 with the aims of facilitating trade among North American nations and bringing jobs and wealth to Mexico. Despite these aims, Mexico has not seen the promised economic benefits and many consider NAFTA to be an example of free-trade neocolonialism (Bigelow 2006). NAFTA brought many women to the border to work long hours in maquiladora jobs with poor pay, no job security, and to live in makeshift colonias in order to feed the labor and service demands of the growing industries. Moreover, the jobs
were feminized and racialized in particular ways. Women maquila workers are seen as low skill and low value workers producing products of low value (Wright 2003). The discursive violence, or in other words, the racialized and gendered representational tropes, that created the conditions for cheap labor in the region also created an environment of physical violence that is illustrated by the murders of thousands of women along the U.S.-Mexico border since the 1990s. In light of the urgencies of combating a globalized capitalism that seeks to build transnational networks and move rapidly and with great flexibility toward imperialist goals (Hardt and Negri 2000; Mohanty 2003), the artists under consideration find new ways to draw attention to how Chicanas are affected as well as the ways that they resist free trade neocolonialism. As this section illustrates, a key strategy has been to stake out place- and gender-specific identities, but to leave them open and deferred in order to draw intersubjective coalitions with others who might stand in solidarity, a point I begin to elaborate here, but which finds its full expression in chapter three.

Juana Alicia’s Murals: Sacred Space, Coalition-Building and Women-Nature Links

Murals are particularly suited to the development of politicized and place-specific identities because they are often painted in strategic and very public places. The site of their construction matters in terms of both public access and in terms of its surrounding environment. Guisela Latorre explains that Chicano art, and particularly an indigenist aesthetic, calls on a sense of space as sacred (2008, 15). Reaffirming the sacrality of space through the creation of art that draws the community together in both production and reception of the mural can stimulate “a sense of responsibility toward the place, its
community, and its environment” (2008, 15). In marking the space as sacred, the mural not only builds community, but reclaims space that has historically been denied Chicana/os through U.S. colonialism from Manifest Destiny to the contemporary moment where anti-immigrant sentiment remains strong and Chicana/os are figured as always already non-citizens. Murals work to politicize the environment and stake territorial claims on it.

The site-specificity of murals is just as important as the means of their production. Execution takes time and is often a community effort, requiring the participation of many to complete the project; that is, coalitional impulses are built into the process of creating a mural. While murals may be conceptualized by a primary artist, community volunteers help shape that concept and bring it to visual life. In the process people come together to learn new skills and to create an object of aesthetic value for their community. Due to the political drives of the mural, they can also undergo a process of transformation. Latorre clarifies, “For Chicana/o artists who invited local community members to collaborate in the creation of murals, this spiritual transformation also took the form of political revelation, whereby all those involved underwent a radical process of what Paulo Freire would call conscientização, or ‘conscientization,’ through which they became conscious of their own oppression but also of their own potential and power to bring about change at an individual and collective level” (2008, 8). While murals are a politicized medium for reclaiming space and building community, the cultural work that particular murals do is just as important. Here, I draw attention to two murals in the San Francisco Bay area in particular: Juana Alicia’s La Llorona’s Sacred Waters (2004) and MaestraPeace (1994),
La Llorona’s Sacred Waters shares many themes in common with ecofeminism in that it notes colonialism’s legacy of devastation of both peoples and the natural environment while drawing clear links between women and nature. The mural brings together the allegorical figures of la Llorona and Chalchiuhtlicue and surrounds them with women protestors from around the world. Both figures are associated with water—Chalchiuhtlicue is an indigenous goddess of lakes and rivers and la Llorona is a figure associated with Mexico’s Spanish colonial period who is sometimes coded as having drowned her children in revenge for her husband’s unfaithfulness. An ambivalent figure that has accumulated a diverse spectrum of significations, she has also been recouped by Chicana feminists as in Sandra Cisneros’s “Woman Hollering Creek” (1991). As Debra Blake’s research shows, la Llorona has been resignified by Chicana writers and artists as a figure that resists not only patriarchy, but colonialism (2008, 49). Because of her association with water, la Llorona has been linked with Aztec nature goddesses, creating a hybrid figure with indigenous roots that emphasizes resistance and empowerment (Latorre 2008, 208). Below the sacred figures, the mural depicts women engaged in water-related social justice struggles that include Indian women’s struggles against damming projects in the Narmada River Valley, Bolivian women resisting the privatization of their water, and women protesting the murders in Juárez along the Rio Bravo.
According to Latorre, the two sacred figures appear to be weeping at the scenes of social injustice. Chalchiuhtlicue, in particular, is shown with a speech scroll from her mouth that implies “she is speaking against these social conditions” (Latorre 209). Latorre remarks that despite the era difference between the emergence of the two sacred figures, Alicia makes them both relevant to contemporary events and links them to an expanded need for transnational justice, “to underscore the negative effects of globalization on marginalized communities across the globe… the onset of globalization… has ushered in the realization among many Chicana feminist artists that the struggles of the Third World and women of color across the world bear striking similarities; thus, their approaches to activism and resistance are also comparable” (210).

While the parallels are strongly present in the mural, I would argue the mural is not only suggesting that the struggles are similar and therefore the resistances might be too—here, strategies can be borrowed from one context to the other in ways that leave resistant groups essentially isolated from one another. I think the coalitional impulse is much stronger. Rather, as research in chapters three, four and five of this dissertation show, there is a strong tradition among Chicana and Mexican-American artists and activists to draw support and alliance across groups and movements (see, for example Adamson 2002, Berelowitz 1998, O’Loughlin 1993). The mural paints relationships between third world women of color across a variety of geographies and seems to suggest not only a common struggle against neoliberal capitalism, but a call for alliance against it—common themes in the work scholars of decolonization, such as Chela Sandoval (2000) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003).
Citing a tradition of Chicana art that foregrounds a link to spirituality and transformative social politics, *La Llorona’s Sacred Waters* portrays the specificity of Chicana women’s experiences, their link to colonialism and current forms of neocolonial globalization, and a history of empowering female figures that legitimize women’s experience and authority. Importantly, the work also seems to suggest a temporal trajectory. In drawing figures from the past and into the present, Alicia notes the specific modes of oppression under which Chicanas have lived (pre-colonial, colonial, and neocolonial) and seems to be guiding women to a future that engages in forms of transnational alliance. In understanding Alicia’s mural as alliance-building rather than as a representation of parallel activisms, it becomes possible to understand how the mural can incite spectators toward a politics of engagement rather than simply a politics of solidarity, a distinction Gwyn Kirk makes in “Ecofeminism and Chicano Environmental Struggles” (1998, 194).

My reading of the mural is also driven by the strong ontological impulse of Chicana cultural productions that draw on spiritual themes. Sarah Ramirez’s “Borders, Feminism, and Spirituality” (2002) and Laura Pérez’s “Spirit Glyphs” (1998) detail connections between the reimagining of indigenous spirituality and its role in assisting women to heal both their communities and the land. Ramirez summarizes, “A Chicana aesthetic space… participates in community empowerment through *curandera* (healer) work, which expresses the concern for social, global, and environmental justice as well as engages in the processes of recovery and transformation” (2002, 42). In linking narratives of women’s social and spiritual leadership with the specificity of territorial belonging and
sense of responsibility to the environment, Alicia creates opportunities for viewers to raise their consciousness and join in transnational alliances that will intervene in the injustice to heal both the community and the land.

*La Llorona’s Sacred Waters* is not Alicia’s only mural that draws connections between social and ecological justice. *La Llorona’s Sacred Waters* was painted over the fading *Las Lechugueras* (1983) that featured women lettuce-pickers under the toxic threat of pesticides. One woman in the mural is transparently pregnant, suggesting that both the natural world and the human-world are at risk from the methods of commercialized agriculture and that women are at the heart of the struggle against such practices. While women’s bodies and their productive, reproductive and spiritual labor are shown as connected to the natural world in important ways in the prior two murals, Alicia’s collaborative effort with other women artists to complete *Maestrapeace* (1994) expands on these themes.

*Maestrapeace* derives its name from a play on words that signifies women teaching about peace; it also contests the notion of a masterpiece—art for art’s sake—focusing instead on the value of art for survival. The mural shows Guatemalan activist and Nobel prize winner Rigoberta Menchú. In Menchú’s hands sit Nahua goddess Coyolxauhqui and Yoruba creation goddess Yemaya that are both hybridized with Marian imagery (L. Peréz 2007, 281).

Coyolxauhqui’s mythology is that she was murdered and dismembered by her half-brother, war god Huitzilopochtli. Like la Llorona she has been reclaimed by Chicana writers and artists as a cultural and spiritual figure linking them to an indigenous history
that authenticates both a tie to the land and spiritual authority. Here, Coyolxauhqui is pictured whole once more, representing the strategy of re-membering histories against the grain of colonialist and patriarchal dominant histories that erase a Chicana presence. Debra Blake notes that “In her lower hand she clutches paintbrushes signifying the creative and political power of the artists to re-present women as active agents creating their own subjectivity. Coyolxauhqui emerges from a maguey plant cradled in the palm of Rigoberta Menchú… Both female figures symbolize dynamic, outspoken actors for indigenous and Third World women’s rights” (35).

Like La Llorona’s Sacred Waters, Maestrapeace brings women across the world together. The mural shows an Indian woman nursing a child, a Guatemalan child, West African goddess Yamaya and a tapestry with the names of important female figures in history such as Zora Neale Hurston and Sojourner Truth. Here again, Alicia and her collaborators show the links that draw women together against the imperialism that shapes women’s lives and the environment. As an interview with the artist confirms, “This moment is one where women are leading environmental struggles and carrying the weight of poverty on their backs and in their bodies, which are made mainly of water” (Alicia 2010).

As women across the world are affected disproportionately by global capitalism, they must find strategies to stand in solidarity across their different resistances. The collaborative nature of these murals—particularly Maestrapeace, which is a large-scale mural composed by multiple artists and community volunteers over the course of a year—and the location and visibility draw a community together. Moreover, this mural
not only seeks to create a coalition between artists, audience and the struggles of women whose resistances take place outside the U.S., but the site on which the mural is painted, the Women’s Building in San Francisco, adds an additional charge of politicization to its reception.

Juana Alicia’s murals sketch connections between women and nature that highlight the body: *La Lechugueras* focuses on the gendered and racialized exploitation of women’s labor and the effects of pesticides on the bodies of women and their children as well as on the land; *La Llorona’s Sacred Waters* focuses on women’s bodies in specific regions of the world resisting the violence of neocolonial globalized capitalism. The collective focus of Alicia’s work is important in challenging viewers who might otherwise remain complicit or whose politics might remain narrowly nationalist. In both critiquing hegemonic economic and political practices that are detrimental to women and their environments and posing an alternative move forward based on coalition-building and healing, the murals by Alicia and her collaborators enact a performative move that exposes ruling logic and resists it at the same time.

**The Body Politics of Yreina D. Cervántez: Mestizaje Aesthetics as a Becoming Other**

Yreina D. Cervántez’s work may appear more personal and autobiographical than Alicia’s, yet as in the works of early Chicana writers, Cervántez too draws connections between the personal and the political, the individual and the collective. While Alicia focuses on the relationality of the body as it stands with others in alliance, Cervántez’s representations show a mestiza aesthetic of depicting the self as multiple; in addition, she opens the body to a complex relationality of self to human and non-human others.
For example, the *Nepantla* triptych (1995) shows Cervántez’s face juxtaposed with key competing representations of Chicanos. There are news clippings about proposition 187 that prohibited undocumented immigrants from using public services (e.g., health care, public education, welfare; “California” 1997) in California. There are human skeletons on all fours and a depiction of a Euro-American styled American Indian man standing next to a “partially civilized” American Indian, and another who is understood to be “wild,” suggesting social Darwinism as responsible for Manifest Destiny and the continued repression of Chicanos through erasure of their histories and language in schools. This message is underscored by the inclusion of a passage from Miguel León-Portilla’s *Endangered Cultures* (1990) that highlights the role of Anglo cultural violence against indigenous and Chicano traditions. Specifically, León-Portilla mentions the threat against *nepantla*, a mode of “remaining in the middle” or being in the process of always becoming. Cervántez includes another juxtaposition: a diagram of the model of perspective applied in Euro-American artistic traditions and a pre-Columbian mask, showing different artistic traditions and, by extension, ways of looking at the world. Like Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, this panel marks the difficulty of navigating a nepantla state where one is trapped between competing cultures, world views, and limiting representations of women both in the mainstream American culture and in the Chicano nationalist movement. And, like Juana Alicia, the citation of particular cultural and historical symbols reveals the power behind social, political and educational institutions and their historic patterns of repression that continue into the present, thereby offering a performative subversion of the ruling logic. In addition to the exposure and
critique of ruling logic, Cervántez introduces her own visage into the work. She sits at the right of the piece holding a sprig of sage, often associated with women who perform curandera work.

The second panel of the triptych, *Mi Nepantla*, shows Cervántez’s face with eyes closed in reflection, surrounded by images and text that suggest a more personal understanding of her mestiza consciousness: Christian images juxtaposed with Aztec symbols and glyphs, the poem “Come Union” by Gloria Enedina Alvárez translated in both Spanish and English (L. Pérez 1998), a passage on the “New Mestiza” from Anzaldúa, a figure bound up in ropes and caught within the European rendering of linear perspective. The transposition of this diagram of perspective over her forehead with the words “of colonization” suggests a personal sense of losing oneself. Yet the emergence of a jaguar figure—Cervántez’s ties to an animal spirit—point to a continued effort at decolonization and the calling up of spiritual energies to heal the self, a reading bolstered by the inclusion of another sprig of sage.

The third panel, *Beyond Nepantla*, shows a spiraling feathered serpent, which according to Laura Pérez reflects “the glyph of Quetzalcoátl, man-God representing both wisdom and the arts, the unity of the spiritual and material” (2007, 44). The serpent is surrounded by natural elements such as shells and a feather, a crucible with plants and Cervántez’s self-portrait, including the sprig of sage. The bottom of the panel features an essay about “two Americas” (the America of ancestors and the America of today) and another diagram of the European model of perspective with images of the “evolution”/assimilation of the American Indian. Pérez reads this last panel as a mode of
reframing perception and suggests that colonialist representations “may be transformed in viewing them from the nonhierarchical, circular perspective of traditional American Indian, and other, cultures” (2007, 44). Cervántez combines images that allow the viewer to reframe her understanding of historical and contemporary images and events.

Thus, as Pérez points out in her article, “Spirit Glyphs: Reimagining Art and Artist in the Work of Chicana Tlamatinime” (1998), in drawing on indigenous artistic practices, Cervántez creates not just images, but *glyphs*. Glyphs more than represent that to which they refer, but *evoke* that which is represented. Here, Cervántez invokes a change in perspective and a future that moves toward decolonization. In terms of my project, this difference is critical because it reflects a Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) sense of *becoming-decolonized* or *becoming-revolutionary*; glyphs demand more than an epistemological shift—they incite an ontological shift. They do not offer a representation, but that which they create or evoke is meant to alter reality, to forge new connections and relations among humans and between humans and their environments.

Further, although the title *Beyond Nepantla* suggests that decolonization beyond “the middle ground,” and it signifies an end to process and to *becoming*, the choice to use the pre-Columbian codex as a medium expressed in the form of a *triptych*, a form often associated with European Christian art, suggests paradox and that a point “beyond” may never truly be reached. With this example, Cervántez demonstrates the performative enactment of working within and between logics, contesting and stretching them to the point of incoherence or hybridizing them to generate new directions. *Beyond Nepantla,*
rather than signifying an end point in the struggle, reaffirms that the process is never complete.

While the *Nepantla* series shows Cervántez as working through her own struggle for decolonization and, as an artist and a healer, working to establish alliance with her viewers toward decolonization on a broader scale, *Big Baby Balam* (2000) focuses not on colonial artistic, political, and scientific perspectives that other Chicana/o bodies, but on her own body as a contested history. If, as Foucault suggests, bodies are the sites upon which relations of power discipline and inscribe us with histories and futures, they are also the first sites of resistance (Foucault 1990).

In this watercolor self-portrait Cervántez’s face is tattooed with the marks of a jaguar and other Aztec glyphs representing elements from the natural world such as water. The figure staring back at the viewer resists the male and colonial gaze and creates a counter-hegemonic subjectivity through the citation of indigenous codes that are illegible to the uneducated viewer, retaining a certain degree of distance: neither Cervántez nor her image will be easily consumed. Moreover, the symbology of the jaguar reveals a human-animal synthesis that defers an essential identity and defines Cervántez as a fluid subject in the process of becoming-animal, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s language (1987).

In addition to disrupting colonial paradigms that position the non-human world as other to humans, Laura Pérez presents another way to read the text. She explains that this image performs a strategy of racial deferral: “The image of this self has the effect of displacing the racializing semiotics of skin color and features. The artist shows herself to
be another social self through covering herself in the unfamiliar signs of the self outside of human society, the jaguar. Identity is represented as a process, and as a zone between the known and the social unknown” (2002, 52). Here, the body resists the colonial order and, figured as a conjunction of the spiritual merging of human with animal, acts as the foundation for alternative knowledges at the same time that it rejects racial hierarchies.

Both the Nepantla triptych and Big Baby Balam make connections between the body as text, the individual in relation to her historical and geographical context, and the spiritual nature of the self that can motivate change. The codex form is key to understanding Cervántez’s intent to create art that serves the Chicana/o movement by raising consciousness not only on the issues that constrain Chicana/os in the present period, but by educating about heritage with respect to indigenous culture. Cervántez’s self-portraits, particularly in the Nepantla series, show that she sees herself as fulfilling the role of more than just an artist; she is also a codex reader. In the indigenous tradition, she understands the role of an artist to be an interpreter and teacher who can enable her audience to achieve a critical consciousness. Thus, like the tradition of autobiography that runs throughout the Chicana studies canon with works such as Cisneros’ House on Mango Street, Pat Mora’s House of Houses and Sánchez’s “Cartohistoriografia” that opened this chapter, self-portrait is not just a reclaiming of the self and a writing of one’s own narrative, but a means to draw others into a politicized awareness.
The Cartohistoriographic Landscapes of Alma Lopez

Among the artists reviewed in this chapter, Alma Lopez and her digital compositions offer the most direct critique against globalized capitalism and the strategies the works of art use to racialize and gender Chicanas. Although not as explicitly ecological in focus as the work of the last two artists who each showed the ways the social and ecological intertwine as the artists attempt to forge new connections among humans and between humans and their environments, Lopez’s compositions concern themselves with the role of place in Chicana/o politics. Her works often draw together desert landscapes and the L.A. skyline as linked by the im/migrations of Chicana/os, by the labor they perform and by the neocolonial political maneuverings that structure their lives. Lopez’s use of maps is particularly important. Here, I draw a connection between the mapping strategy of *California Fashion Slaves* (1997) from the series *1848: Latinos and the U.S. Landscape after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* and the notion of cartohistoriography introduced by Elba Sánchez.

In each composition Lopez layers a map of Northern Mexico with the words “Gold!” and “Manifest Destiny” written in an arrow that points to an image joining Guadalupe and 1848, the date of the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalago in which Northern territories of Mexico were claimed by the U.S. The map also features an image of a border patrol vehicle chasing a man south. Lastly, both show an image of Coyoxaulqui that, as it does in so many other visual and textual narratives created by Chicana feminists, signifies that Lopez is participating in the practice of re-membering Chicana history and culture by pulling together disparate experiences and histories—
those that are repressed and silenced in dominant historical narratives. Over this spatio-temporal representation of the racialized political and economic history of the border region in the 1800s, Lopez tells stories of the present. *California Fashion Slaves* shows women seamstresses positioned as a border between the map of Northern Mexico and the L.A. skyline. Laura Pérez suggests that the image of the seamstresses, “effectively conveys the hidden presence of female garment workers in Los Angeles, one of the many garment-production capitals of the world, whose superprofits are built upon unseen superexploitation” (2007, 173).

To take the point further, like Almudena Carracedo’s documentary *Made In L.A.* (2007), *California Fashion Slaves* shows that women are not only concentrated in the more visible border maquiladoras, but that their immigration across the border is shaped by a need for cheap labor in the U.S. where economics and anti-immigration sentiment continue to work together create conditions of exploitation for Chicanas, Mexican-Americans and Latina immigrants. Additionally, while Lopez *is* sketching connections between colonialism and capitalist neocolonialism that exploit garment workers, the placement of women’s bodies *onto the map* also shows a rewriting of history that speaks to the inclusion of experiences of women and suggests that women have always been implicated in the process of colonization and that colonialism itself is a gendered process (McClintock 1995).

Like the last two artists, Lopez summons the past to rethink and reframe the present. And, as with Cervántez, this method can be said to showcase an indigenous knowledge system where time is seen as cyclical. However, it is also possible that
Lopez’s spatio-temporal understanding parallels or draws from Emma Pérez’s *The Decolonial Imaginary* (1999). Emma Pérez explains the idea of a “third space” that can be found in the work of many Chicana artists and writers where “third space” is that interstitial space where the gaps and silences around the histories of Chicanas can be found and articulated (E. Pérez xvi). As she illustrates, the decolonial imaginary is also that space between colonialism and the postcolonial period, the nepantla state of being in the middle and subject to change, remaining in process and calling on all survival strategies at one’s disposal—a theory that resonates with Chela Sandoval’s “differential consciousness” that was introduced in this dissertation’s introduction.

The concepts of a “third space” and the transition to a decolonial imaginary that creates space for a postcolonial landscape returns us to the essay that opened this chapter. Elba Sánchez summarizes that, “As cartohistoriography, my writings explore the longitudes and latitudes of an ever-shifting map of life, where my conciencia is affected by physical elements and vice versa. My landscape is at times eroding, but rebuilding as well, always renewing, changing once again. Each time I or we write and chronicle our real and imagined spaces, we are consciously naming, putting on the map, so to speak, previously unknown territory” (2003, 27). Like Sánchez, Lopez is skilled at depicting personal and communal histories in non-literal and non-linear ways. *California Fashion Slaves* pays close attention to the space in which such histories occur and, while documenting dominant histories that reproduce events in a singular and linear manner, Lopez also offers contested histories from the margins that reveal the ways the past continuously replays through the present.
Thus far, this chapter has explored the relationship of women to human and non-human others and to the land through a survey of semi-autobiographical texts, murals, paintings and digital compositions. This chapter concludes with an investigation into the unique possibilities installation art offers to an understanding of Chicana ecological narratives. “Domesticana,” in particular, offers much to our developing understanding of the relationship between place, time and identity that opened this chapter.

Part III: Visual Culture: Performative Excess,

Critical Juxtaposition and Recycling Aesthetics in Mesa-Bains’s Installation Art

Amalia Mesa-Bains is an artist and scholar who is famous for her altar installations. As an art critic, she also coined the word “domesticana” to describe a specifically feminist take on the Chicano art of rasquache. Rasquachismo, best defined by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, may describe anything from yard altars to street theater that presents a survivalist, irreverent and spontaneous attitude of making the most from the least (1991). Rasquache celebrates a working-class sensibility while critiquing dominant culture through parody. However, while rasquache politicizes the racialization and cultural and economic marginalization of Chicanos, domesticana responds to the silencing of women in the Chicano movement. According to Mesa-Bains, domesticana offers a feminist rasquaschismo that also defies high and low art distinctions and is rooted in the working-class, but it addresses the domestic sphere where patriarchy is also interrogated (2003, 302). Mesa-Bains writes, “Chicana rasquache, like its male counterpart, has grown not only out of resistance to majority culture and affirmation of cultural values but from women’s restrictions within the culture… Techniques of
subversion through play with traditional imagery and cultural material are characteristics of domesticana” (305).

Domesticana is most popularly represented in the form of home altars. Altar work typically falls to women who are responsible for maintaining the family’s ties to Catholicism and to loved ones by layering the altar with photos and other mementos that record family history. This collection of photos and artifacts, like the layering of images that occurs in the work Lopez and Cervántez explored earlier, can represent an act of remembering and documenting the past in ways that are meaningful to the community and that stand against the Chicana/o erasure within (neo)colonial narratives. Not only does the juxtaposition of images and other meaningful objects offer an affirming history of Chicana/o families, it may also write against narratives of the heroic patriarch that featured heavily during the height of the Chicano nationalist movement.

For example, Mesa-Bains’ series Venus Envy, an obvious play on “penis envy,” displaces the patriarch and centers and celebrates women in his place. Venus Envy Chapter I (First Holy Communion, Moments before the End, 1993) shows an ornate vanity adorned with statues of Mary, angels, and a photo of a woman who appears to be family. The vanity and chair are also littered with rosary beads, dried flowers, and feathers. Glitter, candles and dried flowers are scattered on the floor surrounding the vanity. This scene is set within a single room that also holds a communion and wedding gown, signifying as Laura Pérez notes, the paradoxical expectations to which women are held: a sexual double-bind, a matrix of interlinking patriarchal institutions—the Church and the family (61). Along the wall opposite the vanity hangs a mirror and pictures of
Chicana feminists, including Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz—a scholar, poet and proponent for women’s rights in 17th century Spanish colonial Mexico. The mirrored vanity reflects these images, suggesting both a personal struggle with identity and an awareness of the construction and negotiation of personal, familial and social histories. As such, Mesa-Bains works against essentialist notions of identity by pointing both to historical and contemporary social limitations with which Chicanas have been constructed. Through ritualized altar-building, she points out the role of self-practice in creating oneself and one’s relationships to others, to the past and to the present. The ritualized element exposes the performativity of identity as shifting and constituted through repetitive and meaningful acts—a theme that is also commonly seen in the practices of the activists discussed in chapters four and five of this dissertation.

In addition to the performative elements of layering and the juxtaposition of photos and mirrors, as Laura Pérez notes, the vanity also highlights open theatricality. The glamorous elements of the vanity—feathered fans, beads, perfume, a mask half-hidden in a drawer—signify care of the self; “it is an altar where reverence for the otherwise devalued, racialized, gendered self, and what is important to the self, is cultivated” (Pérez 2007, 101). In light of the performativity theory that has undergirded my analysis, I would take Pérez’s point further to suggest that the glamour and excess do not just signify care of the self against a cultural backdrop where women are devalued; as Judith Butler’s work reveals, it also potentially exposes the artificiality of femininity (1999). That is, in Mesa-Bains’ installations, the spectator may see both the ways in which institutional forces such as the patriarchal family and Church subject Chicanas,
and the ways in which women create performative subversions to actively negotiate their own subjectivity.

*Venus Envy Chapter II: The Harem and Other Enclosures* (1994) is also situated in a single room made to look like a family or dining room in the artist’s home. Much like *Chapter I*, a table sits at the center of this room too, yet this one is coded as a desk in Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s library. In citing her, Mesa-Bains calls forth a little celebrated history of women’s achievement and draws her into a pantheon of female heroes that include Mesa-Bain’s family (pictured again here as in *Chapter I*) along with images and writings from other Chicana artists. The walls are lined with mirrors to emphasize perspectivalism and to return the spectator’s gaze in a way that undercuts attempts at voyeurism and an uncritical visual consumption of the spectacle.²²

Paradox and juxtaposition are key to understanding Mesa-Bains’s art. With respect to *Chapter II*, the title *The Harem and Other Enclosures* names a specifically gendered and sexual trap for women who are racialized as other. Clearly, Mesa-Bains draws a parallel between the harem and the household, both seen as a mode of confinement for women that marks them as both gendered and racialized just as domesticana and its play on “domestic” and “Mexicana” is meant to do. Such titles employ linguistic play to call attention to the experiences of women. However, while the domestic space is confining, it is also understood as a place of creativity and resistance; here, it appears that Sor Juana acts as a guide beyond the constrictions that continue to limit women.
Mesa Bains’ installations, and domesticana more generally, offer rich opportunities to explore feminist artistic activism; here I want to draw out just two themes in this body of work that bear on ecological understanding in particular. First, I explore the ontological drive within this work that creates new understandings of the self and its relationships to others and to place. Contrary to superficial readings of both ecofeminism and Chicana studies, identity is often described in non-essentialist ways. As noted above, Mesa-Bains’ art reveals the multiple subject positions to which Chicanas are hailed and seeks to create new, more liberatory subject positions for viewers to inhabit as they walk through the installation and take with them the cultural critiques that works like Venus Envy offer. As I outline above, identity can be understood to be performative and open to change, while the specific genre of art invites an understanding of identity as both non-unitary and relational. That is, the installation and its specific organization positions the spectator to see how one’s sense of self derives from the relationship to historical others and contemporary others. Mesa-Bains models this relationality through semi-autobiographical installations that speak not only of personal history, but of social history more broadly. The artist explains, “I have pursued strategies based on the survivalist position of shifting locations and community celebration that have been impermanent and ever-changing” (2003, 311).

This strategy of personal and social storytelling that relies heavily on the understanding of space and the relationships between humans and objects in space shares much in common with the notion of cartohistoriography introduced by Elba Sánchez. Consider the first two chapters of the Venus Envy series, for example. Both use objects
strategically to refer to the past as a way of understanding the present and of making sense of the possibilities of resistant subjectivity for both Chicanas and other spectators. Moreover, both share a distinct ontological drive not just to raise critique or to pose epistemological questions regarding the nature of history and self, but to lay the ground for new relationships and new futures. As with Sánchez, who sees her sense of self shift over time and who has learned the modes of deterritorialization that have displaced her only to learn the ways she might remap herself, so too does Mesa-Bains seek to deterritorialize spectators. She writes, “Using accumulation, fragmentation, and dispersal, the shrines have created the dislocation of boundaries in space through their allegorical devices” (2003, 311). She goes on to highlight those elements that have featured so prominently in Sánchez’s own work—the fluid sense of time, space and place: “The viewer is drawn against limitations of the temporal and spatial. Interior and exterior are challenged in the use of organic materials such as earth, leaves, twigs, and waste. Mirrors, broken and fragmented, act on the viewer to fissure illusion and gain states of receptivity” (311). As I suggest in chapter three of this dissertation, disrupting the spectator’s sense of place and time proves most effective in rendering a deterritorialized, and therefore more open and critically relational, sense of self.

The rootedness in altar-like installations also adds an element of ceremony and ritual, coding the domesticana site as an instance of personal and social healing that further mobilizes the ontological impulse in the work. In fact, Mesa-Bains and other artists often use words such as “transfigure” and “transform” to describe the function of art in the Chicana/o community. Embracing the notion that Mesa-Bains’ work might heal
community distress and fundamentally transfigure relationships and our understandings of self, space and time is to take a step beyond symbolic gestures. For example, Mesa Bains does not aim to resignify the domestic sphere, but change its role and the ways in which women move within it. This is a distinction that Norma Klahn emphasizes with respect to Chicana cultural productions—a distinction between representational concerns with epistemology and subaltern epistemologies concerned with “performance and transformation” (2003, 128).²³

Mesa-Bains and the other writers and artists in this chapter present cultural productions that demand respect for explorations of “the real,” such as questions of embodiment, of identity and relationships with non-human others, of spiritual connections to human and non-human others. As Klahn notes, the stakes for subaltern survival hinge on transforming these most immediate relationships. Art does not just represent some aspects of the world around us; it should transform it. This anti-representational stance that can be seen in the work of Deleuze (1986, 1989) and further theorized and mobilized by the artists under consideration requires a certain literacy from the audience in order to motivate widespread transformations—a point I turn to in the next chapter. What I highlight with this analysis of the ontological drive of altar installations is that, similar to prior Chicana narratives regarding the self, space and time that have been explored in this chapter, such texts deterritorialize spectators by pushing them to rethink history, rethink the present in response to changing ideas of history and to rethink themselves and their relationships in response to social critiques exposed in the art. Further, by emphasizing closed in spaces and installations that the spectators walk
through and explore, that relational self is very much called to be a self-in-space, conscious of how one’s environment imposes on and shapes one’s sense of self.

The second ecological theme that emerges from Mesa-Bains’ work is the link between femininity and consumerism in figuring relationships between the self, human-others and non-human others. *Chapters I and II* rely on an “aesthetic of accumulation” (González 2003, 307) seen in rasquache, but which here takes a unique form related to the distinctly feminine interpellation to consumerism. Mesa Bains plays on the idea of home altars by populating the desk and vanity surfaces with family photos and hyperfeminine depictions of glamorous Chicana movie stars that may sit next to plastic flowers or a wedding gown. Here too the juxtaposition of articles on the altars exposes the paradoxical status of women. The altars are simultaneously characterized by accumulation, display and excess, as González points out, and, I think, a recycling aesthetic. The recycling aesthetic exists in tandem with a presentation of the glamorous and hyperfeminine and a debased and shattered glamour, a sense of devotion both to spiritual and domestic roles and a struggle for emancipation from them. I believe much can be gained from reading the spectacle of excess against the anti-capitalist critiques of much Chicana cultural production as seen in Alma Lopez’s work, which reveals Chicanas as the invisible and exploited producers of goods in the capitalist system. The woman-culture link is sketched as complex and even paradoxical in its contradictions, yet with space for performative subversions.

Drawing this point out, in these works neither Mesa-Bains nor González seem to highlight the *anti-capitalist* working-class roots and recycling aesthetic central to
rasquache and domesticana art. That is, while clearly displaying a survivalist aesthetic, the nod to glamour and excess might read as capitalist yearning rather than anti-capitalist critique. The play of juxtapositions, however, challenges simple binaristic readings. In broadening her analysis on the ceremony and spectacle of femininity, I see this as a particularly interesting area for ecofeminist analysis. The critique of women’s consumerism shows consumerism as linked to a classist and racist beauty standard; in contrast, performative excess does not deny the feminine interpellation to consumption, but criticizes it while rewriting consumption through a recycling aesthetic that speaks both to the constructed poverty of Chicanas and the damage capitalist production schemes place on the environment. This aesthetic criticizes oppressive capitalist structures while citing another major concern of Chicana/o studies—place-centeredness (the lococentrism of the domestic sphere, e.g. the kitchen or bedroom as well as the border geography populated by maquiladoras). And, it seems to do so though a third space articulated by Emma Pérez (1999) and others where the paradox and contradictions of femininity exist together; femininity is achieved through the doing and the troubling of gender norms.

In some ways Venus Envy Chapter III (1997) is less intimate in its presentation of space than Chapters I and II (the installation is spread throughout a large museum room). Yet, in that it focuses more sharply on the body it is also a much more intimate portrayal of women’s lives. The centerpieces of the installation are three very large figures that signify the female body: one is a “Vestiture... of Feathers,” a large and colorful feathered gown; one is a “Vestiture... of Branches,” a large translucent golden gown with branches
stuffed in the neck and arm pieces of the dress, and the third, *Cihuatlampa, The Place of Giant Women*, is a large, curvaceous moss-covered body inscribed with Aztec glyphs and sprawled on the floor. With each, Mesa-Bains points to the ways in which women’s bodies are inscribed with meaning through costume or, as with Cervántez, literal inscriptions through glyphed tattoos. Yet, here the artist takes special care to use elements from the natural environment (moss, feathers, tree branches) to embody women. Given their juxtaposition with the very unnatural environment of the museum as well as their placement across from a large mirror, a table/altar featuring feminist literature, walls hung with paintings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz among others, Mesa-Bains reveals a tension between nature and culture. In framing the room with an altar and through the use of spirit glyphs, Mesa Bains seems to signal the citation of spiritual energies drawn from earth goddesses. Rather than yielding a reading wherein there is a clear and natural link between “women” and “nature,” Mesa Bains seems to sacralize both women and nature through the performative use of symbols and the staging of a ritualized scene in the museum room.

To further draw out the analysis of ritual, the mirror reframes the subjects and again calls attention to perspective, as Cervántez’s work has done, but it also highlights audience spectatorship that, in its collective nature, heightens the effect of the ritual setting and can move spectators to think and feel new things and new connections. As I argue in the introduction to this dissertation as well as chapters four and five with respect to direct action activism, the citation of spirituality in activism can have a collectivizing
effect that forges connections among humans, between humans and spirit-others, and in some cases, between humans, spirit, and nature.

The clear symbols of the natural environment and the spiritual world play up the deterritorialization of bodies in *Venus Envy Chapter III* and the ritual seems to have at its purpose the birthing of new subjectivities that may be more relational, producing precisely the body/landscape/spirit subjectivities I outline in the introduction. The reference to Cihuatlampa points to the place in the Aztec afterlife where the souls of women who have died in childbirth gather (Goodman, 1997). The ceremonial gowns and the large woman of Cihuatlampa surrounded by Chicana feminist figures suggest a ceremonial space that is an offering, an *ofrenda*, to the Chicana artists and community leaders who have come before and sacrificed themselves to birth a more just future. Signs of the natural world and the theme of reproduction are called upon not to signal women’s inherent naturalness or biologically determining capabilities, but women’s role in constructing new social realities. Spectators act as witnesses in this spiritual labor of social transformation where categories of sacred/profane, natural/artificial or cultural, public/private, human/non-human/spirit are challenged and opened up to support possibilities for counter-hegemonic subjectivities and alternative futures.24

While I emphasize the ecological narratives generated from installation arts and draw parallels between them and other works introduced in this chapter, I conclude by noting that despite shared themes in their content, altar installations are unique with respect to their form: like performance art, installations allow viewers to interact with the art in a more intimate way that creates the opportunity for more active and more critical
spectatorship (Mancillas, et al., 1999). Recalling the themes brought up in the work of Anzaldúa, Moraga and Mora earlier in this chapter, Mesa-Bains and others that work in the genre of domesticana draw out a complex sense of belonging. Visual culture scholar Jennifer González writes that a specific kind of spectator position is enabled by the art: “The decision to produce installation art rather than works in traditional media suggests an interest on the part of these artists to create an environment within which the viewer will recall other, familiar sites. The artists perhaps recognize that the most important forms of ideological hailing may take place not ‘in the street,’ but in the home” (1999, 200). Spectators are moved to see both the homely and unhomely aspects of the domestic realm. As Mesa-Bains’ work recalls her own domestic spaces, viewers connect it to those places that are familiar to them, but are hailed to see them in a different way. A similar phenomenon is observed in chapter five, which demonstrates with the becoming-co-extensive of the Women’s Intercultural Center and the homes and families of the participants; this yields a politicization of the participants that seeps into their private lives outside the center. In the same manner, the consciousness-raising potential of installation has the effect of deterritorializing subject spectators from their own places of belonging, potentially opening up their subjectivity.

Conclusion

This chapter opened with an argument that ecological themes proliferate through Chicana scholarship, art, and literature yet they are down-played in order to emphasize critiques aimed at social justice. As I sought to show throughout, critiques of social justice are often necessarily tied to those of ecological justice. Patriarchal, racist, Anglo
nationalist and capitalist norming logics figure the natural environment, women, working-class and racialized others as exploitable. The environmental justice movement has recognized this, yet scholars do not often connect that more policy-oriented field with the cultural production of minoritized groups who often suffer most from environmental degradation. Despite this disciplinary divide, this chapter shows that creative resistances do offer critiques and new visions for how we can relate to each other and with the natural environment in new ways.

With respect to the guiding research questions I asked in this dissertation’s introduction, this chapter has shown significant ways in which Chicana environmentalism reworks some of the major debates in ecofeminism; in particular, this chapter focused on the many ways artists and writers create performative subversions of ruling logics by reworking our understanding of the body, of the relationship between women and nature, and of spirituality. Counter to the essentialist understandings of these three themes, the artists in this chapter might be seen to use a deterritorializing strategy that destabilizes our given understandings of historical and present social, political, and economic systems, disrupting our sense of selves and orienting us toward more critical reflection and the formation of new (inter)subjectivities. While this chapter offers a broad survey that cuts across multiple artistic genres, chapter three offers an in-depth case study that shows the multiple deterritorializations that are possible with cinematic technologies and the ecological (inter)subjectivities that might become possible as a result.
CHAPTER THREE

TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE ECOLOGICAL SELF:
CINEMATIC DETERRITORIALIZATIONS

Part I: Deterritorializations

The prior chapter offered a broad survey of ecological themes in Chicana feminist visual and narrative cultural production that sought deterritorialize Chicana studies by pointing out the ways those themes have been ignored or under-theorized by scholars in the field. By introducing ecofeminist themes such as the role of the body, the nature of the connection between women and nature, and the role of spirituality in women’s ecological theory and activism, I also sought to find ways Chicana writing and art reworked common essentialist understandings of academic ecofeminism, thereby deterritorializing the field and pushing it in new directions. Hopefully, those directions lead toward a greater embrace of poststructural and performative approaches in ecofeminist philosophy and toward more context specific analysis that might include conversation with the field of Chicana studies.

Here I use the concept of deterritorialization to describe (1) the effect derived from joining ecofeminist and Chicana theory once more whereby both bodies of theory are put into new motions by their mutual encounter with each other and are opened up to new questions and analyses, and (2) the effect Portillo’s filming strategies have on
spectators, including her ability to dislocate the viewer’s subjectivity and push the spectator to consider new alliances directed toward social and ecological justice. While *Señorita Extraviada* has been skillfully reviewed by others, I extend the argument I made in the previous chapter and claim that reviewers have not recognized the ecological cues in the film and that by applying an ecocritical lens we can better understand the full potential of this activism-oriented documentary. *Señorita Extraviada* is one of many films by Chicana directors about Chicana and Mexican-American women that represent a trend of performative documentary film-making with the potential to deterritorialize both the subjects of the film and its spectators. I chose to focus on this film in particular because of a clear rewriting of both people and the spatial relations that construct humans and non-humans (including the landscape) in more just ways though this trend is visible across other films and modes of cultural production, as chapter two has demonstrated. However, though I celebrate this film’s potential, deterritorialization is neither a straightforward concept nor a straightforward process; this chapter concludes with a brief reception analysis that reveals to the limits of such deterritorializing methodologies that would open up coalitional and ecological intersubjectivities.

This analysis begins by taking another Deleuzian approach in asking what a film can do. Here I turn from more traditional film analysis that tends to focus on film as a more or less distorted representation of reality. Rather, Deleuze’s anti-representational philosophy reflects the strong ontological impulse in much work in Chicana studies that emphasizes the power of the creative act to bring about change in oneself and in the world around us. Sarah Ramirez summarizes, “A Chicana aesthetic space… participates
in community empowerment through *curandera* (healer) work, which expresses the concern for social, global, and environmental justice as well as engages in the processes of recovery and transformation” (2002, 42). This is particularly true for a film like *Señorita Extraviada* in which religion and the curandera function play such an explicitly central role as I will detail below.

Moreover, while feminist film analyses that focus on structures of gazing remain important, this chapter reflects Deleuze’s concerns that film criticism highlights the visual at the cost of other affective cues; for instance, Deleuze’s *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989) reveal how the manipulation of images and time through film editing creates the possibility in the viewer of thinking differently. Film cuts, superimpositions, the speeding up and slowing down of images, filmic dissolves—the camera’s eye can see differently than the human eye and it can push us from our comfortable and routine engagement with the world around us. Thus, the cinema is uniquely situated as an art form that can disrupt continuous flows of time and of movement, disconnect perception from one coherent viewing subject and play with affect in order to dislodge, disorient, deterritorialize spectators. Ultimately, as Claire Colebrook suggests, new becomings of life may be enabled through an encounter with film. She writes, “A thing (such as the human) can transform its whole way of becoming through an encounter with what it is not, in this case the camera. But this can only be so if we encounter the camera of cinema, not as something we already know, but as something that challenges us” (2002, 37). Given this orientation to the potential of film, this chapter asks: what sort of *becomings* does *Señorita Extraviada* enable? In
particular, how does the potential of film stretch the possibilities of deterritorialization beyond the scope of the possibilities for becoming-other, becoming-revolutionary offered in chapter two by less confrontational modes of cultural production? What human-nature and human-spirit connections or, in other words, what body/landscape/spirit intersubjectivities, are enabled?

**Narrative Threads: A Search for Truth, A Summoning of the Sacred**

This analysis tracks the film’s narrative strategies before weaving in its visual and aural approaches. The story moves along two lines. The first line shows Portillo narrating the search for answers that might explain the hundreds of missing young women of Ciudad Juárez. Several master narratives are at work: women have fallen prey to the danger that accompanies life as a prostitute; narco-trafficking; an American serial-killer; the deranged plot of an Egyptian national; the deranged plot led by a local gang controlled by the now-incarcerated Egyptian national; a police conspiracy; a conspiracy between the police and the maquiladoras; a conspiracy among the police, the maquiladoras and the government; and finally, globalization writ large. Notably, Portillo herself fails to provide any concrete answers to her audience though she does indicate that, at the very least, the government is at fault for failing to protect its citizens from two decades of continued violence. Rather, she shows less concern with finding the truth than with mapping the discursive terrain as provisional truths emerged. In this, Portillo charts not just the physical violence brought against the women of Juárez, but also the discursive violence that continues to circumscribe women. With this refusal of easy answers, Amy Carroll surmises that Portillo’s film “(re)deploys the trope of the question:
How does one attempt to interpret the killing fields of Juárez? How does one attempt to interpret the sexualized and racialized sociopolitical and economic violences/violations while neither contributing to their maintenance nor choosing to ignore them?” (2006, 381).

The second narrative line writes against the representational violence mapped in the first—including the representation violence that marks both the women and the land of Juárez as degraded and exploitable. Portillo does so by bearing witness to the stories of the families of the disappeared and following them with her camera as they reclaim symbolic and physical space. In the face of the failures of the state, its policing arm and the media, Portillo claims, “I find myself mistrusting everything I am told and everything I read. The only reliable sources of information are from the victims and their families” (2001). While Portillo troubles given narratives and offers space for alternative stories from the victims’ families, she employs another narrative strategy via the use of religious imagery that both tells and defers truths that speak against the grain of the master narratives. Rosa Linda Fregoso suggests that the funereal tone and religious symbolism are key to understanding the film’s aim. The religious cues act as a mode through which women are resignified from abject to sacred, and thus shows how the film demands recognition of their political subjectivity (2003). I extend Fregoso’s insights and elaborate on the role of religion, historicizing this mode of resignification in order to enfold a call to re-sacralizing the land as well as the women of Juárez. That is, I claim that Portillo is not only re(w)riting relations between and among humans, but addresses spatial relations
as well, which is a way of recognizing the ecological element of women’s struggles for justice.

The Time-Image: Disrupting Time, Decentering the Spectator’s Privilege

Having drawn the broad strokes of the film’s narrative structure, I focus on Portillo’s cinematic strategies in more detail. Since the play of time is central in manipulating affect, I begin thinking filmicly—that is, on the technologies specific to cinema—on this point. The film opens with a mother of one of the disappeared telling the story of her own kidnapping and rape while pregnant with her daughter. Portillo cuts back and forth between a close-up of the woman giving testimony to the camera and a re-enactment of that night eighteen years ago. As the viewer grows emotionally invested in the terror drawn out by the contrasting visual enactment and recitation of the story, the mother denies the viewer’s sense of relief that she has survived. At the conclusion of her story, the mother reveals, “what nearly happened to me has happened to her,” speaking of her daughter’s kidnapping and subsequent murder (Portillo 2001).

Portillo opens the film with an example that shows the complexity of time and history. Rather than show history as something that unfolds in a straightforward and linear fashion, the director what the works of Yreina Cervántez and Alma Lopez have shown in the last chapter, a sense of time as cyclical. The cyclical expression of time is repeated throughout the film as Portillo moves between the build-up of evidence and collapse of a case only to build up a new case with a different suspect that suffers the same fate—that is, the mystery remains unresolved. Yet, the sense of time as circular is compounded by the use of Gregorian chant that crescendos at the close of each woman’s
narrative, the montages of news stories, and the continuous tracking of time and body counts. The effect of this time-image—what Carroll names a “circular-turned-spiraling logic”—is to disrupt the spectator’s sense of time as continuous, forward-moving and progress-oriented (2006, 385).

If subjectivity is marked by a coherent sense of self in a moment and across time, Portillo’s troubling of time, indeed history, undermines any sense of the coherent self that might emerge. Further, this image of time spiraling out of control without the intervention of justice strikes a dissonant chord against the slow but crescendoing, mournful music that accompanies the melodramatic shots of a mother laying out her daughter’s dress or the deliberate stroke of paint marking a cross on a telephone pole. The contradictory impulses of all too-fast and the sudden stopping of time, action and narration create anxiety in the viewer but provide no resolution. Following Deleuze (1989), I suggest that the unsettled subjectivity of the spectator effected by this play on affect can create an opportunity to undermine a coherent sense of the bounded, autonomous self in order to invite an intersubjective positioning—a positioning that is effected by other strategies in the film as well and which, ultimately, I will show is key to the film’s activist orientation toward alliance-building.

Expanding on this insight, Laura Marks examines the roles of time, memory and “reality” as they are expressed in contemporary documentary filmmaking. She mobilizes Deleuze’s distinctions between the virtual and the real wherein the virtual acts as “the reservoir on which thought draws in order to bring about the actual” (200, 31). Accordingly, the virtual plays a potentially large role in documentary filmmaking: the
role of the documentary camera might be to record and re-member history differently in order to actuate the virtual. Indeed, rather than relaying representational truths, Deleuze and Marks ask how the documentary might offer virtual images that are more real than reality, that might relay the unspeakable and reveal the unvisualizable—a question that remains particularly significant given the burden of representation on the murders of Juárez and in the imaginary that Marks studies in documentaries. Marks explains, “it is paradoxically at the point when images become ambiguous—when we cannot tell what is real and what is imagined, what has happened in the past and what is happening in the present—that we begin to see the outlines of how Deleuze understands the virtual aspect of the cinema…the present in modern cinema seems almost to lapse into the past, or the past to overtake the present” (2000, 32).

This anti-representational impulse parallels strategies Chicana writers and artists have used—rewriting the past outside of the restricting colonialist and patriarchal frames to create grounds for a different present; that strategy is often symbolized by the re-membering of the goddess Coyolxauhqui as seen in the work of Juana Alicia, Alma López and many other Chicana artists and writers as exemplified in chapter two. Given this, it might be said that working within the virtual summons what Emma Pérez calls the “decolonial imaginary” or the third space, which is that interstitial space where the gaps and silences around the histories of Chicanas can be found and articulated (1999). As she illustrates, the decolonial imaginary is also that space between colonialism and the truly postcolonial future, the nepantla situation of being in the middle and subject to change, remaining in process and calling on all survival strategies at one’s disposal.
New Subjects: Becoming Coalitional, Becoming Sacred, Becoming Other

Becoming Coalitional: Spectators in Movement

While this strategy works across artistic mediums, the cinematic technologies that challenge time can potentially disrupt spectators on a deeper affective level than is possible in other mediums. Señorita Extraviada invokes the virtual throughout the film with the effect of troubling the spectator’s understanding and subjectivity. For example, Portillo cites the virtual through a series of juxtaposed images that bring the past, present and future together via objects, like shoes, that link multiple women. Portillo films young women window-shopping for shoes and then cuts to a close-up of the very same shoes found on the body of a murdered woman. She repeats this later in the film, showing one of the survivors slipping into her shoes before cutting to a close-up of another shoe found on another body in the desert.

The collision of present-day shoppers with the dead bodies of the past serves two purposes. First, the dead body implicitly raises the specter of danger in the future of the shoppers, suggesting a dire future unless an intervention is made. The conflation of women of the past, present and future destabilizes subjectivity and pushes the spectator to take up a relational rather than individualist perspective that recognizes relationships—indeed, continuities—between people. Second, the juxtaposition of shoe stores and women shoppers next to the maquiladora factories speaks of the complicity of consumer culture and maquiladora-style trade. Portillo’s camera scans the makeshift houses of the colonias, silently but visually documenting that free trade has not brought economic security to women in the region though it has brought violence. Within this moment of
historical contextualization, she seems to suggest that if NAFTA brought with it a significant increase in violence against women, then perhaps the future could look different. The apparent “whodunit” narrative remains unresolved, yet Portillo’s critique against gendered and racialized labor and consumption, both of which ultimately make objects of women, remains potent.

Although the deterritorialization of time proves to be an effective means to dislocate and deterritorialize spectators, there are other ways in which the documentary strives to open up the self to human, nature, and spirit relationalities. As I suggested in this chapter’s introduction, Señorita Extraviada clearly functions as what Bill Nichols names a performative documentary, one that “addresses the fundamental question of social subjectivity, of those linkages between self and other that are affective as fully as they are conceptual” (quoted in Carroll 2006, 381; see also Nichols 2001, 130-138). The remainder of this subsection explores the affective potential of intersubjectivity explicit when the young women return the gaze of the spectator. For instance, in the final scene, immediately after Portillo films the activist surviving sister of one of the disappeared warning “To be silent is to be an accomplice,” she cuts to a close-up of an anonymous young woman on a bus, gazing directly back at the spectator as though she were demanding accountability. Moreover, Portillo’s marketing efforts and tours with the film have consistently stressed the activist and coalition-building impulse of the work. She declares, “It is not objective journalism. It evokes compassion and incites action” (Portillo 2003, 231).
Of course, Portillo is not the first to deploy art’s performative functions to draw spectators to coalitional subject positions. Las Comadres describe themselves as a “multinational women’s collective of artists, educators, and critics who studied, taught and created art in the San Diego-Tijuana region during the years of 1988 to 1992” (Mancillas et al. 1999, 107). Las Comadres, like Portillo, focus on art and the ways it can open for discussion questions of territory and shifting identity. In fact, here too the artists use “deterritorialization” as a guiding idea to think about the potential for art to enable the creation of “postnational subjects” that, as Portillo does, brings spatial relationalities and their relationship to subjectivity and privilege to the fore. One of their most effective performance pieces was their border demonstration under the banner of “1,000 Points of Fear: Another Berlin Wall?” In comparing U.S. anti-immigrant sentiment and the militarization of the border to the Berlin Wall, Las Comadres brought the specter of injustice home, deterritorializing spectator-participants to think new associations about themselves, their land and their sense of community belonging. They explain, “Performance in the public sphere introduced a disordering of the status quo. In the resultant space there was an opportunity to call attention to the structure of everyday reality, to awaken the sleepwalker whose feelings and experiences are dulled by prevailing mass culture and mass information systems” (Mancillas et al. 1999, 112). This too is Portillo’s goal and thus far, I have shown how she attempts to achieve it through the disruption of time and historical understanding in order to push spectators into coalitional becomings; I turn now to the role of religion in the film and the ways Portillo
deployed religious imagery in order to deterritorialize bodies and land, ultimately disrupting our understanding of space and place, as the Comadres have done.

*Becoming Sacred: Re(w)riting the Body*

As Fregoso makes clear, Portillo, aware of the discursive violence brought against the women of Ciudad Juárez (Fregoso 2003), Portillo films with a knowledge of the burden of representation she faces. She deploys Catholic imagery to write against the overdetermining depiction of women as prostitutes and as workers. Fregoso points out, she also attempts to write against the portrayal of women-made-spectacle as abject corpses (2003, 22). I extend this point to note that, counter to the proliferation of images in the popular press of the brutalized and decayed bodies of the victims, Portillo’s filming strategies suggest that she invites the ghosts of the women to reanimate their lives. This can be seen in examples of relatives of the victims telling stories of their deaths as well as of their lives. Portillo’s montages of photos and letters from the deceased pass across the screen slowly for the spectator to note the details. In one important scene, the mother of one of the disappeared takes out several items of her daughter’s best clothing and lays them on the bed without explanation—the sense is that this seeming altar to the daughter invites her return. The camera’s lingering shot suggests that indeed, the daughter’s ghost looks back from the bed, filling the screen and returning the spectator’s gaze.

The construction of altars does play an important role in the film, but like Portillo’s other documentaries such as *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead* (1988), *Señorita Extraviada* is itself an altar and it marks the director as a curandera of sorts (L. Pérez 2007). Luis León, writing on *Religion, Life and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Border*
remarks, “It is out of the space constituted by the gaze, between science and the knowable world, that universal normativity and order are made, deviance defined, and aberration classified and managed. This is the space disrupted by the persistence of religious poetics” (2004, 248). Ironically, Portillo reclaims a camera’s gaze to shift viewing, to shift cognition to alternate knowledges presented by the female survivors of border violence. Not only have science and “ordered logic” failed to protect the women, but they are partially responsible for defining such women as deviant. Portillo’s reclamation of the gaze and use of religion to resignify the women can, according to León, “challenge modern reliance on empiricism and colonial forms of knowledge” (248). Moreover, it does so with the charge of an ofrenda—Portillo’s offering of the film acts as a form of spiritual healing and an incitement to justice.

In addition to the altar-specific strategies to humanize the victims, Portillo makes full use of Catholic imagery, including flickering candles, refrains from mournful chants, the filming of a religious funeral, and the painting of pink on black crosses across the streets of Ciudad Juárez. The crosses are the primary symbol of Voces sin Eco (Voices without Echo), the organization established by the families of the disappeared to raise awareness and find justice for the women of Juárez. As Fregoso notes, the crosses underscore the often unmentioned aspect of the murders that disproportionately target racialized female bodies; thus, the intersectional nature of the activism that demands recognition of women as racialized women, pink on black, is significant. Further, the crosses act as a sign that not only insists on the sacred nature of the women also insists on their public visibility. This visibility underscores the denial of women’s full access to a
citizenship, a right that has been denied them by the state’s failure to protect as well as by
the dehumanizing, misogynist rhetoric the state has used to explain and excuse the
murders (Fregoso 2003).

**Becoming Sacred: Re-mapping Nature**

While Fregoso and others have noted the ways in which the film writes against
the abjection of the women of Juárez, none have taken into account the depiction of the
landscape within *Señorita Extraviada*. The documentary constructs two different
landscapes: the city of Juárez with its maquila factories, shopping and clubs and the
desert outskirts. If Juárez exists in the neocolonial imaginary as El Paso’s abject other,
racialized and feminized as the city of sin where prostitution and drugs reign for the
American tourist who crosses over, it also exists alongside the NAFTA-era imagery of
Juárez as a geography overdetermined by the symbol of the maquiladora and its young,
racialized female workers. The conflation of Border-Woman-Mexico is not new.

Indeed, Chicana studies has long wrestled with the colonial legacy of Malinche, Cortez’s
translator and presumed lover. She has been seen as the figure on whom the primal scene
of *Mexicanidad* has played out and in which the lineage of the mestiza stakes its origin.
Malinche’s assumed betrayal, her coding as *la chingada* (the raped one) and the betrayer
of the race, lingers in contemporary neocolonial relations between the U.S. and Mexico.

While Chicana feminists have reclaimed Malinche and sought to resignify her in multiple
ways, Portillo and *Voces sin Eco* aim to wrench the women of Juárez away from the
discursive violence that claimed Malinche and that continues to figure Mexico and
particularly the border as a feminized, racialized and thus disposable space.
If Juárez is understood as the abject other of the U.S. border towns, the desert exists in the neocolonial imaginary as the *other* other, the site against which Juárez is defined. As is evidenced by the unsolved murders, the desert escapes surveillance. Portillo’s voiceover notes that it is “full of secrets, *some* of them buried in the sand” (Portillo 2001). Hundreds of bodies are deposited there without notice. The newspapers and the documentary alike note that the desert acts as the dumping ground for everything unwanted. However, what remains unnoted by reviewers and film theorists is that the desert is *not only* inhabited by the corpses of young women, but by the city’s poor who accumulate there for lack of other housing options. Not *all* of the desert’s secrets are buried in the sand; Portillo suggests that the desert does, or at least it *can*, stand in as something other than the abject dumping ground of corpses. That is, in the film, the city is marked by production (maquiladoras) and consumption (bars, clubs, stores); the desert, on the other hand, is marked by the homes of the poor who are often made invisible in the production process. Portillo draws them into visibility as part of a larger critique against neocolonial globalization and which sees the intersection of poverty with gender and race oppression as playing a role in the violence.

The resignification of the desert and the city occurs along similar lines as the resignification of the women of Juárez. Portillo takes care to characterize the families that live along the desert as impoverished but virtuous. Her camera holds on the ramshackle houses and cardboard apartments not to indict the families, but to point to the disparity between the wealthy and poor on each side of the border. Alongside these visual cues, Portillo films families talking about their daughters, highlighting the fact that they were
hard workers, that they taught catechism, etc. In one of the most important scenes in the film, the mother of a disappeared woman named Sagrario Gonzalez tells the story of her daughter’s disappearance. In the absence of any coherent narrative, the mother finds solace in an alternative source of knowledge. Gonzalez’s super/natural interpretation begins with her acknowledgement of Sagrario’s disappearance and her subsequent turn to Sagrario’s parakeets for answers. She recalls asking, “‘Luis, do you know where Sagrario is?’ And, he nodded. The parakeet seemed to understand. He shook his head as if he were saying ‘Yes.’ The parakeet left on Tuesday… and on Wednesday they found my daughter’s body. We found out on Thursday. I felt that the parakeets knew” (Portillo 2001). This testimony is given careful attention in the film despite the fact that this scene, including the close-up of a parakeet, does not drive the narrative forward. The scene does not contribute to any sense of the film as a “whodunit.” However, it does signal the role of alternate, oppositional knowledge systems, a sense of the supernatural that is not contained by institutionalized Catholicism, and a re-sacralization of the natural world that draws connections between the natural, the supernatural and the human worlds. The parakeets double signify as both super/natural figures that connect humans to the natural and spiritual worlds and as women who are confined as birds within an oppressive network of cultures.

Significantly, the destabilizing work of that scene occurs next to, but not in tension with, Portillo’s more traditional reterritorializing of both the desert and the city. Pans of desert expanses are cut between shots of troops of activist families combing the land for loved ones and claiming it back from the grips of murderers. In these moments,
the haunting refrain of the religious chant accompanies the families as they pause in their search, scanning the acres before them. The music coinciding with this halt in the narrative marks the territory as sacred even as the visual seems to cite the biblical symbolism of the desert wherein the desert remains both a site of temptation as well as the setting for a journey toward greater communion with God. It is also possible that viewers will connect the desert scenes intertextually with other representations in Chicana cultural production. For example, in many widely read works, Pat Mora envisions the desert as a place that is dangerous, but also a place where women can find themselves. In *Agua Santa: Holy Water*, Mora compares La Llorona, a mother whose children have been lost to her, to “desert women/ [who] know about survival” (1995, 77). The parallels between Mora’s poem and Portillo’s visuals of mothers and other family members asserting their agency, refusing to bend to patriarchal and neocolonial violence while searching for their disappeared daughters is striking.

As in the desert, *Señorita Extraviada* also shows the families marching across and thus reclaiming the city of Juárez though here they do so with protest banners. In addition, in several scenes throughout the documentary, the camera zooms in on pink on black crosses and pans out to streets full of crosses to show the ways in which Catholicism (and the coextensive intersectional awareness of women’s sacrality) literally becomes part of the landscape of Juárez. The tactics enacted here do resignify abject landscapes as sacred as they rewrite abject women as such, but equally important as the scene with Sagrario’s parakeets show, they also disrupt narrative flow and the spectator’s sense of security and coherence by opening up the relationality of animal-human and
human-landscape assemblages. These two functions remain key to understanding the cultural work *Señorita Extraviada* can perform: the film not only re(w)rites our understanding of the people and geopolitical history of the region, but in concentrating on the affective potential to deterritorialize spectator subjects Portillo attempts to invoke a change in relations of power by disallowing the privilege of spectators.

*Becoming Other: A Revolutionary Position*

To review, Deleuze sees the viewer’s relationship with film through an anti-representational frame of understanding where film is not charged with the task of representing a certain view of reality, but to move viewers to *new associations*. Given the analysis drawn above, *Señorita Extraviada* seems well positioned to do the important work of enabling a becoming-other, an other that, as Portillo hopes, will engage with the crisis of physical and representational violence along the border directly and in new ways. Distinct from a call to revolution, which entails a concrete plan and preconceived outcome, Portillo makes no explicit demands and gives no answers, but she incites a desire for change. In short, her affect-driven filming technique prods the spectator into a *becoming-revolutionary*.

It should be clear now that what distinguishes this documentary is its potential for deterritorialization. To be sure, not all subjects are deterritorialized by this film in the same way; context is important in understanding the cultural work performed by *Señorita Extraviada*. As I’ve sketched throughout this chapter, the women of Ciudad Juárez are deterritorialized through sacred resignifications while the American spectators targeted by Portillo’s film are deterritorialized through the destabilization of their subjectivity,
including the ways they are confronted with their privilege and complicity with the
discursive and economic violence along the border. With respect to Portillo’s use of
aural and visual religious cues, Judith Butler warns that there is always a citational legacy
that drags behind resignifications and here the danger is that the documentary recodes the
women as sacred Catholic subjects of suffering (1997). However, while Deleuze might
describe this as a dangerous example of reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1983),
the film resignifies them outside the strict confines of institutionalized religion and, as
Sagrario’s story shows, it does so incompletely.

The deterritorializing impulse is not only depicted in the way the documentary
unravels dominant narratives, or the ways that it resignifies women’s religious
participation within the public realm to demand citizenship rights, but also in the ways it
defers meaning. The crosses are provocative but do not deliver a single story that can
erase or resolve the trauma enacted in the region. Rather, it is a call to envision the space
for new subjects along the border, to envision the borderland itself as a new kind of
territory in which such violence is inconceivable and to invite allies to stand in coalition
to support this aim. Indeed, not only does it reconceive the land as a place in which
violence can no longer be brought against women’s bodies, but in tying together
Portillo’s resignification of the land and her implicit critique of global capitalism and the
maquila culture it engenders, the film may also be seen to combat the ecological violence
of relaxed standards for environmental protection within free trade zones and the neo-
liberal commodity fetishism they support.
Thus, what remains most significant is that the portrayal of the victimized bodies and landscapes is not closed, but deferred while the subjectivity of the spectators is pried wide open to force a relational positioning. That is, spectators are challenged to take up alternative knowledge systems that function outside the colonial order of things. In addition, time flows unevenly, sometimes speeding up and sometimes stopping altogether. The spectator is decentered as much by the unsettling of the traditional unitary subject position denied by the film’s editing and narrative structure as by the revocation of privilege that occurs when the viewer is faced with Portillo’s critiques against neocolonialism and the returning gaze of a young woman who remains vulnerable to the discursive and material violence at the border. Once moved from comfortable and easily identifiable subject positions, viewers are left to scramble to make sense of the trauma recorded by the film and their relationship to it. Given this, Deleuze might happily note that the work of the documentary is not complete… Portillo’s inconclusive but emotionally wrenching interrogative ending—an ending that leaves us with the organization Voces sin Echo marching in protest and warning us to speak out and join in protest—also leaves the spectator and the film itself in movement, striving to make new connections and to generate new solutions.

Part II: Complications in Reception

Despite its potential, the question remains: does deterritorialization work as a strategy to generate more just social and ecological subjectivities that are affectively open to coalitional activism? In other words, does the film actually move spectators to intersubjective subject positions? As is true for all creative works, including those
presented in chapter two, neither writers nor artists can guarantee how their work will be received. Reception depends on many factors including modes of the text’s circulation and the cultural literacy of the audience, though in their tours with the film, Portillo and Fregoso do strive to educate about the director’s intent and the activist impulse imbedded in the work (Fregoso 2003). Nonetheless, as Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans explain, “meaning is constituted not in the visual sign itself as a self-sufficient entity, nor exclusively in the sociological positions and identities of the audience, but in the articulation between viewer and viewed, between the power of the image to signify and the viewer’s capacity to interpret meaning” (1994, 4). In part two, we investigate Señorita Extraviada’s reception in the U.S. and conclude by revisiting that space between the sign and its readers to explore the potential buried in that ambivalence.

Part one of this chapter detailed Sagrario’s story through the recollections of her mother and it is one of the longest and most poignant scenes in the film. Señorita Extraviada also introduces us to Sagrario’s sister who has become an activist. She is the one who informs the audience about the work of Voces sin Eco, an organization founded by the families of murdered women. These scenes come at the end of the film and the music is surprisingly upbeat in contrast to the funereal tones carried across other scenes. In these final moments Portillo cuts from footage of family members marching in protest and an effort to raise awareness to a scene of women painting the haunting pink on black crosses across the roads of Ciudad Juárez. Finally, as the music fades Portillo cuts back to the sister and it is she who warns: “To be silent is to be an accomplice” (2001). As noted earlier in this chapter, this declaration is followed by a close-up of the eyes of a young
woman staring back at the spectator, returning her gaze fully as if challenging spectators to speak out, to do something.

These scenes are recounted to emphasize the potential they bear, though strangely, they are not mentioned in any reviews of the film consulted in the writing of this chapter. Nor is the role of spatial relations or the remapping of nature. As outlined above, *Señorita Extraviada* has two narrative threads: the first bears witness to the pain and agency of the families, including the restoration of humanity to their daughters through religious resignifications; the second records the search for the causes of the feminicide. However, reception of the film shows that audiences do not read evenly across both narratives. Not one review consulted gives name to the organization founded by the families of the disappeared. Not one reviewer consulted mentions the crosses, the dirge that weaves throughout the film, nor the altar-like quality of Portillo’s juxtapositions of photos, clothes, and letters of the dead. Part one focused on the first narrative because of its power to disrupt simple, linear storytelling and the kind of colonialist knowledge frameworks that are at least partially responsible for the discursive violence that constructs the devaluation of the woman-border-Mexico assemblage named by Carroll (2006). Citing Bill Nichols, I celebrated the interrogative force of the documentary that appears to tell two parallel stories though one clearly interrogates and then unravels the other as it unfolds. Yet, reviewers emphasized what they see as Portillo’s search for answers rather than her construction of alternate knowledges. The driving question remains: how has the reception of *Señorita Extraviada* been able to ignore entirely the *interrogative* force of the documentary? To what aims do spectators
read the young woman’s gaze as a plea for sympathy and not a challenge? Part two documents three broad reception patterns that show deflection of the director’s interrogative gaze while spectator assumptions regarding the nature of documentary as investigative and fact-finding are deployed to erase complicity.

**Pattern 1: The Politics of Agency and Outrage**

The reviews gathered for this film have come to surprisingly similar conclusions and almost all are structured the same way: they open with a murder count and the profile of the victims as young, thin, dark-skinned and with long hair; all list the potential culprits, citing drug traffickers, globalization and maquila factories, and incompetent and/or corrupt police and government officials. Reviewers write as though the facts of the case speak for themselves—they rehearse the master narratives reported by Portillo as though her film was investigative journalism. In framing the work this way—as a murder mystery where all the important players are the victims and the suspects—there is no room for extraneous characters. Indeed, families of victims and activists remain largely absent in most reviews and marginal in others. When present, they are enveloped by a sense of hopelessness and disempowerment: “there’s little they can do except complain to the authorities,” mourns the reviewer from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Wilson 2003). This attitude rewrites the women Portillo defines as activists, coding them as victims. Yet, some reviews deny the women even this. Janice Page of the *Boston Globe* complains that the portion of the film that gives space to grieving women doesn’t tell or show viewers enough about them. Page warns that, “This is especially problematic when it comes to factual analysis. When one alleged victim of police misconduct makes some
serious allegations relating to the kidnapping crimes, her credibility is impossible to judge because she’s hastily sketched by the filmmaker” (2003). With the activists rewritten as either helpless or suspect and thus unworthy of empathy, what do reviewers make of the point of the film?

Thus, the first of Portillo’s two aims, to resignify the women of the region as sacred and powerful social and political agents appears to have been compromised. The success of the second aim, the potential to move spectators to new associations and new actions, is more difficult to discern. The Boston Globe’s headline announces, “Flawed but Powerful ‘Señorita’ Evokes Outrage” while other reviews interpellate readers in more subtle ways to join the reviewer in a sense of moral outrage over the crimes. However, a closer look at the object of this outrage reveals a troubling trend. A survey of the literature offers the following quotes: “More disturbing than the statistics—since 1993 more than 270 young women have been raped and killed with their bodies often dumped in the Juárez desert—is the general shrug of indifference from local authorities regarding the killings” (Rechtshaffen 2002); “But, even more stunning than the number of deaths has been the failure of law enforcement officials to put a stop to the killings” (Navarro 2002); “What is even more brutal about these crimes is that they continue without anyone being positively charged with the crime” ( “Reel Review” 2002); And finally, “The most incredible fact is that there have been so many victims and so very few answers” (King 2002).

In a sense, these reviewers are correct. The lack of action points to either a highly complex array of factors that generated the crisis or a high degree of complicity among
all parties involved. Portillo hints that it is both. Yet reviewers simplify her sketch of the causes as well as the scope of complicity she implies. In characterizing the film as a “whodunit” alongside a shallow sense of moral outrage that decries not the murders themselves and the humanity of the victims (and their living advocates) but the failure of justice, reviewers suggest the solution is to find and punish the perpetrators. Of course, Portillo’s aim is to create a coalitional subject position for the spectator to inhabit that “evokes compassion and incites action” (Portillo 2003, 231). However, in this case, the would-be heroes who might be driven to action in the face of the horror in Ciudad Juárez fail to note their complicity in the race, gender and neocolonialist politics that target women of the region. Without an understanding of the broader critique for social, economic and ecological justice, spectators fail to engage in coalition; at best, their activism reproduces the colonialist missionary position (Narayan 1997).

More worrisome, in some reviews even the potential action of the uncritical spectator is undermined. One reviewer resignedly states that, “Unfortunately, as U.S. citizens, there’s only so much we can do” while another recounts how she felt powerless and as though she were pinned down by the weight of the crimes, unable to move (Wells 2002 and Page 2003, respectively). This is particularly curious given the relatively upbeat conclusion of Señorita Extraviada that is both an indictment of complicity and an incitement to action. The attitude of powerlessness that inheres in these reviews displaces complicity and defers the call to action. The sense of ambivalence that emerges is reflected in Don Bain’s comment in La Voz de Colorado: “Perhaps a wider knowledge of this injustice and the accompanying cries of outrage will cause something to be done. See
this film and form your own opinion” (Bain 2003). In a dangerous rhetorical move, the ultimate action called for is that of spectating and armchair theorizing about the murders and possible interventions that might stop them.

Pattern 2: Globalization, the Ultimate Deterritorializing Machine

While the first pattern to emerge reveals the politics of agency and moral outrage in reception, the second pattern—though related to the first—explicitly considers the discourse of globalism as it works within reviews. If the reader has been left with a sense that the activists’ charge of complicity has gone completely unrecognized or ignored, this section suggests that, in fact, there is a more complex negotiation at work. Fregoso offers an expansive and impressive discourse analysis regarding the ways globalization has been called into account for its role in the murders. Her chapter “Toward a Planetary Civil Society” in MeXicana Encounters (2003) largely focuses on the Mexican government’s alibi: globalization has limited the sovereignty of the state; there’s no way to intervene because the force of globalization is too great. Similarly, each review consulted underscores the compelling and unstoppable force of globalization such that reviewers too repeat the claims of the Mexican government. Reviews do note that the majority of companies that populate the border are American and that, although some murders have been documented prior to NAFTA, the number of murders has increased dramatically post-NAFTA; but reviewers stop short of implicating American corporations, their consumers or transnational politics and economies that rely on racial and gender hierarchies in which we all participate.
In fact, while these reviews erase the political stakes, Fregoso’s critique regarding the deracialization and degendering of globalism language is curiously explicit in one review: “People here are as disposable as the products they make, so is it really any wonder that drug use and sexual harassment are ingrained in the corporate culture, and that you’re not safe even when your workplace is adjacent to a police station?” (Page 2003). This passage yields a complex negotiation of race, gender and national identity. Janice Page’s description of the multiple forms of vice that intersect at this site of globalization produce Juárez as an “other” that is discrete and no longer related to conditions of its emergence. Here, U.S. complicity in the creation of the free trade zone at Mexico’s northern border remains ignored though studies such as Melissa Wright’s ethnography in the maquilas have exposed how white middle-class American masculinity is propped up against a devalued Mexican working-class femininity in ways that ultimately define female maquila workers as cheap and disposable (2003). Furthermore, this review and others ignore U.S. complicity in the consumption of drugs and manufactured goods that are produced or transported through the region. In fact, if we look closer at the review above, context-specific geopolitical analysis is undermined altogether with the conflation of Ciudad Juárez with “here”: “People here are as disposable as the products they make…” The ambiguous “people” who are disposable are without race or gender… in fact, they could be anyone. They could be you. This elision of the positionality of the victims, who do follow a specific gender, race and class-based profile in that victims are reported to be young, dark skinned with long hair, and lacking in economic security, occurs in Page’s statements that “you’re not safe even when your
workplace is adjacent to a police station.” In implicating the reader/ spectator in the peril, Page heightens the reader/ spectator’s sense of fear, but in the face of the erasure of the victims, including the race and class characteristics that mark some as more disposable than others, readers are called to disavow their own privilege and complicity. The terror is brought home to “your” neighborhood in a way that deflects, disempowers and further diffuses efforts of resistance so that any would-be American ally sees their work as already-ineffective before they have even begun to think through the modes of their possible resistance.

Pattern 3: The Investigative Documentary Gaze Interrogated

Lastly, the third reception pattern that highlights assumptions regarding the nature of the film as investigative (a “whodunit”) rather than an interrogative calling of account draws on the almost total failure to read the film as a film. Reviewers are interested in the facts of the case, their truth-value and how they will lead to a break in the case, and the eventual capture of the culprits. The film is seen as an investigative report; the assumption is that the documentary can give privileged, objective access to reality. Apparently caught up in their outrage over the developing crime thriller unfolding before them, reviewers rarely mention the mise-en-scene, music, color filters, or the careful characterization of the women of Señorita Extraviada. If the film is strictly a “whodunit,” what could account for Portillo’s dedication of so much time and narrative space for Sagrario’s mother to tell the story of her super/natural awareness of her daughter’s death? Why does the spectator get called to understand the alternative knowledge systems the mother deploys through communication with the parakeets if not to interrupt the
“whodunit” storyline and challenge viewers to question their own confidence in neocolonialist Truth narratives? This scene does not easily fit into reviewers’ pat understanding of the investigation and, as such, it remains unmentioned in reviews. The argument throughout part two of this chapter has been that the assumptions of the investigative mode of the film allow reviewers to evade some of the more difficult impositions Portillo makes on them. In marginalizing the role of the families and activists that return the spectator’s gaze, and in ignoring the careful filmic cues such as the deployment of religion to resignify the women, reviewers miss the interrogative impulse of Portillo’s work.

The ambivalence surrounding the negotiation of Portillo’s interrogative intent is made clear in the single review that I could find that directly offers a filmic engagement of the text. Karen Backstein of Cineaste verges on offering an alternate reading, but her insight is recuperated at the conclusion. After exploring what she considers to be the strikingly personal nature of the film, including Portillo’s use of family and victim testimony, close ups, frames of personal belongings, etc., she quotes Portillo as undertaking “an investigation into the nature of truth.” This telling turn of phrase speaks less about finding answers than it does about questioning how and what we know—the politics of truth-making. Yet, despite Backstein’s efforts to quote the director, she returns to familiar territory by suggesting the film “has the fascination of any mystery story, where the ‘whodunit’ compels the ‘reader’ to sift through clues, engage deeply with the information, and try to arrive at a satisfying conclusion. Sadly, here the ending remains open and the truth is still out there, waiting to be found.” Indeed, what she fails to note is
that the openness of the film’s approach is the key. The openness is strategic in that it continues to generate discussion and, hopefully, activist collaborations. Portillo purposely avoids providing any concrete answers to her audience. Rather, as part one of this chapter has shown, her aim seems to have been to chart both the physical and discursive violence brought against the women of Juárez. While reviewers have taken Portillo’s call to action to suggest we need to step up efforts to find the culprits and punish them, the young woman at the close reminds us that the problem is less about punishment and more about calling spectators to note how relations of power distribute privilege so unevenly that the young women of Juárez can continue to be figured as less than human. Justice needs to be understood as broader than catching the murderers; it needs to address the devaluation of women that is at the root of the problem and that requires an intervention into the racialized, classed and gendered neocolonialist thinking that continues to be reproduced on both sides of the border.

Portillo’s filming strategies disrupt the discursive violence that figures the women of Juárez as less than human and she asks her viewers to be self-reflexive and interrogate their own conceptions. That reviewers have missed this message so completely suggests the project of decolonization has far to go, but what is clear is that reviewers are genuinely uncomfortable in their viewings. They may not yet have been moved to become revolutionary as projected in part one, but there is evidence that Señorita Extraviada pushes spectators from their comfortable viewing positions while denying them an easily consumable story with stereotyped Mexican and Chicana subjects. The narrative strategy of deferral and the affective technologies of deterritorialization leave
the viewer with many questions, which is another form of openness though not, perhaps, the kind of radical openness that is possible. Nonetheless, the potential is present, waiting to be actualized.

**Conclusion:**

*Recouping Deterritorialization as a Technology for the Intersubjective Self*

At the conclusion of this chapter and by way of extending the insights of chapter two that set the groundwork for this chapter’s more in-depth case study approach, I bring together this dissertation’s three main lines of inquiry (Chicana studies, ecofeminist philosophy and Deleuzian theory) once more. One of the most important overlaps of Chicana studies and ecofeminism is the centrality of intersubjectivity—in Chicana studies the stress on intersubjectivity emerges from multiple sites including Gloria Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness and the coalitional impulse found in Chela Sandoval’s work; in ecofeminism, the idea is broadened to decenter human subjectivity, highlighting the relationality and thus mutual reliance and responsibility of all organic and inorganic forms in the maintenance of (bio)diversity. Deleuze’s anti-humanism carries this line of reasoning even further, displacing the idea of the subject (and thus also of subjectivity) wholly to privilege a shifting perception of multiple times, movements, connections. De-individualized, we become parts of assemblages moving in many new directions in the best of cases, or stuck (territorialized) at other times.

Though intersubjectivity is theorized at different degrees by theorists working in these fields, *Señorita Extraviada* works to deterritorialize spectators and create intersubjective subject positions across all three registers. And, although this film cannot
guarantee the deterritorialization of either the spectators or of the discursive violence that currently restricts the representation of women along the border, reception analysis shows that the film does open spectators up to new and uncomfortable subject positions and it does garner sympathy (if not always empathy) for women in the region and their families. It defers any concrete understanding of Chicana subjectivities and models an open and politicized consciousness for viewers. One of the elements that does seem to get lost in the reception, however, is the film’s reworking of spatial relations. Spectators are clearly made uncomfortable in their viewing and they are asked to stand in alliance with women in the border region, yet reviews analyzed here have shown that taking the step beyond alliance to see how spatial relations are constructed so that centers of production and consumption, privilege and oppression are spatially segregated remains harder to see. Despite this, there is at least the possibility that these more open subjectivities can form the basis of an ecological and intersubjective self oriented toward activism. Thus, these two chapters affirm the potential of cultural production to carry spectator/readers to deterritorialization toward an ecological intersubjective positioning by opening up human/nature/spirit relationalities. The next two chapters take up the questions of if and how a politics of deterritorialization might function similarly in the scope of direct action environmental work.
CHAPTER FOUR

ACTIVIST HISTORIES OF CHICANA/O AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTALISM

Introduction

This chapter outlines the historical framework in which Chicana/o and Mexican-American environmentalism can be understood. Importantly, what might be called “Chicana/o environmentalism” looks very different from the “mainstream” environmental movements that have taken place in the United States. Here, I also differentiate it from ecofeminism and the environmental justice movement. While mainstream environmentalism has focused on wilderness and wildlife preservation (e.g., campaigns to save rainforests, to save whales), and the environmental justice movement has critiqued the largely white and middle-class bias of the mainstream movements and organizations (e.g., Green Peace, Sierra Club), the environmental justice movement is over-determined by its focus on toxicity (e.g., placement of landfills and burning facilities). Ecofeminist literature offers a broader focus among its areas of interest, including: the gendered effects of toxicity; the fact that women are more likely to live or have employment in areas that are ecologically fragile and are less likely to have the financial means to escape poor environments; women’s spiritual connection to the land; and representations of women’s connection with the natural environment in art and
literature. However, critics have pointed out that there may be a white, middle-class bias in ecofeminism in the West.

Chicana/o environmentalism, however, encompasses ecofeminist and environmental justice concerns with toxicity and a critique of environments as dangerous. It also raises questions regarding the devaluation of ecological knowledge that is based on long-standing awareness of the land and wildlife that some communities have tried to retain in the Southwest. Related, Chicana/o and Mexican-American efforts at environmentalism may be oriented toward claiming land and water rights in a region to counter the redistribution of land and other resources that occurred after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848. Under the treaty, lands formerly belonging to Mexico became property of the U.S. and those of Mexican descent became “foreigners” and were not recognized as legitimate citizens of the land. Given all of the above, Chicana/o environmentalism represents a diverse movement toward epistemological and ontological modes of decolonization, including the decolonization of people and land through direct reclamations of space and rights as well as the reorienting of representation and modes of thinking about human/nature/spirit relations. This chapter also argues that the strategies that are deployed in these struggles may be best understood via an interdisciplinary lens that better captures the multiplicity, or the rhizomal character, of Chicana/o and Mexican-American environmentalism than is offered by the frames of environmental justice and ecofeminism, which represents not just a decolonization of subjectivity and movements, but asks the academy to decolonize by changing its frames of reference when addressing questions of justice.
Methodology

In this chapter, I seek not to present an all-encompassing historical record of activism related to the participation of Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans in environmental movements, but to provide an account of some of the most important sources out of which current ecological efforts have grown; it is important to understand this broader context while also recognizing that organizations and activists draw from a variety of sources, discourses and frames of reference to articulate their understanding of justice. As such, the work of Chicana/o and Mexican-American activists does not often fit within categorical and linear histories. In following the tradition of cultural theorists and historians in Chicana/o studies that seek to tell decolonizing histories (E. Pérez 1999, Fregoso 2003, Castañeda 1990, 2001, Vasquez and Torres 2003), this project details not just the stories that have been told about Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans’ environmental activism, but probes alternative sources and movements as possible sources of connection. This effort takes up Emma Pérez’s call to multiply and fracture groups in ways that resist their easy consolidation into a monolithic, reified entity such as “the Chicano community” (70-79). To this end, part one discusses the limitations of mainstream environmental movements for their exclusions of Chicana/o and Mexican-American activists and perspectives. Similarly, part two addresses the ways in which ecofeminist and environmental justice movements may have improved on some of failures of the mainstream movement, but still fail to recognize Chicana/o and Mexican-American struggles in all their complexity. Part three turns to alternative sources from which to find and understand these struggles.
Further, using an interdisciplinary framework, this chapter looks at both activist protests such as marches, boycotts, and participation in justice-oriented organizations and at cultural production and the stories such artifacts tell about activism and the relationship between communities and their natural environment. As argued in chapter one, ecofeminist studies often focus on social science approaches or humanistic approaches to study, but rarely do scholars bridge the disciplinary divide in theorizing women’s relationships to their environment. Environmental justice researchers, on the other hand, remain preoccupied with social science approaches to human-nature relations and thus miss the role of cultural production in the construction of ecological subjectivities. Yet, as Rosa Linda Fregoso’s social history *MeXicana Encounters* shows, the making of social identities through representation is intimately tied to the subject positions available in “everyday life,” including the subject position “activist” that some take up (170); in effect, cultural representations enable or disable cultural citizenship and create the conditions from which we come to understand ourselves and our relationships with the world around us.

In addition to consulting a variety of sources from varying sites of activism, this historical review is also a regional one that highlights, as do the remaining chapters of this dissertation, Chicana/o and Mexican-American activism in the U.S. Southwest, including Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California—states that border Mexico and that comprise the spaces and spatial relations from which Chicana/o borderlands theory grows. Additionally, however, portions of these states also share ecological characteristics that their populations have struggled to adapt to under changing political
and economic conditions. The place-centeredness, or what Devon Peña refers to as lococentrism (1998), is a response to the cultural and material effects of displacement as well as the ecological effects from developing relationships with the land and its flora and fauna. Indeed, as I argue in chapter two, borderlands theory does not only refer to the symbolic and material losses and resistances of life on the border, but is rooted in displacement from ecological belonging and strivings to re-root.

In studying environmental rights and Chicana/o activism, Laura Pulido explicitly exhorts the importance of regional histories and notes that in this region in particular several processes intersect to shape people’s lives and their relationships to the land. She explains, “Three fundamental and related processes are currently affecting California and other Southwestern states: economic restructuring, internationalization, and immigration” (2009, 280). These processes shape both the changing relationships possible between people and between people and the land yet also forge unique directions for resistance. Given these processes of forced deterritorialization, this chapter concludes with part four, an analysis of strategies that have emerged from Chicana/o and Mexican-American environmental activism that enact their own deterritorializing move, affirming a sense of community without reification, and centering place-belonging without incurring either lococentric xenophobia or loss of a transnational framework that can strengthen and enliven environmental movements.

Part I: Limitations of Mainstream U.S. Environmental Movements

Riley Dunlap and Angela Mertig (1992) delineate three stages of the environmental movement in the United States: the progressive conservation movement
“that emerged in the late nineteenth century in reaction to reckless exploitation of our nation’s natural resources” (1-2); the contemporary environmental movement as one of the new social movements that gathered momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, here with a focus on environmental toxicity that broadened the conservation scope of the earlier movement (2, see also Bryant 2003); lastly, due to greater awareness of an increasing array of hazards (e.g., acid rain, ozone depletion, poor air quality in urban areas), the 1980s saw a fracturing and diversifying of the mainstream environmental movement (5). Diversification has occurred in both the specialization of mainstream organizations (e.g., organizations aimed at rainforest conservation, campaigns to save endangered species, to clean up water pollution) as well in terms of ideological orientation wherein more radical movements such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and environmental justice challenge and in some cases expand the work of mainstream environmentalists (6-8).

Dunlap and Mertig note that the proliferation of environmentalisms does not represent a failure of solidarity. Rather, they write, “This increased diversity has allowed environmentalism to fill (and create) many niches within our society and, as in nature, increased diversity may lead to greater resiliency in social movements” (7). However, here, as in chapter one, it is key to disrupt the narrative that situates all environmental activism as an outgrowth of mainstream efforts. I highlight how the mainstream environmental movement bolstered American identity by exclusion, protecting the well-being of middle-class white citizens while invisibilizing and exploiting working-class and immigrant communities largely comprised of people of color. Thus, while Dunlap and Mertig’s framework offers a starting point to understand current environmental activism,
a historical context that centers the lives and histories of Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans yields a more accurate picture of the changing relationships between communities and their landscapes.

_Empire through Westward Expansion and Conservation_

An illustration of this kind of contextualization can be seen in “Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California” (1990). There, Antonia Castañeda offers a historical outline of Spanish, Mexican, and American frontier history in California after the Mexican War and gold rush of the late nineteenth century. Reviewing the historical records that were written by popular historians of the time (bankers, lawyers, and other elites), she determines that the records narrativize racialized men as lazy and dangerous; racialized women were largely absent from their histories, yet when present, there were clear demarcations between “Spanish” women, elites that were seen as “morally, sexually, racially pure,” and “Mexican” women who were “immoral, and sexually and racially impure” (Castañeda 1990, 9). Significantly, these stereotypes reflect the social Darwinism of the time that equates biological and social inferiority, legitimating war and expansion. Simultaneously, as Castañeda points out, such representations also served to bolster and confine the ideal white Victorian femininity (9). Thus, women were racialized and sexualized differently depending on the needs of white settlers; marriage into wealthy “Spanish” landowning families required the de-racination of some women against the hyper-racination of others. These tropes were incorporated into the popular consciousness and emerged in similar form within the scholarly work of post Civil War era.
At a time when nation-building and unification of the country took center stage, historians turned their questions toward social institutions, noting the failure of Spanish rule to develop the Southwest and discipline its population. The racialization of indigenous and mestizo populations in the Southwest both provided ideological justification for westward expansion and the integration of Texas as well as reinforcing a consolidated American identity post-Civil War against the new other. Castañeda writes that the second half of the nineteenth century, from the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo onward, marks Mexican-Americans as dispossessed, suspect citizens in a new nation, made “foreigners in their native land” (2001, 120).

The signing of the treaty, dispossession and seizure of lands belonging to Mexican-Americans, along with the westward migration of white settlers during the Great Depression, reterritorialized the American Southwest, erasing the history and presence of existing communities. In so doing, white settlers rescripted the land as the “rugged West” to be dominated and developed by incoming settlers. This action also included setting certain areas aside to maintain controlled zones of “pure wilderness.” In fact, as Pricilla Ybarra notes, the reterritorialization of the Southwest is an effect of legislation that is often perceived to represent the earliest roots of the U.S. environmentalist movement: programs to set aside national parks and wildlife areas. Ybarra troubles this celebratory account of the conservation impulse in environmentalism and U.S. history, writing, “The pervasive images that inform American environmentalism tend to alienate Chicana/o sympathies. For instance, the ideas of national parks and wilderness areas—both powerful images that still inspire American environmental
activism—do not hold the same unequivocal appeal in the context of Chicana/o studies. Rather, they invoke the era of Manifest Destiny and U.S. imperialism” (Ybarra 2006, 2).

Importantly, the wilderness ideal is largely criticized by contemporary theorists for its rural focus that often renders urban spaces as unimportant to the environmental movement (Vance 1997), but is less often recognized for the role it played in “Americanizing” the west through the dispossession and othering of Mexican-Americans.

Dunlap and Mertig’s second and third “waves” of environmentalism can also be reoriented by virtue of their exclusion of Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans. As they note, the second stage of the environmentalist movement emerged in the 1960s and 1970s with a focus on environmental toxicity and the 1980s onward saw a further fragmentation and diversification of environmental movements. Occurring alongside new social movements such as the women’s liberation movement, the antiwar movement, and nationalist movements such as the Black Panthers and Brown Berets, activists borrowed strategies and rhetoric from other movements of the time and those that preceded them such as the civil rights movement (Freudberg and Steinsaper 1992, 29). However, little sustained critique of the classed, raced and gendered nature of environmental security or precarity reached the mainstream organizations at this time. Moreover, while grassroots efforts were more likely to be comprised of African Americans, Native Americans and Latinos, their participation in mainstream environmental organizations was limited (Freudenberg and Steinsapir 30). Rather, “racial-ethnic activists involved in environmental issues did not always articulate them as such… and others were simply opposed to the environmental movement itself, seeing it as a challenge to civil rights
activism” (Pulido 2009, 276).

There are many reasons for this, one of which is the perceived privileging and protection of nature and the continued ignorance of human suffering based on racial, ethnic, and class oppression in communities populated by people of color. Especially in the case of the Southwest, the “protection” of the land may have come at the cost of stripping indigenous and Mexican-American people from their rights to land and/or relocating them. In addition, activists have argued that environmental organizations and their protectionist stance impose a kind of epistemic privilege about the best uses of the land. As a result, strict conservation approaches erase “the ongoing relationship with nature that people of color maintained for centuries before the establishment of the United States” (Ybarra 3; see also Peña 1998).

Empire and the NIMBY Mentality

Although many conservation-based organizations continued to grow throughout the last several decades, grassroots activists increasingly focused on human health problems. One of the most important events to galvanize the movement occurred with the publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring that exposed the dangers pesticides pose to human and ecological health, greatly increasing the visibility of the movement and recognition of its importance. Following the explosion of interest in Silent Spring, Carson and others made advances in research that showed the dangers of pollution and other toxic chemicals from incinerators, chemical runoff from industrial sites, and other hazards.

Mainstream movements during this era have often been characterized as efforts
to halt or relocate toxic hazards such as pesticide spraying, the placement of incinerators or nuclear plants, etc., and have come to be known as “Not in My Back Yard” or NIMBY movements. Struggles such as Lois Gibbs’ and the Love Canal protests against locating a community over a toxic waste site in the late 1970s received national attention and are often included in the histories of environmental activism in the U.S. However, activists in the newly emergent environmental justice movement argue that the race and class backgrounds of communities matter tremendously in the ability to prevent toxins from entering the community. A frequent consequence of the NIMBY mentality is relocation of toxins from the neighborhoods of those with relatively more privilege and power to communities that have fewer resources to defend themselves. Benjamin Chavis describes this phenomenon as environmental racism, or “racial discrimination in environmental policy-making and the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of people of color communities for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership in the environmental movement” (Adamson et al. 2002, 4). As with earlier efforts at environmentalism that relied on hierarchies of race, class and ethnicity to mediate the expansion of empire and the exploitation of indigenous, Chicana/o, Mexican and Mexican-American communities, I explore how such hierarchies are maintained by contemporary examples of the NIMBY mentality. The two most important examples include the industrialization of agriculture in the U.S. Southwest and maquila culture along Mexico’s northern border.

The industrialization of agriculture, including the advancement of pesticide
technologies, coincided with the Bracero Program (1942-1964) that encouraged Mexican immigration to meet the needs of agribusiness in the United States. Devon Peña argues that federal policies like the Bracero Program encouraged Mexicans to immigrate under conditions that increased their vulnerability and exploitation (2005, 97). The racialization and othering process that proceeded and continued through the Bracero Program produced exploitable labor while producing areas of the west as either wilderness/conservation zones or development zones. These zones submit both the earth and the laborers to toxic chemicals while the workers labor long hours in back-breaking conditions. While the Bracero Program may have ended in 1964, Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans continue to be exploited and poisoned in agricultural fields. Indeed, without an immigration system in place that formally welcomes workers, immigrant laborers may have fewer protections now than in the past. The displacement and relative invisibility of agribusiness and its laborers and the concentration of pesticide use in farming that largely employs vulnerable populations should be considered part of the NIMBY mentality—a mentality that distributes the costs of environmental degradation differentially, fostering security for privileged citizen-consumers and invisibilizing the land and bodies that bear the brunt of costs.

In addition to agricultural production, the industrialization of the border zone as a result of NAFTA, including the maquiladoras that primarily employ poor women from across Mexico, reflects the NIMBY mentality. The ecological destruction and violence against women on the border is unprecedented (Peña 2005, Pulido 2009, Christensen 2006, Sullivan 2006). Locating production in the export processing zone on the northern
border of Mexico, as Ursula Biemann notes, separates capital from labor, removing the social, economic and environmental costs of the production of goods consumed in the U.S. and elsewhere—that is, production is not in our backyard (1999). While I am emphasize the ways such production reflects the NIMBY mentality here, I discuss examples of this behavior with an emphasis on their gendered effects in parts three and four of this chapter. However, as an important extension to this argument, I point out that while the industrialization of the border and subsequent violence to women and the environment is a product of the political and economic relationship between the U.S. and Mexico that has developed over more than a century, similar phenomena can be witnessed across the globe. This phenomenon has caused Vandana Shiva to ask, “Are we going to move into a[n] era of environmental apartheid, where the North becomes clean and stays rich while the South stays poor and becomes the toxic dump of the world?” (Quoted in Platt 1998, 142).

Part II: Interrogations of Environmental Justice and Ecofeminist Activism

Environmental Justice

The environmental justice movement has critiqued the NIMBY mentality, arguing for awareness of the connections between social and ecological justice and a need to recognize the roles race, class, and, to some extent gender, play in environmental issues. The environmental justice movement as well as ecofeminism, which I will turn to shortly, grew in visibility in the 1980s during the period which Dunlap and Mertig designate as the diversification of environmentalisms (5). Joni Adamson et al. define environmental justice broadly as “the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a
healthy environment. We define the environment, in turn, as the places in which we live, work, play, and worship” (2002, 4). Unlike mainstream environmental organizations, the environmental justice movement is largely comprised of grassroots efforts responding to specific local harms, such as high levels of toxins in a local water source. Moreover, grassroots efforts remain diverse among racial and class categories (Freudberg and Steinsapir 29). Despite this, the movement (or popular genealogies of it) has limitations.

One limitation of the literature of environmental justice is that the movement is most closely associated with African American grassroots activism. Peña notes that, “Conventional histories of the environmental justice movement (EJM) trace its roots to 1982 and African Americans’ struggles against toxic waste dumps in Warren County, North Carolina” (2005, 100; see also the National Resources Defense Council). A genealogy of environmental justice that primarily situates the movement as an outgrowth of the civil rights movement (Bullard 1990, Gale 1983) and studies that exclusively highlight the burden of ecological devastation borne by African Americans (Bullard and Wright 1992, Taylor 1989) serve an important function. However, they also run the risk of reifying the movement and excluding other histories, including those mentioned above; moreover, it runs the risk of situating the movement solely within a U.S. national context, occluding struggles that occur outside the U.S. as well as a transnational perspective such as that which Shiva articulates above.

Another limitation of the literature is its disciplinary narrowness. The first chapter of this dissertation explores ecofeminist genealogies and argues that something is lost in the parallel rather than intersecting and dialogic trajectories of social science-based and
humanities-based ecofeminist approaches. Until recently, the literature of environmental justice has almost exclusively derived from the social sciences (Sze 2002, Peña 1998). Julie Sze explains what is at stake as a result of this narrowness: “The dominant discourse of environmental justice privileges a sociological analysis of communities of color and community-based organizing to the exclusion of other kinds of inquiries, such as cultural and textual analysis. Literature offers a new way of looking at environmental justice, through visual images and metaphors, not solely through the prism of statistics” (163). Undoubtedly, the justice movement has legitimized itself through reports such as the Commission for Racial Justice’s report (1987) that reveals evidence showing that communities of color are disproportionately burdened by the placement of hazardous waste. In employing the authority of quantitative data toward social and environmental justice aims, grassroots activists and their allies have been able to influence policy and coerce corporations to work with them to improve waste output from the production process. Yet, grassroots activists, and particularly those from Chicana/o and Mexican-American communities, have employed many strategies to advertize their concerns and earn allies. Consequently, efforts that do not fit the narrowly sociological mold or demonstrate active resistance through protests, picketing, political pressure or litigation are not easily recognized as belonging to the movement. As I discuss at a later point in this chapter, Chicana/o and Mexican-American activists have deployed a variety of strategies toward the aim of public education and community-wide resistance, including the use of theater of the oppressed (e.g., Houston and Pulido 2005), literature (e.g., Viramontes 1996), and murals (e.g., Alicia 1983, 2004), for example. The multiplicity of
these struggles—that they cannot be easily identified by disciplinary eyes as belonging to a Chicana/o nationalist, workers’, or an environmental movement; that they employ a variety of tactics to subvert oppressive interlocking systems of racism, classism, sexism and coloniality—situates them in the interstices of movements and disciplines. As such, these struggles are largely misrecognized in their shifting and multiple resistance efforts.

Finally, much environmental justice literature, though it seeks inclusivity, remains androcentric. Some authors note that women make up a large percent of the activists in the movement (Visgilio and Whitelaw 2003, Prindeville 2003, Peña 1998); however, despite this it is not common to read of the gendered nature of environmental degradation in literature that identifies its support for the environmental justice movement. Kamala Platt concisely summarizes the gender asymmetry in the effects of environmental degradation, listing examples that include:

… the extensive damage that many toxins cause to women’s reproductive systems. In the Third World, occupational divisions of labor created by invasive ‘development’ programs have different effects on women than on men. Women are less likely than men to profit from the introduction of a cash economy and more likely to experience increased manual labor. And in the move from a rural to urban environment necessitated by environmentally destructive development, women are more likely than men to have to turn to prostitution as the only form of employment open to them. (141)

Platt’s concerns are important for both the U.S. context—including what U.S. Third World feminists call internal colonies (Gordon 2006, Córdova 1998)—as well as those that occur outside the U.S., employing a transnational understanding of development and its effects. However, as in Chicano studies and mainstream environmentalism, women’s voices and perspectives have been marginal to the literature of the environmental justice
movement; where present, they are more likely to be portrayed as a special case study (i.e., the Mothers of East Los Angeles) rather than incorporated into the body of the environmental justice movement, reorienting its interests and analyses (for a good analysis of the Mothers of East L.A., see Pardo 1990).

Ecofeminism

Unlike the environmental justice and mainstream environmental movements, ecofeminism has always taken as its object of study the gendered nature of environmental degradation and the linked oppressions of women and the natural environment. However, its association with white, Western feminism has turned some women of color away. For example, Gwyn Kirk’s “Ecofeminism and Chicano Environmental Struggles: Bridges across Gender and Race” addresses the “interconnections, overlappings, disjunctions, and gaps” between ecofeminist perspectives and Chicano environmental struggles (1998, 177). She articulates a social constructivist position that sees environmental activism as an extension of the care and subsistence work women in general and Chicanas in particular already do. While many of her views have been stated elsewhere (see chapter one on ecofeminist genealogies), Kirk also specifically addresses the connections between spirituality and politics in order to both create more coaltional space between Chicana studies and ecofeminism as well as mitigate against the too easy dismissal of theories that address spiritual concerns: “Many Native American, African American, and Chicano environmentalists do not seem to polarize spirituality and politics as some ecofeminists do” (179). In addition, she warns against the folding into ecofeminism of some of color who do not claim this position for themselves. In efforts to appear more
inclusive, such attempts erase the implicit and often explicit criticisms of racist and classist false universalisms some see within ecofeminist movements.

While there is a dominant theme in ecofeminist theory that poses a relationship between the oppression of women and that of nature (i.e., Karen Warren’s “logic of domination,” 1995), such theories cannot be universalized. Chicana environmentalist theory, for example, would take into consideration the unique way in which, historically, Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Chicanas, and Native Americans have been constructed in policy and in historical and literary narratives as primitive and natural in contrast to more developed, cultured Anglos. These representations differ from the construction of white Euro-American women as closer to nature. Antonia Castañeda’s work mentioned earlier in this chapter begins to do this work, showing the ways in which populations are racialized against each other.

Further, because this racialization is linked to the production of hierarchicalized labor relations, Chicanas and Mexican-American women continue to stand in different relationships to the landscape than do white middle-class women that may be protected by their privilege. Devon Peña’s “Los Animalitos: Culture, Ecology, and the Politics of Place in the Upper Rio Grande” details the roles Chicanas have played in both the capitalist economy as well as their communities as workers on family subsistence plots, canners, and cultivators of healing herbs, noting in particular that knowledge of the cultivation and use of plants is passed down through female oral traditions (1998, 51). Thus, while attending to the many roles women play that bring them in contact with the non-human world, Peña asks, “Ecofeminism posits that women have a special,
harmonious relationship with the natural world. To what extent do the experiences of Spanish-Mexican women affirm or reject this interpretation? What are the lessons that ecofeminists might learn from Mexicanas?” (52).

Looking at Chicana and Mexican-American women’s activism from a strictly ecofeminist perspective may yield recognition that women are engaging in ecological activism, which is a perspective mainstream environmental and Chicano studies have failed to highlight in reading such struggles solely through a social justice framework (Ybarra 25-26). However, the full meaning of such strategies remains opaque without greater attention broader context of Chicana and Mexican-American women’s activism for both social and ecological justice, including the ways in which they overlap and are conceptualized as one and the same. Activist Teresa Leal who is best known for her participation in campaigns for the United Farm Workers and membership in the Comadres borderlands popular education group and the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice coalition, elaborates on the politics of naming and categorization: “people who are barely surviving can rarely have the luxury of haggling over terms. They can’t afford to call it ‘just’ an environmental movement or ‘just’ a social movement…our movement was interconnected with human rights, labor rights, gender rights, and environmental rights and this reality—of interconnectedness—still guides our actions and campaigns today” (Adamson 2002, 47).

**Part III: Sources of Chicana/o Environmental Activism**

The next two parts of this chapter follow up on the efforts of the first two to highlight alternative histories of Chicana/o and Mexican-American relationships to the
environment, exploring activism from the intersectional perspective elaborated by Teresa Leal above. Specifically, I outline the social and environmental justice connections of indigenous movements, including struggles over land and water, and worker movements, including rights for farm and maquila workers. While there is an important regional element that structures common histories across the Southwest that was mentioned earlier in this chapter, local political economies also shape the everyday lives of people in this region. Because of the politics of land ownership, including land grants across New Mexico and Arizona and the partial industrialization of Texas and California, the nature of relationships to the land and thus, of environmental resistances may differ by state.

**Struggles for Indigenous Rights**

In this section, I discuss the struggles of indigenous communities as well as the indigenist strategies of Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans, or mestiza/os to make claims on land and water rights in the U.S. Southwest. Francis Ortega’s study of environmental activism in New Mexico finds that there are 22 Native American tribes, 19 Pueblos, and 295 Spanish and Mexican land grants and that “tribal and land grants cannot be sold and as a result, New Mexico has remained largely rural” (2005, 15). Despite this, in the acquisition of Mexican territory from the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, lands that had once belonged to Mexico have become fragmented—some retained by land grants, some privatized and sold to encroaching Anglos, and some appropriated for public use such as national parks and rail roads. Fragmentation disrupts not just human communities but the ecological stasis of non-human communities. As with the border between Mexico and the U.S., the division of land in the region is unnatural,
constructed by political and economic interests rather than an awareness of the demands of bioregions and their composite ecosystems.

Further, as a result of the high levels of poverty in New Mexico, land grants, which cannot be sold, are often leased for private use that may include extraction of minerals or the production of weapons and energy (Ortega 15). From an ecological standpoint, the history of land use in the region is problematic because “Many Mexican-origin farmers have lost their ancestral lands to government enclosure and private expropriation. Healthy forests and watersheds were damaged under the heavy hand of industrial exploitation in the aftermath of the U.S. appropriation of the Southwest in 1848” (Peña 2005, xx).

In addition to land use, water use is a key factor in the stability of human communities and ecosystems. Communities in the Southwest maintained acequia systems to irrigate the region since the Spanish introduced acequias with the colonization of Mexico. Currently, New Mexico has more than 1,000 acequias that are overseen by local communities that determine how water is to be used for irrigation of crops and other uses. The New Mexico Acequia Association explains that their mission is “to sustain our way of life by protecting water as a community resource and strengthening the farming and ranching traditions of our families and communities” (New Mexico Acequia Association). As is evident from this quote, acequias are important both for their ecological and for their cultural functions. Demonstrating centuries of adaptation to the local ecosystem, those that employ acequias have developed cultural norms and traditions that support and correspond to the natural world; thus, threats to acequia systems disrupt
both human and non-human communities. Unfortunately, fragmentation of the land has a profound impact in the region, leading Peña to remark that, “The acequia landscape mosaic is also highly endangered. Blacktopping of farm land driven by the ruthless subdivision, second home, and tourism amenity industries is resulting in the loss of these historic cultural landscapes” (2002, 59).

Peña, the foremost scholar on Mexican-American environmentalism, describes what is at stake as a result of the land and water fragmentation and misuse that has occurred in the region. Because he eloquently describes the relationship between communities’ social and ecological worlds and the need to think social and environmental justice together, I quote him at length:

Hispano mexicano land ethics are thus profoundly affected by the loss of the qualities that allowed people to define a place as the corresponding biophysical anchor of local identities. When places are violated in this way, by the destructive forces of industrial extraction and other forms of maldevelopment, local people feel the changes intimately and personally as a loss that touches their sense of being in a most deeply troubling and disquieting manner. One farmer, Adelmo Kaber, even described this loss as a type of susto, a term that refers to an illness defined in ethnomedical folklore as a form of fright so intense and profound as to lead to the ‘loss of the soul’…Ecological devastation is the same as the malaise of ‘soul flight,’ susto. (2002, 66)

The deeply felt loss of a relationship to the land reflects the important role of embodied epistemologies that have been drawn out in other chapters as well as the role of affect that moves through the body (of the individual, the community) to charge people toward change efforts. As a result of these deterritorializations, activism has taken several different forms in the region.

The land grant movement aims to reclaim lands given to families by Spanish and Mexican land grants prior to the U.S. annexation of Mexico. Success of the movement
requires that Congress transfer lands from the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Bureau of Land Management to land-grant heirs (Neary 2005). While the movement continues today, it received attention in the 1960s as a civil rights struggle lead by Reies López Tijerina. Chicano studies historian Francisco Arturo Rosales describes land grant activism at the time and its importance for establishing a broader Chicano nationalist movement that emphasizes belonging to the Southwest homeland, or Aztlán. He writes, “The basis of the Alianza [Federal Land Grant Alliance] was the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which guaranteed Mexicans all the rights of citizens, the right to their property and the right to maintain cultural institutions, i.e., the Spanish language and Mexican traditions. Indeed, the treaty and the perception that Anglo-America had violated its stipulations became the raison d’
stre of the Chicano Movement” (Rosales 1993, 154). Protests and incendiary speeches brought the movement to the attention of many and helped fuel a separatist dream among Chicano nationalists (154). This strategy relies on liberal philosophies of the importance of legal mechanisms to guarantee rights as well as a radical notion of cultural separatism that refuses the authority of Anglo political power. Tijerina’s movement resisted the imperial logic that has ordered relations between Anglos and Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans for more than a century.

On the other hand, some local struggles have found success coopting that logic, relying on culturally essentialist ideas to attain land rights. Laura Pulido’s “Ecological Legitimacy and Cultural Essentialism: Hispano Grazing in Northern New Mexico” investigates the appropriation of such logic in the strategic essentialism of grazing activists in the Southwest. The community used the tourist rhetoric that cannibalized and
commodified their culture oppositionally; activists redeployed assumptions about the
“natural” and “unchanged” nature of their culture and relationship to the land in order to
stake claims of land ownership and responsible use. Among the potential problems,
Pulido warns that, “The reification of cultural differences that seems to exist beyond, or
independent of, economic structures also has the potential to reproduce the existing social
formation” (1998a, 135) yet she also notes that it is “difficult to imagine a strategy of
resistance that does not use the master’s tools” (137). Importantly, the reification of
cultural difference has the potential to isolate communities and mitigate against coalition
because of the calcified us/them logic, but this was not the case here. The community was
able to build alliances with Navajos in the region that supported their politics. Pulido
concludes that the framework deployed by the community “was useful in the public
relations arena, but it was absolutely essential in order to challenge the dominant
interpretation of Hispano grazing” (137). Thus, Pulido remains ambivalent about the tool
in general, but notes that while it may be the only option available at times, it is important
to also develop non-essentialist tools when possible.

Both efforts rely on claims of land belonging and an inherent connection between
social and ecological justice to make their cases, though they use different tactics to do
so. As such, once can observe something like what Chela Sandoval names an
“oppositional consciousness” in action. “Oppositional consciousness,” Sandoval argues,
is a methodology of the oppressed, a strategy of survival that may employ one or more of
the following approaches: equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, separatist, and the
differential approach, which allows movement between and among the other ideological
approaches (2000). In turning to workers rights, I elaborate on alternative justice-oriented strategies that reveal more about how land-belonging is articulated by Chicana/o and Mexican-American communities and display other sites by which to observe differential modes of oppositional consciousness in action. The important connection among these strategies is that they display the flexibility of activists’ approaches to reconfiguring relationships among people and relationships between people and their environments. I have looked to land and water struggles to begin to map how Chicana/o and Mexican-American environmentalism grows rhizomally, stretching out in different directions and revealing the multiplicity of its aims, strategies, and participants. In the next section I add to that map, sketching in the struggles for workers’ rights.

**Struggles for Workers’ Rights**

In this section, I focus on the conditions and activisms that grow out of farm work throughout California and maquila industrialization along the U.S.-Mexico border. The struggles are localized and arise from different conditions, but Peña notes that these problems represent the roots of environmental activism for many Mexican-Americans. He writes, “Mexican and Mexican-origin farmworkers are poisoned by pesticides every year while harvesting crops destined for our nation’s collective table. Mexican women workers, many still teenagers, are poisoned, sexually assaulted, mutilated, or fatally injured inside the maquiladoras on the U.E.-Mexico border, while Juárez has become a killing field for serial murderers stalking young women” (2005, xx). Though Peña does not elaborate on connections between the two sites, what they share in common is a devaluation of the land that degrades or erases a variety of ecosystems, replacing them
with monocultures whether they are maquila plants or strawberry fields. They also rely on a devalued and easily exploitable workforce that is poisoned on a regular basis and expected to work hard for long hours at little pay; that is, the social, political and economic conditions produce disposable laborers and environments.

As mentioned above, the agricultural industry in the U.S. has relied on the labor of Mexican immigrants as well as Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans from the period of the Bracero Program (1942-1965) through the present. The Bracero Program, coinciding with WWII that both saw many American laborers leave for the war as well as the development of pesticides for widespread use, brought many Mexican nationals across the border into fields that they did not yet know to be poisonous. In the final years of the Bracero Program, César Chávez and Dolores Huerta founded the United Farm Workers (UFW) (1962), which secured higher pay, health insurance, retirement benefits and freedom from harmful pesticides for many Mexican-American and Chicana/o workers through a variety of non-violent strategies such as marches, fasts, boycotts and strikes. The UFW played (and continues to play) a central role in the lives of farm workers, but it is also notable for its visibility and influence in galvanizing the Chicano nationalist movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s. While the UFW is most often understood in terms of its relationship to struggles for economic justice and a celebration of Chicana/o nationalism, the farm workers movement can also be seen in terms of how it articulates a sense of justice that draws together social and environmental concerns, including the gendered effects of environmental degradation.

As farm workers, women are at greater risk of facing sexual harassment, earning
less money than their male counterparts, and coming home to perform the majority of the reproductive labor. However, they may also bear the harms of pesticide use in their bodies. Female farm workers have suffered miscarriages (Saxena et al. 1981), cancer of the breast, ovary, and cervix (McDuffie 1994), and natal problems, including giving birth to children with misformed or absent limbs and facial clefts (Nurminen 1995). Further, evidence shows that children are more susceptible to pesticide poisoning (Zahm and Ward 1998) and women, primarily responsible for the care of children, are more likely to be burdened with the emotional, financial, and physical labor of caring for children living with environmentally induced disabilities and illnesses.

Ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva have also described the ways that, in addition to the harms to women’s bodies mentioned above and the harm to the environment (i.e., the planting of crop monocultures that disrupts other plant and animal species and changes the soil quality and water table in the area), industrial agriculture changes human relationships to the land. In her work on the “green revolution,” Shiva notes that smaller farmers cannot afford technologies such as genetically modified seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, which often have disastrous effects on people’s lives and livelihoods (Shiva 1992). As a result of the technologizing of agriculture, the means of production are removed from workers that cannot afford those technologies though they may have maintained sustainable and close relationships to the land throughout the life of the community—causing what Peña and others have described as a profound cultural disruption (1998, 2005). As such, agribusiness can produce a deterritorializing relationship between humans and their landscapes. As many ecofeminists point out, the
technologization of agriculture can objectify the earth and the workers, manipulating and exploiting both (Gaard and Gruen 2003, Merchant 1990).

I will say more on specific strategies employed by farm workers shortly. Here, I introduce parallels as well as a few differences regarding the struggles of workers in the fields and those in the maquiladoras in the borderlands. The maquiladoras that currently stand at the heart of NAFTA economic efforts from the 1990s onward began in 1965 with the Border Industrial Program that was meant to replace the jobs lost by the cessation of the Bracero Program (Fernández-Kelly 1986). The aim was to draw investment to Mexico and to provide jobs for workers, especially in the increasingly populated areas around the northern border where population swelled due to the Bracero Program and repatriation efforts to deport those workers that did not return to Mexico after temporary employment (Tiano 1985). In spite of the program’s aim to draw investment to Mexico and grow the nation’s economy, as Cynthia Enloe and others have shown, many corporations that function transnationally strive to keep labor cheap so that workers fail to attain sufficient income to funnel back into their local economies (Enloe 2000, Wright 2003).

Feminist development scholars have critiqued the program and NAFTA’s extension of it for its failure to bring economic benefits to the workers and the Mexican state more broadly. However, as many have pointed out, in addition to the fact that such work environments produce cheap labor, the work conditions are notoriously bad, including poor ventilation, long hours and lock ins, constant surveillance of one’s body and behaviors that includes control of one’s dress, comportment, and reproduction.
through pregnancy tests, sexual harassment and assault (Wright 2003, Enloe 2000, Abell 1999). Devon Peña elaborates on these conditions and their effects on women. He writes,

Health and safety hazards include exposure to toxic chemicals and fumes, assembly line speedup, inadequate ventilation, bad lighting, poor ergonomic design of tools and workstations, and hazardous machinery. Workers face persistent racial and sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape, and—in Juárez—hundreds of unsolved serial murders. Microelectronics assembly workers are exposed to chemicals associated with a wide variety of diseases including cancer, cardiovascular illness, and respiratory or reproductive system disorders. (2005, 160)

As I discuss in chapter three, Rosa Linda Fregoso makes a connection between the objectification and exploitation of women that renders them victims of violence in the maquilas and outside them, resulting in hundreds of murders that Vila mentions above. Further, in her ethnography of a border maquiladora, Leslie Salzinger argues that the panoptic organization of the shopfloor layout “focuses the male gaze in the service of ‘quality’ and ‘efficiency’” with the effect of reifying women as objects of the gaze in ways that conflate worker efficiency with desire (2000, 67). Objectification here, as with the struggles of farm workers above, is a primary element in the incitement of violence against women. However, as was noted with farm workers struggles mentioned above, in addition to the violence brought upon women in the region, there are great harms brought upon the environment. These harms also have gendered effects that women experience differentially than men in the region.

A key example of this is the case of Chilpancingo. Linda Christensen (2006) and Kevin Sullivan (2006) have both written about Chilpancingo, a neighborhood near Tijuana that was once inhabited by Metales y Derivados, a U.S.-based battery recycling company that is now abandoned. Chemicals seeped into the ground and water and are
having a pronounced effect on those who live in the region while the owner of the company has moved back to the U.S., avoiding arrest warrants “charging him with gross environmental pollution” (Sullivan 102). Christensen, speaking with an activist who works with women on both sides of the border to protest human and environmental health hazards along the border, summarizes what she has learned: “Lourdes described children born without brain stems, children whose parents slept with them at night, fearing they would drown in their own blood from spontaneous nose bleeds, maquila workers who suffered miscarriages and birth defects, neighbors with abnormally high rates of cancer” (97). As noted with female farm workers, women may be particularly susceptible to toxins because of the gendered nature of disease and reproduction as well as the socially constructed responsibilities of childcare, but because they comprise the majority of the cheap workforce, they are also more likely to be exposed to toxins for longer periods of time than their male counterparts.

To summarize part three, attention to the regional elements of environmental struggles reveal parallel problems of toxicity and the development of monocultures that have gendered effects on those that work in the fields and in the factories. Activist struggles in each of these sites combat these problems, but they do so by taking different approaches that grow out of the regional needs of the activists; border struggles, as can be seen with activists in Chilpancingo, show that because the problem is a transnational one structured by economic and political policy, activists do well to engage with women and organizations on both sides of the border. In contrast, activists engaged in land and water struggles that focus on long-standing relationships to the land may find that localizing
their activism may be the most effective tactic. In each case, I emphasize the fact that these struggles usually fall outside the purview of mainstream environmentalism, ecofeminism, and environmental justice and, as the next section shows, struggles often exceed the frames of interpretation that each of those movements brings to their conceptualization of environmental activism. In part four, I look more closely at the sites introduced in part three to focus on particular strategies that further expose Chicana/o and Mexican-American environmentalism as a multiplicity worthy of study on its own accord and without the limiting frames that would constrain or exclude elements of activism and activists’ subjectivity. Moreover, I move from a broad connection of the multiplicity of activist strategies to the multiplicity of the self by emphasizing the ways in which activists develop intersubjective selves, deploying what I have called elsewhere in this dissertation “technologies of intersubjectivity.”

Part IV: Highlighting Strategies of Chicana/o Environmental Activism

Activists have employed several strategies to protest the conditions faced by the workers, their families, and the earth. Rather than surveying histories of a movement for key events, this section focuses on specific strategies that demonstrate a movement’s rhizomal capacity to connect struggles to a multitude of movements and actors moving in a variety of directions. This feature, as Dunlap and Mertig argued earlier concerning the fragmentation of the environmentalist movement, has diversified the Chicano, feminist and environmentalist movements in ways that enrich them; the flexibility that drives such an approach to understanding oneself and one’s community can enliven activists and avoid the reification of the movement and the identities of those that comprise it. This
section names four technologies of intersubjectivity that drive this rhizomal environmentalist movement. These technologies include the use of spirituality, coalition-building, “translocal” and transnational framing, and cultural production as movement-supporting resources.

The Place of Spirituality in Movement Politics

As shown in chapter one, ecofeminism has been one of the few areas of feminist praxis to embrace spirituality (albeit unevenly) as a source of guidance for ordering human and human-nature relationships. In addition, spirituality has been described as an important component of the environmental justice movement among people of color. The Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ) provides the “Principles of Environmental Justice” from the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (1991). The first principle declares that environmental justice, “Affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction” (SNEEJ, “Resources”).

In struggles for land and water rights and the rights of workers in the maquilas and the fields, activists have deployed spiritual language and representations to several ends. Chávez incorporated images of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the literature and protest art of the UFW. Dolores Huerta, co-organizer of the UFW, describes the UFW’s ties to the Virgin, acknowledging that she is “a symbol of the impossible, of doing the impossible to win a victory, in humility… I mean that’s the important thing she symbolizes to the union: that with faith you can win. You know with faith you can
overcome” (Wolfteich 2005, 163). Further examples of the integration of spiritual, social, and environmental politics in the farm workers struggles can be seen in the modes of protest chosen. For example, in order to initiate a strike against grape growers, farm workers met in the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe to cast their votes for the strike and banners of the Virgin were carried alongside banners for the UFW at the head of the marches. The most visible march involved thousands of farm workers and allies in support of the grape strike; the walk, which Chávez named a pilgrimage, lasted several days and covered 200 miles before concluding in Sacramento on Easter Sunday. Chávez said of the march, “We wanted to be fit not only physically but also spiritually, and we wanted to stress nonviolence even more, build confidence, and have more visible nonviolent tactics” (Wolfteich 165). Claire Wolfteich notes that like the fast, the pilgrimage acted as Lenten penance to recognize the sins of the workers, but more importantly in this case, the sins of the growers (165). Such an act does not only highlight the farm workers struggles, but follows other traditions in Chicana/o social activism of reclaiming public space through theater, muraling and other acts of protest. In essence, the pilgrimage marked the workers and the land they traversed as sacred through the ritualized marching.

Fasting also played a large role for Chávez, representing both an act of sacrificial penance and a commitment to social change (Tejada-Flores 2010). Fasting was incorporated in other struggles by Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans, including the mobilization of Local 11 supporters seeking rights for cafeteria workers at the University of Southern California (USC). Donna Houston and Laura Pulido (2005) remark on the
ways in which that struggle sought to connect to a larger historical context of worker
protest and the gains of the Chicano movement. Citation of the UFW though ritualized
fasting and the passing of Chávez’s personal crucifix among protesters, as they note,
performs an act of linking in to a cultural memory of legitimized activism and spiritual
wealth:

Chávez’s cross represented such a ‘technology of memory’ that linked the USC
workers to ‘past performance’ of regional labor politics. Specifically, it
represented the historical exploitation of Mexican workers and acknowledged the
extent to which they are no longer confined to the agricultural sector, but are
central to the manufacturing and service industries. In short, the staging of
cultural memory became a strategic site of political intervention and praxis. (336)

In addition to struggles linked to the rights of farm workers, there is a rich history
of spiritual activism along the U.S.-Mexico border. As shown in chapter three, border
organizations such as Voces sin Eco protest the murders and the devaluation of women in
Juárez by painting the city with crosses, resacralizing the land and women in the region
(Fregoso) and claiming rights that were denied by the lax standards for human rights and
environmental protections as a result of the NAFTA policies. Further, organizations such
as the Women’s Intercultural Center (WIC) in Anthony, New Mexico were started by
nuns in support of women in the region and the variety of issues they face on a daily
basis, such as threat of deportation, lack of education about rights, violence, and
environmental degradation. The Women’s Intercultural Center has responded by holding
daily morning meditations to support women’s spiritual leadership in their communities.
Moreover, WIC and other justice oriented organizations on both sides of the border hold
an annual mass at the border to recognize those that have died in the crossing and to
protest the militarization of the border and the economic and political conditions that
created a zone of poverty, deprivation, and environmental destruction of the region.

The importance of spirituality in guiding movement politics and revitalizing activists cannot be understated. Writing about the importance of spirituality, Pulido offers a definition of spirituality as it is understood by activists: “Spirituality refers to consciousness and connection—our connections as individuals to our souls, other people, places, nature, spirits, and in some cases, connection to a creator” (1998b, 721). That is, spirituality acts as a technology of connection, as a way to acquire a sense of ourselves as intersubjectively connected to human and nature-others. While the inter-human connections of the movements for workers’ rights have been highlighted in much of the Chicana/o studies literature, connections between workers and their environments remain at the heart of these struggles and the effort to resacralize both workers and their environments should not be ignored. The use of spiritual symbols and practices that create affective bonds capable of reworking relationships among people and helping to forge more sustainable relationships between people and their natural environments is also discussed in chapters two, three, and five of this dissertation.

The Place of Coalition in Movement Politics

Another element that has been common in efforts to organize for social and environmental justice is the use of coalitions. Coalition-building has a long history in Chicana/o studies, articulated in Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) sense of facultad or mestiza consciousness that enables a critical consciousness derived from crossing borders and which can facilitate the creation of alliances (Fowlkes 1997), Maria Lugones’ “world traveling,” (2003) and Chela Sandoval’s academic coalition-building in Methodology of
the Oppressed (2000). Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga’s edited collection This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (1981) represents one of the most comprehensive attempts to create coalition among women of color scholars in the United States. These writings on the praxis of negotiating a sense of home, crossing borders, and forging coalition across difference come from the lived experiences of scholars and activists who have felt themselves to be border crossers in their daily actions, but who have also seen the benefits of working collaboratively across organizations and movements more broadly. In this section I underscore the work of several coalition efforts that demonstrate the potential of developing alliances across a series of borders, including those that are identity-, issue-, and region-based.

First, in addition to the ability to mobilize affect via the cultivation of spiritualized subjectivities, another reason the farm worker movement has had such success with individual campaigns is its ability to make connections across the varying positionalities of its participants and allies and to point to the intersectionality of movements and issues. The UFW led several successful grape boycotts throughout the 1970s and 80s that received national and international attention. In 1986, Chávez initiated the “Wrath of Grapes” campaign “to draw public attention to the pesticide poisoning of grape workers and their children” (UFW). One of the most effective strategies of the boycott was to point out that farm workers and consumers are affected by pesticide use. In describing the connections and overlaps between the UFW struggles and ecofeminism, Ellen O’Loughlin uses an ecological concept to look at the many places women are (in the field with pesticides, the grocery store, in agri-business management), to see how women are
necessarily connected in a network, but have different access to cultural, political and economic resources based on differences of class, race, nationality, gender, etc. (1993, 150). In highlighting the relationalities among women (and men) with respect to the production and consumption of grapes, O’Loughlin shows how the UFW successfully broadened the scope of their protest and acquired new allies. Moreover, she writes, “By incorporating information about resource and environmental pollution into the arguments about worker health, the UFW specifically allies itself with more conventional environmental and conservation causes. Again, this type of argument is meant to break down walls of classism and racism and evoke a true sympathy between farm workers and the rest of us” (1993, 152). Importantly, it is the movement of affect (O’Loughlin names it sympathy here) to connect people in new relationships to each other and to the earth that motivates and mobilizes this effective coalition.

The Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ), founded in 1990, is another coalition that has been at the forefront of environmental justice activism in the Southwest. SNEEJ describes itself as “a people of color and Native/Indigenous, inter-generational, multi-issue, regional, bi-national organization comprising 60 grassroots community-based, native, labor, youth and student groups and organizations working for environmental and economic justice in the southwest and western U.S. and northern Mexico” (SNEEJ). They also emphasize interculturality as central to their ability to challenge epistemologies that order social and ecological relations. They declare that “[SNEEJ] has been a successful model of bringing together organizations from different cultures, primarily Latino, Native American, Asian-Pacific
Islander, and African American communities, to overcome racial divisions, build capacity, and develop common strategies for community and worker empowerment. Overcoming cultural barriers has been essential to allowing us to impact policy beyond the local level” (SNEEJ, “Background”). This multicultural and multi-issue coalition relies on diversity to inform their decisions on regional and national initiatives; that is, this shifting, transversal epistemological stance (Yuval-Davis 1999) balances the social and ecological concerns of constituent groups and reveals the ways in which the social and ecological are always intertwined. This acts as a critique of mainstream environmental organizations and particularly those that focus on conservation at the cost of addressing the marginalized populations that have been displaced in the name of conservation efforts. In centering knowledge production based on border-crossing, it also suggests a fluidity between subject positions and the frames of reference that construct them in a way that highlights, indeed relies on, a deep sense of relationality for the success of the coalition.

Last, I mention las Comadres—an organization that was co-founded by Teresa Leal (who also co-founded SNEEJ) in 1988. The Comadres collective serves as an example of a multi-issue, multi-cultural, bi-national coalition that, among the coalitions surveyed here, offers the most explicit gender analysis of border issues. In addition to the coalitional elements highlighted above, las Comadres rely on interrogative forms of activism (i.e., theater of the oppressed and other forms of performance art). Such performances are meant to draw spectators in and invite them to question their own identities (including their access to privilege) and relationships to social and ecological
problems and the people that most directly bear the brunt of those problems. I comment further on las Comadres in chapters two and three; here, I focus on their work in the context of women’s multi-issue organizing at the border and underscore their use of art and the negotiation of intersubjectivities in their work.

Milagros Peña’s comparative study of women’s organizations along the U.S.-Mexico border and those in the interior of Mexico suggests that the activism of Latinas in her study displays a major pattern: “the stress that women’s activism in Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border communities places on affiliations across ethnicity, race, and class, often lead[s] these struggles for women’s and human rights to encompass other issues, including environmental ones” (M. Peña 2007, 8). These affiliations are both a source of strength, as they are for SNEEJ, as well as a source of tension. Las Comadres incorporated the negotiations of ethnicity, race and class into their performance art activisms before they ultimately became the source for the group’s insurmountable obstacles; after three years members disbanded. One of their major projects was their campaign to publicize the dangers of border militarization and anti-immigrant retrenchment by flying a banner printed with “1,000 Points of Fear – Another Berlin Wall?” across the border. Their activism sought to challenge the consolidation of artificial borders around racial fears and to posit instead something like Anzaldúa’s ideal for a border inhabited by the “New Mestiza”—they sought a “transborder culture of cross-pollinization and non-dualism” (Berelowitz 1998, 14). Further, las Comadres critiqued NAFTA for exacerbating harms against women and the natural environment in the border region. Though they sought to deterritorialize spectators through performance
such as the “1,000 Points of Fear” protest that challenged spectators’ ideas of belonging to a land and culture, las Comadres’ involvement with SNEEJ and desire to reterritorialize subjects in terms of Anzaldúa’s utopic idea of a borderlands that allows difference and contradiction points to an awareness of the links between social and ecological justice and the need for coalitional efforts to address them.

Place-Centeredness and and Spatial Relations in Movement Politics

I highlighted the importance of place, including ecoregions and regional politics, in the construction of historiography earlier in this chapter; that is, instead of an essentialist universalizing representation of the borderlands, I pointed to the different social and environmental histories in Texas, for example, than in California or New Mexico. Here, I focus on the place-making strategies of activists and, in particular, on the ways they position the movement as complex and situated locally, but also communicate their struggles within a broader national and transnational context. In assessing strategies of scholars and activists, I employ Arjun Appadurai’s notion of “translocality” to explore the practice of meaning-making across multiple spatial scales in the name of social and ecological justice. I argue that, ultimately, translocal framing potentiates coalitional consciousness by expanding the notion of the self and community, opening up varying degrees of belonging and intersubjectivity.

In their article “Translocal Subjectivities: Mobility, Connection, Emotion,” David Conradson and Deirdre McKay explain the concept of translocality as it is used in Appadurai’s work and taken up by social geographers. They write,

Appadurai coined the term translocality to describe the ways in which emplaced communities become extended, via the geographical mobility of their inhabitants,
across particular sending and destination contexts (see also Appadurai, 1995). Social communities that were once relatively localized become internationalized. A translocality is thus a place whose social architecture and relational topologies have been refigured on a transnational basis (cf. Faist, 2000; Vertovec, 1999). At the same time, the term recognizes that localities continue to be important as sources of meaning and identity for mobile subjects. (2007, 168)

The field of Chicana/o studies emphasizes the migratory histories of borderland inhabitants and the artificiality of the border (see Castañeda 2001, Fregoso 2001). As such, translocality is an apt concept with which to understand place-making efforts in the Southwest. As the quote above shows, translocality represents a negotiation of the primacy of locality within diasporic or migratory populations, but it lacks a concrete sense of how locality is also linked to a specific environmental geography or bioregion. Chicana/o environmentalists can make an important contribution to the literature of social geographers through their work on ecological belonging in a translocal context.

Ecologists stress bioregional models of place-centeredness because of the boundedness of the ecozone that includes relatively stable relationships between the plant and animal biodiversity that, in turn, are connected to the soil, air, and water qualities of the zone. Deep ecologists have argued for bioregionalist models of human environmental practice, yet activists in the environmental justice movement note that “deep ecology” models sometimes fail to account adequately for the role of human social relations and the ways in which social hierarchies have evolved over time to give different groups of people differential access to land, water, and other resources.

In contrast, Peña offers a model of place-centric (in his terms, “lococentric”) subjectivity. Here, identity is tied to locality and “assumes a profound shared connection to a particular place and to the people and other species who jointly inhabit it,” but he
also notes the specific histories of domination from Spanish and then Anglo colonizers that have reordered social and environmental relationships in the Southwest (1998). Peña argues that, prior to the colonization of the Southwest by Spain and the United States and the subsequent fragmentation and industrialization of the landscape, indigenous communities developed a co-extensive, supportive relationship with the flora and fauna of their region in addition to the preserving soil and water quality (1998, 2005). As mentioned earlier, degradation of those environments has led to a disturbance of the bioregion as well as a profoundly disturbing deterritorialization of human subjectivities that disrupts the intersubjective relations between humans and their environments that are generated via a place-centered worldview (see also Ortega).

Despite the advance place-centered philosophies pose over strictly bioregionalist philosophies that may ignore the human social elements of a landscape, Gwen Kirk asks a series of important questions tied to how one develops place-centeredness, especially in a setting of migration, displacement and privileged mobility that characterizes the translocality of the borderlands. She also reflects on how place-centered philosophies avoid the problem of xenophobia or the NIMBY mentality detailed above. In a move that is deterritorializing in its own right, Kirk writes, “A sense of place needs to become a much wider concept that encompasses a sense of being connected to the whole planet so that I am not tempted to respect my place at the expense of yours” (Kirk 1998, 193).

There are many examples of place-centeredness in the work of Chicana/o and Mexican-American artists, scholars, and activists throughout chapters two, three, and five of this dissertation. Many of those examples, such as Juana Alicia’s mural La Llorona’s
Sacred Waters (2006), encode a sense of translocality that balances an immediate reclamation of local space while also showing the connections between what is occurring in the local with transnational processes that shape localities elsewhere—that is, not just how our immediate spaces shape us, but how spatial relations on a transnational scale shape our subjectivities. In the case of Alicia’s mural, she reclaims the San Francisco neighborhood where the mural is painted with the help of the community and, in so doing, marks out Chicana-centered feminist symbolic space. In addition, she links the symbolism of the Aztec goddess of water Chalchiuhtlicue with a female figure often associated with a response to Spanish colonialism, la Llorona; the figures preside over scenes depicting water-related environmental struggles across the world, including anti-damming struggles in India, water privatization struggles in Bolivia and activism against the industrialization of the border and violence against women along the Rio Grande at the U.S.-Mexico border (Latorre 2008). Situating her mural within a very place-specific mythology of conquest in the Southwest, Alicia comments on the connections between colonialism and neocolonialism. In connecting the struggles through a logic of domination that links different regions together, she also invites her audience to think coalitionally about collective resistance across a variety of spatial relations.

I offer two additional cases that illustrate how translocality is deployed to deterritorialize subjects toward intersubjective, ecological belongings: UFW protests and border-based multi-issue organizing that draws attention to issues of social and ecological justice. For example, one can look to the centrality of the UFW to a Chicano nationalism that makes connections between Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans, indigenism, and a
historical view that foregrounds a long-standing relationship to lands in the Southwest via the concept of Aztlán stand as an important example of local place-making activism. The UFW also makes connections to the ways in which the immediate locality of the fields extends rhizomally by seeping into private homes scattered around suburban landscapes across the country through the consumption of fruit. The grape boycott made connections between farm workers and consumers, establishing the coalitional elements of activism through recognition that the pesticides that afflict the farm workers in the fields continue to sit on the grapes as they make their journey into private homes, thus connecting the space of the field with the space of the home.

Border activism is more obviously translocal in that the processes that construct the border are necessarily transnational, comprised of negotiations between the U.S. and Mexico states and the corporations that inhabit the free zone; additionally, NAFTA has increased migration to the region—pulling workers from all regions of Mexico, driving the “repatriation” of workers that entered the U.S. from the Bracero Program, and drawing some across the border to seek citizenship in the U.S. while drawing others to the border to protest in the name of and against the nationalism that militarizes the border. Pulido remarks on the translocal character of this bi-national community: “In many communities along the 2000-mile US-Mexican frontera the border is simply a marker. Organic communities and families straddle the region, creating a dense network of social relations. This reality is important in that it facilitates the development of a more international identity and politics, based not only on a common heritage but also on a common vulnerability to the global economy and its pollution” (Pulido 2009, 281).
Pulido further notes transnational frames of activism are important because they avoid a NIMBY mentality—instead of moving an incinerator from one location to another, activists argue for a change in the politics of production (2009, 275). Similarly, the Women’s Intercultural Center, a multi-issue women’s center at the U.S.-Mexico border balances its focus on local issues and women’s education in the rural setting in Anthony, New Mexico with their transnational Border Awareness Experience that invites people from across the U.S. to visit the border, learn about issues specific to the region on both sides of the border and to connect their own lives to the processes that shape border social and environmental issues.

In her articles “Notes on Cross-Border Environmental Justice Education” Soenke Zehle summarizes many of the issues that characterize the social and environmental concerns at the border as well as the strategies of the activists that seek to create different relationships between individuals, their environment and their communities within a local and transnational frame. She writes,

The ecopolitical scope of subaltern environmentalism might be impossibly broad and might diffuse in its political impact: corporate accountability, cultural and media criticism, worker organization, human rights, indigenous self-determination, social justice, international solidarity, sustainable development, worker health and safety. This is an ambitious wish list, but also a necessary consequence of the heterogeneity at the grassroots, a heterogeneity which constantly moves toward transnational spheres of interaction and cooperation. (2002, 336)

As she notes, importantly, the effort is not localized on either side of the border, but aimed at making an array of transnational alliances that respond to the transnationalization of political economies. While Zehle defines this strategy as one of “subaltern environmentalism” generally, I have argued that Chicana/o and Mexican-
American activists have been particularly adept at not over-emphasizing the transnational at the cost of losing perspective on the specific local histories of struggle and the politics of spatial relations across a local and transnational context; thus, what can be seen in the examples mentioned above is the balance between site-specific subjectivities, the environments that construct them and the broader transnational processes that increasingly rework and reconstruct them in conjunction with other spaces and subjectivities.

Without displacing the importance of the site of the initial social and ecological problems, the farm worker and border activisms reorient the fields and the border within a network of spatial relations; actors spread across these spatial relations are invited to imagine their own implication in and/or suffering in these site-specific social and ecological injustices. As a result, a variety of actors from different regions and different positionalities may become deterritorialized and then reconstituted as subjects more likely to understand their intersubjective coextensives with others (i.e., the human-others that make their clothes and electronics and pick their fruit and vegetables; the nature-others such as the degraded ecosystems where production and potentially even consumption occurs).

Cultural Production and Chicana/o Environmentalism

The use of cultural production is the last strategy I discuss that can be widely seen across struggles for social and ecological justice among Chicana/o and Mexican-American actors. Cultural production has already been mentioned briefly in some of the examples above and is discussed much more extensively in chapters two and three for the
role it plays in drawing attention to social and ecological injustices. From the perspective of Chicana/o historians, attention to the role of cultural production has also been important in reconceptualizing the way stories about the past have been told. Stories such as an account of early efforts of mainstream environmentalism that omit the role of race politics in setting aside large tracts of land for “conservation,” for example, remain important in that they established trajectories that later accounts of Chicana/o historical narration and cultural representation (e.g. movies) have not been able to shake off entirely. Indeed, in line with current understandings of the performativity of identity (Butler 1990, 1993) contemporary scholars and activists must wrestle with working within and troubling the subject positions that circumscribe Chicana/os and Mexican-Americans that are created by these narrative sedimentations. These histories need to be interrogated and in some cases deconstructed—rewritten in order to create possibilities for decolonial futures. One way to do so is to look to alternative historical sources such as the cultural production of marginalized groups to tell a counter-hegemonic story.

Emma Pérez’s The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History posits the decolonial imaginary as “that time lag between the colonial and postcolonial, that interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated” (Pérez 1999, 6). Cultural studies scholars Rosa Linda Fregoso and Emma Pérez pose texts that both deconstruct colonialist histories (such as the victory narrative of Manifest Destiny or of conservation mentioned above) and do the imaginative work of reconstruction; as texts that make visible the space of the decolonial imaginary, such works highlight both the performative aspects of historical subjectivity and the role of performance in expanding
those roles into new, potentially post-colonial terrains. Questions of representation remain ones regarding how subalterns are spoken of, how they are represented and constructed by processes out of their control (that is, how they are constructed performatively as effects of social processes written on the body), as well as questions of self-representation and self-formation (that is, individual and collective performances of the self through resistance). Here, a focus on cultural production and performance can be particularly important for rethinking both the past and the present.

Chicana feminists working across artistic genres have recognized this and, in the tradition of reclaiming an indigenous heritage, called on the mythology of Coyolxauhqui—an Aztec figure that was murdered and dismembered by her half-brother, war god Huitzilopochtli. As noted in chapter two, Chicana scholars, writers, and artists reclaimed Coyolxauhqui as a cultural and spiritual figure, linking them to an indigenous history that authenticates both a tie to the land and to spiritual authority. Chicana scholars, writers, and artists have reconfigured Coyolxauhqui as in Juana Alicia’s mural *Maestrapeace* (1994), representing the strategy of re-membering histories against the grain of colonialist and patriarchal dominant histories that erase a Chicana presence.

Other examples of cultural production by scholars, artists, and activists that rewrite the history of Chicana and Mexicana-American struggles for social and environmental justice include Helen Maria Viramontes’ book *Under the Feet of Jesus* (1996) that focuses on migrant workers in California and the toxicity of the fields; Juana Alicia’s *Las Lechugueras* (1983) mural that depicts women lettuce pickers, some of them pregnant, working in the fields while pesticides are sprayed above; the performance art of
las Comadres mentioned above, Lourdes Portillo’s documentary *Señorita Extraviada* (2001) that focused on border activism against the devaluation of women and the land in Juárez. Teresa Leal describes the importance of cultural production with themes of social and environmental justice: “if the issue is introduced in a way that is simple, yet highly, highly informative, it often triggers people’s concerns and activism. That has been a concern for me, that writing about the natural environment and on contamination and globalism continues to be very, very elitist and inaccessible” (Adamson 2002, 25).

Murals, short stories, theater, and other community-based art invites spectators to grapple with issues that might otherwise be inaccessible to them, offering individuals new ways to understand their relationships to each other and to their natural environments outside the narrow purview of academic discourse or the exclusions of mainstream environmentalist activism. Spectators are called, through their affective encounter with art, to both rethink themselves with respect to their current human and nature-based communities and to reorient themselves through a reworked history of their past.

**Conclusion**

At the conclusion of this chapter, I highlight the deterritorializations that were sought. Part one explored traditional historical accounts of the “victory narrative” of Manifest Destiny alongside early environmental efforts of conservation at the cost of fragmenting lands that belonged to Mexican and indigenous communities. In revisiting early histories of conservation and conquest in the Southwest, I deterritorialized given accounts and pointed to their nation-making efforts around the consolidation of a white, masculine national identity. In part two, I explored similar deterritorializing possibilities
with respect to ecofeminist and environmental justice movements, pointing to how these movement created their own exclusions that de-centered and misrecognized the histories of Chicana/o and Mexican-American environmental activists. In pointing out these exclusions, I aim to set scholars of both ecofeminism and environmental justice into new motions to explore what is at stake in the genealogies of each movement as well as how each movement might shift in order to better recognize alternative epistemologies and activist strategies.

Finally, parts three and four center Chicana/o and Mexican-American epistemologies and activisms to achieve, from an interdisciplinary perspective, a partial history of Chicana/o and Mexican-American environmentalisms and the work they do toward decolonization. In contrast to mainstream environmentalism, ecofeminism, and environmental justice, which can be enhanced through deterritorializations that push them into new directions, parts three and four emphasize the deterritorializing nature of Chicana/o and Mexican-American environmentalisms. These are environmentalisms that have been shown to challenge how movements are conceptualized; rather than seeing movements for workers’, women’s, and indigenous rights and environmental improvement as separate, such an approach to environmentalism is holistic and unifying.

Further, in taking a closer look at the diversity of struggles, one sees that a more profoundly deterritorializing move is taking place; I name such a move as the enactment of technologies of intersubjectivity and note that these technologies, such as the role of spirituality, translocal framing practices, coalition-building, and cultural production, challenge discrete categories of identity and emphasize processes of becoming that move
toward more just, more intersubjective understandings of the self. These technologies parallel those that were discussed in chapters two and three in how they rework the autonomous self and open it up to intersubjective human/nature/spirit relationalities. As such, the picture I have drawn of “Chicana/o environmentalism” reflects the Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome (1987), a figure that extends in different directions and seeks to make new connections always—connections to other movements, to other people, to nature-others, and in which multiplicity can be borne.
CHAPTER FIVE

TECHNOLOGIES OF THE ECOLOGICAL SELF:

PRACTICE OF THE WOMEN’S INTERCULTURAL CENTER

Introduction: The Women’s Intercultural Center

This chapter considers one final site from which to explore the production of ecological narratives in the work of Chicana and Mexican-American women, including the specific strategies women develop to work toward social and ecological justice. Here, I offer a case study of the Women’s Intercultural Center (WIC) in Anthony, New Mexico—a non-profit women’s center that addresses the needs of women in southern New Mexico and west Texas. The women’s group that served as a precursor to the center was formed in 1992 by Kathleen Erickson and Camilla Verret, two Sisters of Mercy that traveled to Anthony because it was (and remains) one of the poorest regions in the United States. Using an approach inspired by liberation theology and the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, the Sisters began meeting with local women, most of which identify as Hispanic, at the St. Anthony church. They gathered to talk about women’s experiences living on the border. In collaboration with several women from the community, the Sisters transitioned their discussion group into a center and purchased a small piece of land and a building across the street from the church to house it. Since its founding, the center has grown in staff and participants and has incorporated two other buildings into...
its property. In 2004, the Sisters handed leadership to a new director and staff, however, the mission remains the same: to facilitate “personal growth, leadership development, spirituality and community building” (WIC, “Mission”). They do so through economic self-sufficiency programming, citizenship and ESL classes, painting, sewing and dance classes, and workshops on personal, community and environmental welfare (e.g., nutrition, water conservation and recycling, organic gardening). Lastly, in addition to serving the local women, the center also hosts a Border Awareness Experience that brings small groups of college students and church groups from across the U.S. to the center to raise consciousness about contemporary issues regarding life on the U.S.-Mexico border.

WIC was chosen as a research site because of its multifaceted approach to social and ecological justice and because it is a coalitional site that serves the mostly Mexican-American and Chicana/o local community while openly welcoming others to visit, learn about issues in the area and to stand in alliance with women in the community. The center claims a coalitional identity that is situated within a clearly articulated geographical and historical context; this mirrors an anti-essentialist representational trend I found in Chicana cultural production surveyed in chapters two and three and in activist struggles detailed in chapter four. Moreover, as I will show shortly, there are many examples of a connection between women’s work for social justice and their work for ecological justice as well as a connection between women’s activism and their creative production. In particular, I found that there are many ways in which staff and participants at WIC develop an ecological sense of themselves and their environments through various technologies of intersubjectivity, many of which were also seen in the cultural
production and movement politics that have been explored in prior chapters.

While WIC caught my attention for the similarities it shares with other sites of research pursued in this dissertation, ethnographic research provides an opportunity to witness the complexities and contradictions that occur in direct action efforts at decolonization with women that may have less privilege and security than the popular artists explored in earlier chapters. In addition, research on contemporary activism can serve as an extension of and potential counterpoint to the historical survey offered in the prior chapter. This chapter opens with an effort to make my research plan and methodology as transparent as possible before turning toward an analysis of the themes that emerged in my research at WIC.

Generally, my research questions sought to determine what strategies participants used to work toward social and ecological justice. I was especially interested in discovering the differences or similarities shared between how women activists articulated their relationships to the environment and ecofeminist theories of women’s connection to the environment, including (1) what links, if any, there are seen to be between women and nature, (2) the role of religion or spirituality in understanding social and ecological healing, and (3) the role of the body in constructing women’s identities and relationships to their human and non-human communities. I focus on these three themes because my genealogy shows that they remain sites of tension in Western ecofeminist literature that often hail criticisms of essentialism yet my research on Chicana cultural productions suggests the Chicana texts offer historical cues and subject positions that can create coalitional (i.e., intersubjective) identities among readers and
spectators; these strategies resist the essentialism of which other ecofeminist works have been accused. In observing the center I found a complex web of processes involved in conscientization (conscientização) (Freire 1970). These processes demonstrate impulses toward intersubjectivity that enable a variety of relationships and activisms, shifting women’s values, beliefs and relationships and creating a platform for new becomings. In short, the activisms at WIC can shed light on what Deleuze and Guattari name the deterritorialization of subjectivity (1987). However, there are a few potential limitations of deterritorializing strategies for social and ecological movements for justice; I conclude by looking at these limitations in light of the work that occurs at WIC to theorize the potential and pitfalls of coalitional activism.

Research Methods and Methodology

My research objectives, as suggested above, were to determine how Chicana and Mexican-American women understand their participation at a women’s center that works toward both social and ecological justice. I also considered the differences or similarities between women activists’ relationships to the environment and ecofeminist theories of women’s connection to the environment, including understanding the role of the body and of spirituality in the negotiation of social and ecological justice and how the construction of identity occurs so that women develop (or fail to develop) close ties to their local human and non-human communities. Lastly, I hoped to identify strategies for justice that emerge out of the beliefs and daily practices of WIC staff and participants. Given these objectives, I employed participant observation and semi-structured interviews at WIC to gather data regarding participants' relationships to the center,
including their support of its mission and their understanding of their work as justice-oriented. These methods allowed me to explore the objectives of my research while bridging the disciplinary divide in ecofeminist research described in chapters one and four wherein social science approaches to the study of human-nature relationships are rarely put into dialogue with humanistic efforts of study. The use of ethnographic methods also yielded additional insights into the research topic, allowing me to contrast findings with the themes that developed from an analysis of cultural productions seen in chapters two and three. Such an approach served two important purposes.

First, as Pablo Vila’s introduction to his volume *Ethnography at the Border* (2003) suggests, certain manifestations of border theory have become inadequate to the task of describing the complexity of contemporary border life. Vila argues that the conceptualization of the border as a metaphor or symbol of cultural crossing in general overdetermines popular awareness of border life. Vila quotes Robert Alvarez on this subject: “Some scholars feel that to take a metaphorical approach to borderlands distracts us from social and economic problems on the borders between the nation-states and shifts attention away from the communities and people who are the subject of our inquiry” (x). In contrast, Vila’s collection seeks to balance a metaphorical awareness of the border, of the “social boundaries of the border and those behaviors that involve contradictions, conflict, and the shifting of identity” (x), with a *material* concentration on the daily realities of border life. *Ethnography at the Border* intervenes in the over-reliance on symbols and literary tropes that can be found in some Chicana/o and borderland studies and, for the purposes of my dissertation, suggests a need to balance the analysis of
cultural production with the ethnographic study of individual women’s lives to arrive at a more complex picture of what it means to live as an activists in the Southwest and to understand how symbolic and material realities are mediated.

Second, Debra Blake’s *Chicana Sexuality and Gender* (2008), a comparative analysis of oral histories, art and literature, shows there may be some differences between how working-class women and professional writers and artists conceptualize gender and sexuality. Following Blake’s advice on methodology, I employ ethnographic research at WIC as a counterpoint to the research on cultural production because many of the women at WIC lack the relative financial security attained by some of the professional artists and writers examined in earlier chapters, despite the fact that such artists and writers may remain marginal within their respective fields. Interviews and participant observation may reveal alternative perspectives and needs regarding women’s social and ecological security. These perspectives may not find an audience as easily as those of the artists and writers, but they are essential in the pursuit of developing a broad, intersectional analysis of women’s relationships with each other and their environment in the U.S. Southwest.

Finally, I received over ten years of newspaper clippings, photos and press releases from the director. I used textual analysis on these materials, the center website and brochures that were available at the center. In addition, as this chapter will show, cultural production plays a large role at WIC; I used textual analysis to interpret two short video documentaries of the center (http://www.womensinterculturalcenter.org/, http://vimeo.com/2241523), and took photos of the many artist artifacts (e.g., poems, paintings, piñatas, etc.) that have accumulated at WIC over the years. While the
interviews offered the most important insight into the lives of the women that currently work and participate at the center, the other artifacts allowed me to expand and reframe analysis of interview data through a broader historical and contemporary context.

I aimed to align my work with those feminist fieldworkers that stress the importance of reflexive methodology and non-exploitative research and publication methods (Visweswaran 1994, Lather and Smithies 1997, Frank 2000, Borland 2007, Nagar 2008). It was my hope that because participants often join WIC to develop skills to empower themselves and build stronger relationships with other women that address the social and ecological needs of the community, the interviews could provide participants with an additional opportunity to extend the reflection and consciousness-raising of WIC’s mission. In addition to reflection, participants might benefit from seeing that their personal testimony is important not only to work in their local community, but to the ways in which academics and activists understand ecological and social justice. Several of the ten women I interviewed did express gratitude for the opportunity to discuss their work and history with the center, especially given the fact that center is now in transition and many of the people and programs the women were introduced to when they first arrived at the center are no longer in place. The chance to reflect on those things that worked so well and that had such a transformational effect on some of the women seemed particularly important to them as the center regroups and moves forward in this new stage of growth.

While I hoped my interviews would be a positive experience for the women I met, I also wanted to offer something to the center in exchange for the generosity of the staff.
and participants. I was able to live on the center premises and contribute a small rent income to the center. I also work with the internship coordinator at WIC to spread information about the center to the Ohio State University students I teach and make referrals to the center. Another effort employed to minimize the exploitative or one-sided nature of research is to make the research process as transparent as possible to those with whom I worked. I worked with the director and her assistant to identify possible interviewees and determine which classes and events would be suitable for observation. Women who consented to be interviewed had the opportunity to ask me as many questions about my research, my role at WIC or anything else they liked before, during and after the interview and I attempted to make myself available for conversation by spending time in the courtyard and reception area, which were public and casual common spaces. Finally, I posted drafts of the interview transcripts to my interviewees for their review and informed them that they could make any changes they liked to their comments, allowing them more freedom over their contributions and a greater sense of ownership over the material.

While I remain grateful for the generosity of the staff and participants at the center, it is also important to note my role in the director’s plan for growth. WIC has been filmed for two documentaries and staff and participants have been interviewed for data collection in Milagros Peña’s comparative analysis *Latina Activists across Borders: Women’s Grassroots Organizing in Mexico and Texas* (2007) as well as for other studies; these publications are listed on their website and research on WIC is framed as a mark of the center’s success (WIC, “About Us”). The publicity WIC receives from popular and
scholarly interest plays a key role in the growth and financial security of the center and acts as leverage for the corporate and non-profit funders that the director seeks to partner with as they develop new initiatives and grow the enterprise. The work carried out at the center is extremely important and I am happy to contribute to their strategy for success. I mention my role in this process not just to suggest that my relationship with the center was more collaborative than exploitative, but to highlight the agency of the women at the center and to write against the common narrative in traditional ethnographic research that situates the researcher as an invisible or marginal agent. Rather, I often felt that I was placed into certain classes and prodded to pursue certain topics that highlighted the center’s new focus on economic development rather than left on my own to develop a big picture of the work the center does on a daily basis. I was also introduced to funders as they came through the center for tours. Nonetheless, after meeting with many women who play differing roles at WIC, I developed a broad picture of the present and past aims and the way the mission has been enacted over the years while simultaneously recognizing the import of the center’s new direction.

Part I: Relationality as the Centerpiece of WIC’s Work

As described earlier, WIC regularly offers classes for the Small Business Academy, oil painting, reiki, sewing, ESL and citizenship, as well as occasional workshops on nutrition, violence against women, feminism and empowerment, among others. At the heart of this programming is the aim of providing women with options that encourage them not just to build skills, but to challenge the social isolation that is rampant in the rural, largely immigrant community. Center participant Josie Basan
explains, “I live out in the country and my husband is working. I was alone most of the time and I was very depressed… I tell everyone, if you come here, you won’t be depressed. It’s the medication that you need” (“Where It Starts”). I elaborate on the research theme of relationality throughout this section, showing how social isolation is addressed through daily interpersonal experiences, a focus on strengthening the family and women’s role within it, as well as the coalitional impulses of community-building and exploring intercultural differences at the center.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

The ability to cultivate relationships among the staff, participants, and the broader local and national community remains the foundation on which the additional work of the center (e.g., the classes mentioned above) can occur. The center aims to end social isolation through warmly welcoming its participants and upholding the center’s primary value, which recognizes that “Women need to be treated with dignity, respect and honesty” (WIC, “Mission”). This aim is particularly important because the community is rural, located thirty miles from the metropolitan areas of Las Cruces and El Paso, and comprised of transient families that pass through after a brief stay in the region as well as established immigrant families that have left an extensive social network behind for an isolating life in the often unwelcoming U.S. One staff member that has been with the center for many years explains that the interpersonal relationships are what keep women coming back:

I think that, because of the community we are trying to serve, especially an immigrant community (and it’s grown stronger in the time I’ve been here because of the political views of immigration that gone on over the past 5-10 years), it’s very easy to become isolated in American society. I think people feel
like they belong in this community, but that they’re not welcome. When you have an organization that makes *welcome* a part of what the organization is, that’s part of what the Sisters of Mercy believed in… their “carism” and hospitality.

That welcoming feeling begins as soon as the participant walks through the door and is warmly greeted by the receptionist. Staff and other participants extend that greeting as they pass and the welcome is consciously enacted throughout each day. One staff member emphasized the ritualized importance of the role of hospitality, saying, “The idea of the welcome keeps sticking in my mind. I think that goes down to the fundamental mission of this place: Everybody is welcome. Every person is greeted individually… Even those things that are considered everyday interactions are the things that are most important.” What interests me most about these statements is that the sentiment was reflected in nine of the ten interviews I conducted with staff and participants. Women not only said that they enjoy the warm greeting and that they seek to give it as part of their daily practices at the center, but they build in other practices to reward, support and empower women. Several women said that giving a small compliment about someone’s painting or encouraging a woman that is having a difficult day—these seemingly small interactions both reflect the carism of the Sisters of Mercy and are seen by the director and other staff as strategies that build up women’s confidence so that they feel empowered to stand up for themselves, to learn new skills and, as the director, Mary Carter, believes, help women “withstand anything that happens and start looking at options rather than barriers.”
Family Relationships

Nurturing connection and care for women extends into all aspects of life at the center, but one of the areas in which it is most important to rework relations with others is that of the family. As one staff member informed, “Nearly every discussion that you will have here is about family.” In an isolated, rural and primarily immigrant community, one’s family often serves as the primary social network. However, despite the strong focus on the family, discourses about families and women’s role within them varied widely.

The most widespread narrative about the center’s relationship to family-building is evident in one of their stated core values: “If you educate a woman, you educate a family” (WIC, “Mission”). This idea reveals the importance of motherhood in shaping women’s identities though, as I will show, this notion of motherhood is not a patriarchal one of self-sacrifice and subservience; further, it recognizes that women are often at the center of the family’s network of relationships and that their ability to control and direct the family is connected to the success of the family and, by extension, to the success of the community. Elena clarifies that, “If you educate a woman you educate the whole family, no matter what kind of education it is.” The thought is that, for example, while the Small Business Academy can teach women essential accounting, organizing, and other skills that she can pass on to her children, her business can also support the community and provide more resources, particularly in a rural community that lacks jobs and consumer options. More importantly in the eyes of many of the staff, the Small Business Academy as well as the painting classes and Zumba exercise classes give
women confidence and self-esteem that they model for their family members. Additionally, as I will show shortly, they also give women a sense of calm and peacefulness that their family members recognize and benefit from.

Another common narrative was that WIC serves as an extension of the family. This idea both builds on traditional ideas of the family and reworks them, expanding the notion of family in non-normative directions. There are two main iterations of this theme. One staff member claims, “People say that, and I’ve heard this a lot, that work is one life and your home is another life. And I don’t think that’s true. I think that it’s only one life because I do spend a lot of my time here at work… and I do bring in my family… you have to connect both things.” Women bring their children, husbands and even pets into the center for community events and workshops and they bring the ideas from the center and a feeling of calmness back into their homes, making their family life co-extensive with life at the center. For some women, this has meant that their whole family undergoes a process of consciousness-raising that opens up the possibilities of community work, bolstering the belief that the family is also co-extensive with the community. Women, their children and husbands have gone on to become human rights activists, to participate in food drives, and to work in the organic community garden that aims to provide healthy, non-toxic food to families while educating them about food politics.

However, some may feel that the diffusion of the boundaries between the family, the center, and the community becomes overwhelming as they begin to see how widespread issues of poverty or domestic violence are, for example. One member illustrated this point and the contradictions of working at the center particularly well. She
said, “It’s kind of upsetting to me sometimes because I take the issues that are here [home] and that’s not what I wanted. You know? I don’t need more worries.” This woman spoke of a desire to have a firm separation between work and family and described her attempts to remain invisible when she goes shopping in town to avoid seeing anyone from the center. However, on another occasion, she relayed a story of taking her children to hear a woman lecture on how she survived and escaped from her violent husband. The process of consciousness-raising is never a straight-forward journey toward acceptance and action, but what is evident from these examples is that the center exposes issues in the community and, as many interviewees have said, puts a humanizing face on them so that staff and participants feel moved to engage in community work, sometimes even in spite of themselves. As a result, the geography of the center and the home begins to grow co-extensive; because the center opens up local, national and even transnational issues of justice among the participants, it may be theorized that the center-home dyad may grow rhizomally, stretching out in different directions and embracing the multiplicity of sites and struggles that activists inhabit, as many of the struggles highlighted in chapter four do. Though not strictly environmentalist, this phenomenon does explose the importance of spatial relations, including an awareness of the co-extension of environments and the coextension between people with the various environments. This concept, as I have argued in other chapters and which I develop further below, can become ecological in that it can demonstrate how individuals de-invidivuate and come to care for their environments rather than objectify them.
As the above example also shows, despite the fact that family is important to WIC’s work and to the notion of the community in Anthony, idealized representations stand beside another picture of the family as unsafe for women. Center staff participate in a state-wide coalition against violence and meetings from the local sexual assault organization La Piñon are occasionally held at the center. There are fliers in the WIC restroom informing women that they have a right to be safe and providing them contact information if they have been victims of sexual assault or domestic abuse. Furthermore, according to several staff, many of the women come to the center because they are bored and/or isolated at home and are looking to escape the tedious and never-ending reproductive labor that they are charged with carrying out. Like one of the staff members I interviewed who had been in an abusive relationship, women may also participate in classes and workshops because, as that woman said, “A lot of women don’t have [encouragement] at home. They might hear, ‘You’ll never get anything, you’ll never do anything.’ Here, women tell them to go out and get it; achieve it! Giving the encouragement that ‘Yes, you can do it! Yes you can feel like you’re in a family outside your own family!’”

The center balances awareness that the family is important to women, but that family space is not always safe space, allowing counter-discourses around the family to proliferate. Though none of the conversations, interviews, or workshops I observed challenged the idea of a family formation outside of heteronormative confines, the idea that the women participants and staff become an extended family does challenge normative ideas of the family and open up a woman-oriented space, though husbands and
children are also welcome to participate in all events. Nonetheless, women seem to treasure the fact that the center is predominantly served by women and women remain their target population. Furthermore, discourses surrounding the more traditional and idealized notion of family may play an important role as an authorizing discourse that allows the center to openly rework problematic ideas of women as submissive, as victims, as responsible for the care work of the family and not much else. In giving women skills that will empower them in their families and in their communities, and by working to raise consciousness about gender norms, poverty, racism, and zenophobia in their community and the broader nation, the staff carries out difficult and subversive work without alienating other members of the community or appearing to be too threatening.

**Community-Building and Intercultural Exchange**

Community-building and intercultural exchange are two means by which staff and participants at the center transition from work toward personal empowerment to a broader awareness of the social, political and economic context that shapes their lives; such coalitional engagement promotes consciousness-raising. This ideal is represented in WIC’s value statement that, “Community is essential to personal growth and in fostering women as agents of change” (WIC, “Mission”). The center has invested heavily in the community since the Sisters of Mercy first began meeting with women to help them organize their community and identify their own needs. Today, the center continues to make connections with the community through their programming and outreach activities such as the food donations that they make available to those in need. Their investment
can also be seen in efforts to employ former volunteers and participants at the center—at the time of my research six of the nine staff were former participants. In hiring women who have acquired their employment skills at the center, other women in the community see the center’s commitment to serve and promote them, and the employees have an intimate knowledge of the needs and experiences of women in the community. Further, they can serve as role models.

Whether or not participants become staff, everyone is encouraged to share their skills with others in the community and “give back.” The director revealed that instructors and staff make clear this directive: “Today you got this training for free for you to share with other people and never forget that you have to give back to the community.” In fact, the reiki classes came about in just this manner; founding Sister Kathleen agreed to help a participant who was interested in massage to pay for her education and certification in exchange for reiki classes at the center. The instructor continues to teach reiki and other stress-relieving massage techniques years after completing her education.

Intercultural exchange is closely related to the impulse toward community-ownership and community-building. At WIC, this manifests in two ways: first, there is recognition of the heterogeneity of the local community and second, there is recognition of a need to extend beyond the local community, educating others about immigration and life at the border and bringing in new voices to share and challenge perspectives. With respect to local heterogeneity, one class instructor summarizes, “In many ways, it’s ethnically homogenous with around 90% of the population as Mexican or Mexican
heritage, but it’s heterogeneous in terms of personal cultural practices in families. I think that there’s a difference between first and second generation, third, fourth, so you can’t say that everybody’s alike.” This sentiment was reflected in some of the other interviews as well. One young woman relayed that she tries to spread word about the work the center does, including its thrift store that sells used clothes to fund the center’s work and provide food for local families. She finds that some women choose not to support the center in that way because of class differences and a desire to differentiate themselves from the poorer families in the community. Furthermore, Alma who has lived in the area for nearly twenty years has also described her difficulty adjusting to the community because, as a woman who grew up in a small, rural town in southern Mexico, she felt rejected by her neighbors whose family ties are rooted in northern Mexico.  

Though these differences may cause tensions, the center, with its mission to value intercultural exchange, finds ways to turn difference into a strategy to empower women and strengthen the community. For example, the director purposefully seeks varied applicants for the Small Business Academy in order to create the potential for more creative brainstorming and a wider network for colleague collaboration and market generation. Carter describes her reasoning: “Even though we’re so close to each other, our mentalities are very different. [Participants] are able to absorb other people’s way of thinking and start thinking from different viewpoints, since that’s what they should be able to do with whoever they target in the market.”

Finally, the center acts on its objective for intercultural exchange through programs that draw outsiders into the community. Currently, there are three primary
strategies used: college internships and volunteer opportunities, Mercy volunteers that maintain the original connection that the Sisters of Mercy established at the center’s founding, and the Border Awareness Experience (BAE). I focus on the BAE program that brings visitors from around the country to the center at the U.S.-Mexico border to explore issues of environmental degradation, violence, militarization against immigration, and poverty—experiences that disproportionately affect women in the community.

Currently, the BAE is being redesigned in order to better educate about and better avoid the increasing violence in Juárez. In the past, the BAE connected visiting participants with host families in Juárez and participants had the opportunity to talk with people in a variety of roles, including those from human rights groups and other non-profit organizations in Mexico and the border patrol on the U.S. side of the border. During my time at the center and in the months following my research, no trips were taken because the program was being rethought—how could visitors learn vital information about border life without crossing into Mexico? Who would they speak with since the Border Patrol was no longer meeting with small education groups? Prior groups appear to have greatly benefited from the Border Awareness Experience. After a trip in 2008, Georgian Court University student Marcela Torres wrote, “The real challenge of creating awareness begins on this side of the border. And even though I certainly do not know the right answers at a time when immigration is far from being resolved comprehensively, I embrace as a guide the Mercy core values of respect for the individual, integrity, concern for social justice, compassion, and service. May these guide the journeys of all and prevent borders from being built within our hearts” (Torres 2008).
Though the position of BAE coordinator has gone to different women throughout the years, the center asks BAE instructors to employ a Freirean mode of problem-posing education to encourage visitors to ask questions and develop a critical framework for understanding what they see at the border (Freire 1970). This mode of education attempts to fully and actively engage students in the phenomena they study rather than engage them passively; as is evident in Torres’ writing, this reflective and active learning encourages students to develop deeper relationships with the material under consideration as well as with the people they meet and the land they traverse. As a result, the BAE extends the intercultural and coalition-building impulse of the workshops and classes, highlighting the fact that such local, national, and transnational intercultural work is necessary to challenge stereotypes and “make widespread change” that WIC advocates (WIC, “Mission”). Additionally, much like the efforts to rework interpersonal relationships and relationships surrounding the “family,” intercultural exchange denaturalizes ideas of the self, home, family, and belonging while creating grounds to build new relationships across differences of region, race, class, gender, and religion. And, much like the change in place-based subjectivity that occurs when participants begin to incorporate the center and its translocal politics into their sense of selves (i.e., a shift from the home as the primary space of concern to the center, the community, and possibly national and transnational political spheres become key spaces for concern), BAE visitors are challenged to reimagine themselves as agents of change with a responsibility to the land and communities that occupy the border. Here, the focus on relationality shows fragments of an emerging ecological intersubjective self; I take a
closer look at the ways relationality can be stretched into a more thorough-going ecological intersubjectivity in part two.

**Part II: Effecting Intersubjective Relationalities**

This section explores how the center’s focus on relationality discussed in part one can transform from a feeling of community and embrace of coalition-building toward a de-individuating deconstruction of the self and reconstruction through intersubjective ecological relationships. The observations detailed in this section extend those I explored in the analysis of Chicana and Mexican-American environmental activism in chapter four where I found four primary technologies of intersubjectivity exemplified in the activist strategies for social and ecological justice in the U.S. Southwest: the presence of spirituality, coalition-building, “translocal” and transnational framing, and cultural production as movement-supporting resources that stretch the concept of the self beyond the bounded individual seen in much Western modern philosophy. Here, I focus on those practices at WIC that construct selves that are multiplicitous and co-extensive with others, including both human and nature-others, to develop ecological intersubjectivity.

Further, the reader may see connections as well as departures from representations found in chapters one, two, and three regarding the role of the body and embodied responses, connections between women and nature (i.e., the women-nature link), and the place of spirituality at WIC. I explore how those three themes, which have been important in ecofeminist literature and have been taken up in different ways in Chicana cultural production, emerge in the lives of women at the center and how they help us better understand activism toward justice at the nexus of theory and practice.
Embodied Responses

There are three ways in which staff and participants referred to their work at the center in terms of changes that take place within or through the body: strong emotionality, bodily awareness, and creative impulses that move through the body and connect us with others. All three embodied responses had much to do with the space of the center and the particular places in which the women found themselves, thus I want to highlight body-space continuities here though I will say more on that point in the following subsections.

In my research on the role of emotionality at WIC, I begin with the observation that many interviewees expressed a belief that there is a feeling of positivity that permeates the center though it was not always clear how or why the center is perceived to be so peaceful. Some suggested that, because it was a space for women, there was an element of feeling safe and supported. Related, there is space for the open display of emotions and sociality is encouraged through classes and social gatherings aimed at developing a welcoming sense of belonging among the participants. Alma, who remains at the center as staff years after joining as a participant recalls her first experience walking into the center: Too poor to pay a driving ticket, she was court-ordered to work community service hours at WIC; she approached the center with trepidation because she was a newly arrived immigrant from southern Mexico that had not felt welcome in the United States or by her neighbors who had ties to northern Mexico. She narrates,

I came in and there was a group of women in that little building talking and laughing. It seemed to me that they were enjoying themselves. They were having a meeting and when I was coming in and listening, I felt like it was a place that I
wanted to be. I didn’t feel afraid or nervous anymore… By the time I walked a few steps that first day I was saying, “I want to be here! I want to be part of this!”

One of the key elements of this story as well as the rest of the interview is that there is a strong affective longing to be with others and to become something or someone else expressed in Alma’s narrative of her entrée to WIC.

Aimee Carillo Rowe and Elspeth Probyn each write on the affective and political nature of our efforts to forge new belongings and each puts forward the idea that belonging is not just a motion toward embracing others (people, places, non-human others), but can effect a change in embodiment. Rowe writes, “Belonging is that movement in the direction of the other body: bodies in motion, encountering their own transition, their potential to vary” (2005, 27). Through our affective ties to others we rethink ourselves together and in relation or in our “we-ness” rather than through our individuality such that the very borders of our bodies become less firm; we know ourselves through our relations through others. Probyn makes this key distinction between identity, which relies on the myth of a stasis in individual being, and the processual nature of becoming that characterizes belonging. She writes, “the latter term [i.e., belonging] captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state” (1996 19).

In my analysis of the role of affect in knitting community together at WIC, I am proposing an understanding of affect that moves away from racist and neo/colonialist representations that highlight the emotional unruliness of Latinas (for further discussion
and deconstructions of these stereotypes, see Mendible 2007). Rather, my interview did not suggest that emotive responses naturally well up within women, reifying an idea that women and Latinas, especially, over-emote (whatever that would mean…), but suggested instead that the center creates conditions in which women are encouraged to reach out to themselves and others, allowing their emotions to shape their responses to the world rather than repressing them; in fact, in so doing, this emotionality acts as a strategy of healing themselves and their communities. Moreover, as both Probyn and Rowe point out, strategies oriented toward the creation of affective belonging strive to break down reified notions of the self that are based on identity and work toward the recognition of difference. In the following passage, Rowe summarizes the political potential of our movements toward belonging and connects these efforts with ways to reimagine the role of the body in the creation of intersubjects. She writes,

The presence of transracial alliances [or of differential belonging in general] often anchors a process of transformation that goes beyond intellectual understanding of power and privilege and moves into the realm of embodied knowing. I want to draw attention to what is at stake in such intimate forms of knowing as twofold: that power is remade within such relations, and that transracial belonging becomes a vehicle for walking a healing path of awareness. (36)

The second subtheme related to embodied responses is the body awareness that many staff and participants expressed. Bodily awareness is linked to emotionality in both obvious and complex ways, but the ways in which interviewees talked about their bodies and their emotions differed significantly enough to discuss them separately. First, interviewees spoke of positive changes that overcome the body when one comes to the center. In addition to the ease and reduction of anxiety that Alma expresses above, immediately women who walk through the door of the center notice the moderate
temperature that contrasts the more extreme hot and cold temperatures of the desert outside the center’s walls. Anna explains, “When you come into the building, you see that it’s cool when it needs to be cool and warm when it needs to be warm. And even that affects the way people feel when they go home because a lot of the people don’t have central air so they dread going home in the summer… Little things like that happen on a day to day basis.” Here, participants develop a very clear sense of themselves as part of their surrounding landscapes—a concept that I develop further below.

Other participants, such as Josie Basan introduced earlier in this chapter, note that spending time at the center and making friends while developing hobbies have had a marked improvement on their overall health. Josie is grateful because, in honing her skills as a painter, she has seen her depression and fibromyalgia improve. Furthermore, while I was at the center, I observed a nutrition class and spoke with Sandra, a woman who complained of poor eating and sleeping habits and exhaustion from these as well as the stresses of being a single mother. She had only just begun taking the classes and had joined the center that week, but was enthusiastic about changing her eating habits and taking the Zumba exercise classes to improve how she felt.

As I suggested earlier, body awareness is connected to emotional well-being and the center capitalizes on that knowledge. The nutrition and cooking classes, Zumba and ballet folkorico are meant to help women feel strong and confident in their bodies, improving women’s health as well as their self-esteem. In addition, the staff is aware that these activities teach women new skills (e.g., how to cook nutritious meals with affordable and healthy foods, how to sew clothes for their ballet performances), which
not only affects their bodies, their confidence and feelings of self-worth, but often provides important life and work-related skills.

While the staff value women and focus on the female body as a site of potential for physical and emotional health and for relationship-building, they also recognize the assault on women’s bodies from violence, sickness, and hunger as socially constructed gendered, raced and classed acts of violence. Some staff members see freedom from these violences as a basic human right and, as such, one of the center’s primary responsibilities is to provide healing opportunities to address those problems. Elena elaborates, “Basic human rights-building… I think that a lot of immigrants are not empowered. They don’t feel confident enough to say, ‘You know what, I deserve this’… We have citizenship classes that are very important. This office also used to have sexual assault counseling and resources.” Elena also notes that lack of health care is a huge concern that is related to employment options that offer poor wages and temporary and part-time labor.

Because the staff see women’s health as a multi-faceted and socially constructed arena of concern, the center’s strategies for healing are diverse. From reiki massage and walking the labyrinth, dance and nutrition, painting and sewing, to sexual assault awareness and the promotion of citizenship and human rights agendas, women’s bodies are central to their work. Furthermore, each of these healing strategies open up different relationalities with others, emphasizing positive connections between people and reworking negative ones such as violence between intimate partners. Importantly, as with representations of the body in the prior chapters, these strategies highlight women’s
bodies not as “natural” but contested social terrains—bodies that reveal and rework the ways in which power inscribes and subjugates. Acknowledgement of the social manipulation of women’s bodies gives the women more agency to create new scripts and behaviors perceived as healthier for their socially, emotionally, and physically embodied selves.

In addition to emotionality and bodily awareness, the center values women’s creativity as a means to help women develop their full potential and connect with the world around them comprised of both human and nature-others. As with everything at the center, staff and participants recognize the complexity of women’s subjectivity and the diverse needs that women in the region have. The emphasis on tapping women’s creativity is predominantly narrated as an opportunity for women to find, hone and then share their skills with others. Mary Carter elaborates: “The beauty of the center is that it’s built on the foundation that every woman has something special to share. Women have been known to have incredible talent and creativity so the moment someone discovers a talent, then a class emerges out of that.” This is how the painting and reiki classes developed. Moreover, women have the opportunity to develop not just their creativity and artistic talent, but to potentially sell their paintings while learning important public speaking and marketing skills while educating about their work and selling it.35

As seen above, the center’s current focus on skill-building and economic self-sufficiency highlights the tangible rewards linked to exploring women’s creativity. However, the intangible rewards are just as important. First, women who attend the sewing, painting, jewelry-making and other artistic workshops primarily come to the
center to escape from social isolation. They may feel isolated because their social network primarily consists of close family and friends and/or because they feel unwelcome in a country that does not easily accept their culture or language. The rural environment with no public transportation system exacerbates these concerns. I have found the classes that focus on exploring women’s creativity provide the best opportunities for women to share ideas as well as their problems and joys. The sewing class, for example, is the liveliest and most social class at the center. In each class though, what may be most important is that through creative expression rather than merely vocal expression, women are able to say things that they are not able to say elsewhere—whether it is because no one was listening before, no one took them seriously, or because there was a language barrier—dancing, singing, painting, sewing, quilting, embroidery and retablo offer women the chance to create themselves via new relationships to each other, the materials they are working with and the world around them that is re-imagined in their works. Creative projects allow women to speak in multiple registers while opening the possibility of inciting affective changes in the viewer. The volume of talk and laughter during class speaks, in part, to the freedom of communication along multiple trajectories that occurs during creative work.

Speaking of the potential of song, Alma describes the role of creativity in moving her to develop a strong and immediate affiliation with the center and its participants. She recalls how she tried to avoid community meetings because she knew that song was part of the meeting ritual and in her early days she was too embarrassed to participate. Despite this, she eventually joined in.
The first [meeting] that I had, Sister Kathleen said that to end the meeting we were going sing… they were very enthusiastic and I was embarrassed to be there. I was hiding behind others because I was embarrassed. But little by little those words changed my life. The song was “Yo Soy Mujer” and the words were “Yo soy mujer en busca de igualdad…” The song said that I will love myself and it was a beautiful song… I learned the song and I came to the community meetings and I also sang, “Yes! Yo soy mujer!”

What Alma describes and what can be seen in the kinds of sociality witnessed in the classes and in the art works produced by the women, such as Image 1 (see Appendix) that illustrates continuities between people and their environment, is that creative connections do facilitate networking and community-building; however, it also acts as a means by which relationality moves beyond community-building toward the potential to see ourselves as contiguous and interdependent. Herein lies the space to see selves as not just coalitional (though this is no small feat!) but as more thoroughly intersubjective. Women at WIC do not only share their skills and their life experiences through education and conversation, they share an affective bond that draws them together. For Alma, the memory of that feeling is one of the most vivid she has of her early days and she continues to feel its emotional charge more than ten years after originally joining the center.

While these intersubjective relations may not necessarily reflect an ecological impulse, they do challenge the women to think through and beyond themselves and to see the boundaries between humans (and possibly with their environments) as permeable and occasionally contiguous. In the next section, I take this analysis of body relationalities a step further to look at how body/nature intersubjectivities are weaved in the center’s work.
Throughout the first three chapters, I argued for a more keen awareness of when and how critiques of essentialism have been applied to ecofeminism as well as for a more context specific understanding of why certain discourses that tie women and nature together might be useful. This section elaborates on those connections as they are established in the work of women staff and participants at WIC. I consider the center’s environmentalism through its history of practices that are more obviously environmentalist as well as aspects of WIC that may be less obviously ecological, but which nonetheless stimulate an orientation toward social and ecological justice, such as the broad emphasis on healing and the importance of space-consciousness, topics that are addressed at the end of this subsection. While healing and space-consciousness seem less obvious in their environmentalism, like the examples on embodiment, each of the examples offered in this section suggest a deconstruction of the autonomous self for one that is more thoroughly reconstructed as a rhizomal assemblage wherein the ties to human and nature-others remain central to one’s fluid sense of self. Importantly, by introducing place-centered and ecological awareness into this discussion of intersubjectivity, the following strategies rework what might appear to be mostly human-centered practices of intersubjectivity, exposing technologies of intersubjectivity that are more truly ecological.

WIC’s environmental impulse began with the Sisters of Mercy. Sister Kathleen, in particular, came to the border region specifically to understand how NAFTA was affecting both women and the environment through changes in industry and the
deregulation of environmental policies in the free zones at Mexico’s northern border.

Throughout the center’s history, staff incorporated a variety of measures to educate about environmental health and sustainability, including the ways the ecological health of the community affects the well-being of the community. Perhaps the largest-scale example of this practice can be seen in the fact that the primary building housing the center is comprised of used tires that were rescued from landfills and the desert in order to create the center’s building blocks. Not only are the tires free and in recycling them the builders clean up the community, but the tires and compacted earth insulate, keeping utility costs down while using less natural resources to heat and cool the center.

Like all activities at the center, the construction was carried out as an educational activity. It stands as an example to those in the local community that raises consciousness about the importance of eco-friendly construction and living—in fact, the director is in talks with the mayor of Juárez to investigate the use of tires to build safe, permanent, and sustainable housing to replace the cardboard colonias that have grown up on the outskirts of the town to accommodate the influx of maquiladora workers. In addition, WIC participants researched methods of “green construction,” chose this building method, and learned the skills to build the center. They are responsible for everything from space planning to construction (excepting wiring and plumbing work). The gallery, which is the primary entertaining space to the left of the entry, features a partially finished segment of the wall that exposes the tires bound with compressed earth as a visual aid that reminds all visitors of the building process and the benefits of “going green” (see Image 3 in Appendix). The center also boasts visible solar panels, rain water collection tanks,
recycling bins, a compost bin, and an organic garden used by the center’s gardening and nutrition classes (see Images 5 and 6 in Appendix).

One of the most interesting aspects of WIC’s environmentalism is that it makes up only a small part of their broader justice orientation; that is, the organization is not an environmental organization as such. While the mission statement does not reflect their dedication to the environment, the center integrates ecological awareness into its daily activities. For example, in any gathering such as a meeting for the Small Business Academy, participants are reminded that all plates and cups should be recycled. When participants expressed a desire for nutrition and cooking classes, the idea to plant an organic garden sprung to life and the staff and participants developed a play that introduced community members to the health and flavor benefits from growing or buying organic produce along with other activities we can do to “reduce our imprint on the environment” (interview with Mary Carter, director). With these activities, WIC demonstrates an ability to develop new ways to generate an ecological consciousness beyond what the founders introduced to the original participants while also showcasing the staff’s ability to weave together multiple objectives toward social and ecological justice. In so doing, the environmentalism builds on the necessary multi-tasking that is so useful and efficient for the staff and participants that are struggling against multiple social and environmental concerns.

Though environmentalism was clearly related to the center’s other objectives, I sought to determine what the connection was and, specifically, what role (if any) gender played in women’s environmentalism at the center. In response to the question of whether
the environmentalism of the center was linked to the other aims detailed in the mission statement, Elena responded thoughtfully,

There has to be a relation. Maybe it has to do with [the fact that] most of our classes we offer to empower women; I think that learning that you could have your own garden and you could save money, you’re healthier, which means that if you’re healthy, you have a mind to learn, you’re healthy to work, you’re healthy to go to school and you’re healthy enough to be a parent… I think it’s about empowerment in many ways.

As was expressed in part one of this chapter, empowerment through education is particularly useful for women because women often serve as the heart of social networks in the family and the community. In line with Elena’s comments, staff and participants drew clear connections between women and nature rooted in the potential for women to share their newly acquired knowledge with others. Another staff and former participant concurs, “You see the ladies come and plant things because to them, that’s helping the earth and they take that home with them. With the knowledge of how to recycle, you’re going to go home and find that you don’t want to throw that bottle in the trash.” This comment shows that environmental education can act as a mode of healing work that spreads the spark of raised consciousness that participants bring with them into the home and other spaces in their lives. Further, environmental education at the center isn’t merely focused on conservation, but is oriented toward the care of others. This is expressed in the care of nature-others, as that interviewee went on to suggest that if we can save a bird by recycling plastics, we have a responsibility to do so. It is also expressed as the care of human-others—feeding yourself and your family well, sharing your knowledge about recycling or water collection with others, building community through sharing a community garden.
It must be stressed that WIC enables women to make the most of their strategic position as social networkers, a strategy that empowers women to develop and facilitate more equitable and just relationships within their community and between their human community and the natural environment; yet no staff or participants gestured toward a “natural” or biological link between women and nature. Rather, these links were strategically deployed through daily educational activities that enact a healing move. While some of the Chicana writers and artists examined in chapter two have depicted women as spiritual curanderas that perform community healing rituals, WIC recognizes the social roles women play in their communities and extends the tools that enable women to make the most of their power to create change—a role that may be linked to spirituality as in the examples of chapter two, but is primarily grounded in the educational possibilities at WIC. Nonetheless, as I will soon show, there is also a spiritual element to the work women do at WIC that parallels and enforces the healing work performed by women’s education for social and ecological justice.

One final element of environmentalism emerged during research: the importance of spatial and place-based consciousness. For example, the center’s proximity to the church facilitates a sense of spiritual awareness despite the departure of the Sisters of Mercy that founded the center. The center’s location between two large metropolitan areas and across the U.S.-Mexico border from Juárez and its outskirts has contributed to its success and made it a hub for people crossing through, especially given the fact that the center delivers services that cannot be found elsewhere in the region. Moreover, the center is built on land owned by a once prominent family in Anthony and incorporates
the house in which the family lived; this unique feature draws residents to the center with excitement and the hope that they will get to tour the house at some point. While each of these examples shows how, quite accidentally, the center took advantage of its geographic location to draw people together and strengthen community and regional ties, there are two further examples of space consciousness that reveal a concerted effort to deepen not just communal ties, but move toward the creation of intersubjective associations. One of the images stitched into a quilt donated to the center by its participants demonstrates this well (see Image 2 in Appendix). The quilt square features women linked and crossing a desert landscape and it reads: “Across the desert came a multitude of women.” Such sentiments reflect the site-specificity and border crossing mestiza consciousness that Anzaldúa (1987) highlights and this is only reinforced by the notion of difference or “multitude” that used to describe the women of the region and center.

The gallery is the most emotionally charged space at the center. It serves as the primary gathering space for large meetings and social events. It features a labyrinth that was researched, designed and tiled by the participants during the center’s construction (see Image 4 in Appendix). As mentioned earlier, it exposes the tire construction work while also housing the staff and participants’ artwork including the aforementioned quilt that stitches together images and text from many participants and their families thanking the center for bringing something special into their lives. Several interviewees expressed that there was something very social, very positive, and also very calm and peaceful about the gallery despite its nearness to the entrance and reception area that occasionally
become congested and hectic. Its large and cavernous space, the purposes for which it is used, as well as the décor contribute to this feeling, but there is also an interesting piece of folklore that marks the center and that area in particular with an additional charge. I quote Mary Carter as she tells the story of the center’s construction:

Whenever they would get really stressed through the construction of the building, because they learned how to do everything and they were doing it all and it was really hard work… they had this ceremony. They would get a couple of pens out and they would start thinking and really try to connect with the idea behind the center. On little pieces of paper they would write their dreams and wishes for themselves and for the center. Then they would dump all the little piece of paper within the dirt and within the tires. They did it in different sections of the center and I always laugh when somebody tells me that as soon as you come in, you have this beautiful sense of peace even if you’re having problems at home or whatever. I really think it has to do with all the beautiful well wishes that are located in the different sections of the center because there’s so much positivity that was given to it and that’s how they were able to connect to the vision and the mission of the center and they were able to refocus.

In this example one can see a ritualistic focus on enacting the mission and on staying connected to each other as well as to future generations of staff and participants through the sharing of hopes, dreams, and a contagious sense of positivity. Through affective communion, the women re-energize themselves in the wake of their physically and emotionally exhausting labor and they do so, in part, by focusing on their shared strength and shared futures. That is, this behavior shows a conscious performance of intersubjective relationality wherein women redraw their ties with each other and, in putting parts of themselves (i.e., their dreams and wishes) into the soil and tires, they become co-extensive with the center and thus, more deeply invested in its success. The reiteration of this story to the staff and participants that have come after the founding women bolsters the effect of space-consciousness on the women in ways that continue to
refigure women’s sense of self as contiguous with the human and nature-others that comprise their environment both at the center and beyond and in the present and the past.

Capitalizing on this knowledge, Carter hopes to expand the center and introduce additional spaces that draw community together, what she calls “a gathering space that is really open to all.” Modeled off el Zócalo in Mexico City, she envisions a large concrete patio that could host dances, stalls where people from the community sell their crafts and food, open debates on directions for community change, and any number of other community-driven events. Carter explains, “That attracts me, that something so simple as an area of cement would provide so much to a community. Creating those types of community spaces that are spear-headed not only by the center, but by community members, that we can combine those types of events to bring different people together to share—that’s what we need.”

What can be seen from this example and from the example of the gallery space above is that the center offers a broader sense of the environment that includes not just the natural world, but an individual’s orientation in space and place and their relationship to natural and built environments. This is evident in chapters two and three, but this example expands the more narrow ideas of ecological belonging that can be found in some environmentalist and ecofeminist work. Such perspectives can also be found in the work of environmental justice activists that have argued against notions of environmentalism that seek only to protect rural or green spaces while ignoring more urban landscapes and “concrete jungles.” The gallery and other communal spaces attempt to facilitate intersubjective selves that are oriented toward community-building and
education for consciousness-raising, but they are also working toward more thorough-going connections between humans, nature, and the built world that surrounds them. As my interviews show, the staff and participants develop identities that are directly linked to these relationships and, maintained through the affective ties and sense of responsibility for social and ecological justice, these identities are solidified through constant performance of the center’s mission. This has been seen throughout many of the examples above from the ritualized construction of the center to the ritualized daily welcomes to the constant reminders about the importance of recycling, for example.

Spirituality

For further evidence of performative practices of intersubjectivity, I turn to the role of spirituality at WIC, a role that is intimately bound with the creation of ecological intersubjective selves and with the establishment of a social and ecological justice orientation at the center. As with environmentalism, there is a more overt spiritual presence that coexists with a subtler and more diffuse sense of spirituality. Overtly, the center was founded by the Sisters of Mercy and its location across from a Catholic church links WIC with a religious community in the area. These factors are responsible for the fact that some continue to confuse WIC for a Catholic community center despite its efforts at interculturalism and a non-denominational embrace of spirituality. The intercultural approach to spirituality can be seen in the bringing together of several different traditions including reiki and meditation, healing arts associated with Eastern practices such as Buddhism; the labyrinth, which has Eastern roots, but can also be found in indigenous cultures around the world; prayer, but which may also be understood as
reflection and focused on appreciation of life rather than rosary-based and focused on sin and forgiveness; there is also a dedicated celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Elena notes that this celebration is one of the biggest community-building events, drawing those who do not regularly visit the center. She explains, “We celebrate the Dia de la Virgen de Guadalupe… We’ve been doing the celebration for the longest time and we bring the chiles, the dance Azteca, we have an altar for her, we bring flowers… And we do the ofrendas. At least in Anthony, we’re the only not-church that celebrates the Dia de la Virgen de Guadalupe.” Elena recognizes the ceremony’s hybrid elements—“It’s very Catholic, it’s very Mexican.” That hybridity is encouraged through the mission’s emphasis on interculturality that recognizes that although spirituality is very important, so is open-mindedness and an ability to recognize the best of another culture. While this approach to spirituality has led to the thriving coexistence of multiple spiritual traditions and healing strategies, spirituality is also expressed in less obvious ways that nonetheless further fracture and multiply how spirituality is taken up and diffused through the center and its staff and participants.

As I conducted interviews and asked about the role of religion at the center, most were quick to point out that, although there is some evidence of Catholic practice, religious undertones were not always present or, at the least, they were not always evident because WIC purposely strives to be flexible and open without imposing any particular belief system on staff and participants. Without a single driving narrative about religion in place at the center to shape interviewees’ responses, I heard a variety of answers regarding how the spiritual presence was understood. One person characterized
the spirituality cited in the mission as less about religion and more about “the golden rule”—doing unto others what you would have them do to you. Another spoke of it as a feeling that overcomes you: “If you don’t want to go to church, it’s okay... It’s not so much a ‘doing’; it’s not a verb, it’s a feeling. It’s something like a feeling of calm; you have peace.” Earlier in this chapter I noted the role of feeling or affect in creating the grounds for intersubjective identities and it can be seen here, especially in prayer and group reflection. In thinking through the role of spirituality at the center, one young participant explicitly named the relationship between affect, prayer, and their ability to generate grounds on which to build intersubjective relationalities among people: “I think it is important because you get to understand what they’re feeling and the prayers connect you more to everyone else. For me, when I pray with my family, it connects us more.”

Yet another interviewee focused on one element of the belief system of the Sisters of Mercy that she thinks is very important to the center, the practice of hospitality, but she emphasized that what is important about hospitality isn’t that it is linked to religion, but that it offers “a welcome.” While the interviewee is careful to note that she believes this ritual to be independent of religion, the feeling that it generates is comparable to the feeling expressed by the participants and staff mentioned above. Moreover, though it may appear on the surface as a non-religious phenomenon, religious studies scholars since Emile Durkheim’s publication of The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1912) have theorized what Durkheim calls “collective effervescence.” For Durkheim and others religion can be seen as a primarily social phenomenon wherein the collective energy from a gathering of individuals takes on a character of its own, a kind of social euphoria as can
sometimes be seen in political rallies, for example. Here, religion serves as a community-building enterprise, but more than that, with the collective generation of great emotional or affective energy, individuals de-individuate and come to collectivize themselves along the intersubjective lines described above. The energy at WIC, particularly during the highly social event of the building’s construction, might exemplify this kind of phenomenon.

In addition, in each of the cases detailed in this section that rely on the movement of affect through the social body, from the ritualized welcome and the consecration of the building with messages bearing the positive thoughts of the women to the labyrinth walks and morning meditations that have been held for years at the center, what is described is an act or series of acts that people do with meaning to generate a positive personal and community outcome. In *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), Victor Turner theorizes the role of ritual as a socially significant performance that creates meaning from the ambiguity of cultural liminality; as such, his theory regarding the use of ritual as a mechanism of social cohesion may be particularly well suited for the study of a community that is largely comprised of immigrants striving to build a home in the often unwelcoming U.S. Southwest and his description of liminality shares much in common with what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as the borderlands in both the metaphorical and material sense of the word.

In this case the ritualized welcome and construction efforts may act as a place-making practice that invites participants to feel welcome to the center, to the community, to the land in Anthony—a practice that ties ecological and social justice together in
demanding recognition of the participants’ belonging to the region. Moreover, the place-making emphasis on hospitality pairs with the site-specific form of spirituality that grows out of this liminal or border space. That is, the center’s hybrid approach to religion that is at once spiritual, social, and political is a response to the history of colonization of Mexico by both Spain and the United States. And, to fold back into the discussion the earlier analysis of the open and hybrid approach to religion emphasized in WIC’s interculturalism, such an approach is reflective of what Anzaldúa names a mestiza consciousness—one that derives from the borderlands and invites all those who dwell in the borderlands to join as allies to create a new land that is free of oppression. As I argued in chapter two, reclamation of this land (as earlier activists sought to reclaim Aztlán) can be understood as a strategy for both social and ecological justice.

I conclude this section by noting one additional connection between spirituality and environmentalism that may be particularly significant because this connection was stronger during the years when the center was directed by Sister Kathleen and may now be on the decline. Alma, who has been at the center since its earliest days, reveals what she has come to learn about spirituality. She says, “I was used to staying at home with my family, praying in front of an image or something. Now, we did it outside in nature, giving thanks to God for the day, for what we see, and to appreciate what we see because sometimes we are walking through the desert or the street and you don’t appreciate what you are seeing, what nature is showing to you.” Alma describes religious practice at the center as *en-natured*, as an appreciation for others that joins human others with nature and spirit others in a web of connectivity. Alma does not claim that women are *naturally*
or essentially linked to the natural world or that they share a unique connection to the spiritual world—be it constructed or otherwise. Rather, she notes that this appreciation needs to be taught and that what is most important, like others above have said, is the *feeling* that connects bodies, minds and spirits. Now that Sister Kathleen is no longer working at the center, Alma sees a distinct change, “We can talk about spirituality, but I cannot move your feelings inside.”

The shift from an overt spiritual presence that Alma and others have witnessed to a more immanent presence coincides with a shift from more affective modes of gathering to combat social isolation (e.g., through morning meditation, singing) toward gatherings aimed at skill-building and economic self-sufficiency. The model of self-sufficiency is very important to disenfranchised women in a poor and rural town in New Mexico; furthermore, a focus on economic self-sufficiency programming is more legible to national and regional funding agencies that can provide financial support for the center’s expansion of programming as well as its expansion into additional satellite offices in neighboring rural communities, which remains key for those that lack transportation. Yet, in shifting away from programming that provides less visibly tangible rewards such as the morning meditation, the center may lose that element of affective cohesion that was so important through the founding years of the center’s history. Staff that have been with the center since the early days say that new participants continue to find the sociality the best part of their experience at the center, though women who have seen the evolution of the center remark that the feeling isn’t nearly as strong as it once was. I argue that the ability to draw affective connections between human, nature, and spirit others is what
pushes participants from individual skill-building for success and the networking or community-building that often occurs in educational settings towards the longer-standing and deeper intersubjective connections that have enabled the center to become as strong as it has and to form the base for wider community change. In other words, the deeper interconnections are what can create social, political and spiritual healing. However, the director has mentioned that she is currently in negotiations to develop a program that explores how to “cultivate women’s cultural and religious leadership” so it is possible that new efforts will fill the gap that has grown in the absence of the Sisters’ spiritual leadership.

Part III: From Relationality to Movements for Justice

Parts one and two looked at the center’s focus on relationality and sketched the various kinds of connections manifested by staff and participants that might work toward the development of an ecological intersubjectivity. However, collective care does not always transition into collective action, though the work of building positive relationships performs its own kind of healing that is necessary, if not sufficient, for broad change to occur. In this final section, I step back from close observation of the daily practices and beliefs of those that spend time at WIC and focus instead on WIC’s organizational structure, including ways it motivates staff and participants to engage in various justice oriented practices.

While community-building may lead to consciousness-raising and eventually to activism in the community toward local, national or transnational change, it is important to note that the center itself does not advocate any particular worldview or direct its
participants toward any specific action. Rather, in following a Freirean model of popular education, the projects come directly from participants; from conversations they have with each other and with staff there is the potential to see reality in new ways and to observe social, political and economic patterns that were previously hidden from view. From that awareness, participants decide what, if any, appropriate actions to take toward social and ecological justice. Mary Carter explains, “They have this evolutionary process. You have some that become health promoters, some that will go with human rights, some that work with AIDS; as you know, as we grow and experience different things in our lives, the whole connection is being able to take something close to us that brings us together.” Carter further notes that her own emphasis on economic self-sufficiency stems from her mother’s widowhood and seeing firsthand that women cannot rely on marriage as a means for financial security.

The center’s organizational structure has a lot to do with the ability to raise consciousness and create opportunities for action. WIC strives to achieve a horizontal or non-hierarchical organizational process that they describe as circular and group-oriented rather than director-driven; there are several methods to take in input from the participants regarding program planning and evaluation and incorporate participants “as instructors, workshop facilitators and [in] other leadership roles” (WIC, “Management”). As a consequence, the center is participatory and, because it grows out of the community, it needs to be as flexible as possible to meet the community’s diverse and changing needs. I suggest that because of this, what actually emerges is not so much a “circular” organizational model, but a rhizomal one—a model that remains non-hierarchical and
non-linear, but which can accommodate unexpected growth in differing directions at once while some growths are suddenly stunted depending on the rapid and ever-changing needs of the participants. This is particularly important because of the nature of this borderland community. One instructor who has been with the center conducting citizenship and ESL programming for years explains, “All communities are always undergoing change but I think that because of the geography, there’s a tendency for this one to change quite quickly and to evolve quite quickly because you do have a significant portion of the population that’s transient. By transient, I don’t mean homeless, but passing through Anthony on their way to another place in the U.S.” In order to adequately meet the needs of this population, staff must be flexible enough to change programming frequently and need to have clear and open access to the opinions and desires for programming from their participants. What excited me most about WIC is this ability to deliver a variety of programming to effect healing on multiple levels. While all non-profits have to wear several hats at once and balance different programming, the political work of citizenship classes, human rights and voter education that gets balanced alongside reiki classes, painting, and ballet folklorico, and the spiritual and environmental elements of programming shows an awareness of the intersections of identity and of needs that is at the heart of social movement organizing. The center’s successful relationship with the community relies on its ability to “shift gears” and work in multiple directions at once.

One might describe such an organizational model as rhizomal because the vision and programming for the center expands in different directions, or in Deleuzo-Guattarian
terms, the organization throws out “lines of flight” (1987), depending on the input from a variety of actors including the most important stakeholders, the participants themselves. However, a rhizomal model is also one that recognizes not just the lines of flight in the many different activities that occur, but also that each of those lines is itself a multiplicity that engenders varied becomings. For example, like a rhizome such as a ginger root that generates different nodes of growth wherein each node could sprout a new growth in any direction or multiple growths at once, the center has an ability to offer activities that teach multiple skills and address multiple needs, better recognizing life’s complexity while allowing women to more efficiently address those needs at once. Amanda, who teaches an ESL class, illustrates this point: “The idea that if you learn a skill [like the acquisition of English], then you might be able to go to a PTA meeting and say in English, ‘This isn’t right. This shouldn’t be happening in our community.’ I think skill-building can give you the confidence to participate in community-based social movements.” Similarly, participation in ballet folklorico classes teaches women how to dance for health and fun in a way that socializes them with other women, but it also requires that they learn to sew their own costumes, it gives them confidence to perform in public, and because they introduce themselves and the dance at events, it teaches them public speaking skills. As mentioned earlier, it also connects them with a heritage that is empowering. In the act of joining the group, every woman has the potential to undergo any number of becomings from becoming-fit, to becoming-confident to becoming-revolutionary (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).
The rhizomal model allows for rapid growth, maximum flexibility, and permits us to recognize multiplicities in participants’ needs and identities as well as connections between various social and ecological justice struggles and strategies. It is a model that can also be seen in several of the struggles for Chicana environmentalism detailed in chapter four’s historical review; thus, this analysis of the organizational structure of WIC and the daily practices of its staff and participants offers an in-depth case study that confirms and extends an analysis of trends that were witnessed in my earlier review of the literature of Chicana/o and Mexican-American movements for social and ecological justice. Like those struggles, the Women’s Intercultural Center also represents the deterritorializing potential of Chicana and Mexican-American activism that resists inscription by a single social movement frame (i.e., WIC’s efforts cannot be seen as strictly environmentalist work, strictly feminist work, or strictly anti-poverty work, for example). Furthermore, like many of the struggles in chapter four and the themes seen in the cultural production of chapters two and three, WIC encourages a deterritorializing of individualist subjectivity, encouraging staff and participants to rethink themselves in terms of relationalities with human and nature others that can forge intersubjective “selves-in-community.”

Nonetheless, there may be limits to an impulse toward deterritorialization, as chapter three of this dissertation has shown in its in-depth case study of the deterritorializing potential of the documentary Señorita Extraviada (2001). I conclude this section with an exploration of some caveats regarding the use of deterritorializing strategies toward justice among direct-action coalitions. In particular, I ask whether the
very flexibility and multiplicity or multi-directionality of these struggles could ever lead to social and ecological justice without some consolidation of beliefs, aims, and efforts on the part of activists.

The tension here lies between the values of (1) hegemony, which gives coherence, direction, and collective strength to a movement or struggle, and (2) multiplicity, which can enliven a movement and enable it to be as complex and inclusive as possible both to welcome as many allies as possible and to track the shifting configurations of power as quickly as possible. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Multitude* (2006) might provide a suggestion for ways to negotiate the tension in these two competing social movement values without reductively denying one value to support the other. In *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri build on their prior work *Empire* (2000), which focused on an emergent global form of sovereignty based on “network power” that includes not only nation-states, but supranational institutions, and major capitalist corporations among other powers that are not only network-like in their ability to connect with multiple organizations and actors across space, but are rhizomal in their power to quickly respond to resistances in flexible ways, shift gears, and move in a new direction (e.g., factories that relocate at the first sign of worker resistance) (xii). In *Multitude*, they expand this analysis to include the ways in which war facilitates the growth of empire as well as how it mediates our lives and relationships—that is, war not only represses, but reorganizes and reproduces social, economic and political life.

However, they also note that it has created new kinds of labor (such as immaterial labor that produces ideas and sustains relationships) and new resistances (for example,
guerilla network resistances such as the Zapatistas). New circuits of communication and collaboration emerge from the biopolitical production of these networks. In other words, power creates its own conditions for resistance and in this case the only way to adequately resist the rhizomal nature of “network power” is through what Hardt and Negri call the multitude. They develop the concept of the multitude as a social network full of singularities that nonetheless work together to produce a common. The multitude is at once singular and plural, multiple and unified—that is, the multitude is a Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari’s work on becoming-other (Hardt and Negri often reference a “becoming different,” or “becoming common”) is also evident here, particularly when Hardt and Negri describe the efficiency of the multitude through reference to “swarm behavior”—a both becoming de-individualized and becoming-insect. They also take care to describe the ways in which the multitude does not arise spontaneously, but is produced through collaboration and communication.

Finally, they warn that the multitude is ambivalent in and of itself; it does not guarantee liberation, but must produce it through democratic process and organization. While the common always remains to be produced, Hardt and Negri look to some common conditions that can galvanize a move toward radical democracy. Their three common conditions for a new democratic order consist of: “the critique of existing forms of [political democratic] representation, the protest against poverty, and the opposition to war” (269-270). Here, a critique of these organizing forces might serve as a unifying or hegemonizing function though the actual shape of that critique or the alternatives it might
pose need not be established in advance and multiple approaches can and will be put forward by diverse social actors who act in concert across their differences.

I suggest that this may be the case for the struggles depicted in chapter four, including various activisms against violence to human and nature others in the free trade zone along the U.S.-Mexico border, violence against the human and nature others that make up the agricultural fields in California, and the economic, cultural, and ecological violence perpetrated against those whose livelihoods, land and water (and subsequently, plant and animal species) are being compromised and/or privatized in the Southwest, to name just a few struggles that are independent yet related.

Moreover, each struggle appears to rely on the joining together of many activists through the use of technologies of intersubjectivity that connect people to each other through the sharing of thoughts, ideas and perhaps most importantly, affect. This interconnectivity produces a collective intentionality, or what Maria Lugones (2003) theorizes as an I→we intentionality that lies “between rather than in subjects, subjects that are neither monolithically nor monologically understood” (208). Lugones also points out that challenging social fragmentation is the first and most necessary step in the development of an active (inter)subjectivity capable of generating the movement toward counter-hegemonic or anti-normative ends (215). WIC’s primary goal of ending women’s social isolation reflects Lugones’ analysis of what it takes to create successful resistances.

Further, the work of women at WIC might serve a variety of differing needs for each woman, some of which might act as personal resistances aimed at survival rather than collective change, but in relying on several technologies of intersubjectivity that
create a collective social body, these seemingly individual acts also contribute to the collective struggle against networked power in a number of ways. As such, the multiplicity of the struggles and participants does not necessarily provide an impediment to justice, but provides an ever-shifting and multiple response to an already multifaceted and ever-changing political and economic complex. The technologies of intersubjectivity that have been detailed in this chapter are those practices that allow the multitude to stay connected despite the internal inconsistencies and differences among its members.

**Conclusion**

The tensions between a hegemonizing or unifying force and the difference-respecting forces of social action as well as those between individual actors and their immediate social needs and the collective as a whole can be accommodated within the rhizomal organizational model enacted by WIC and in the other struggles mentioned in chapter four. As a result of the consciousness-raising that can occur by bringing women together through community-building described in part one and the more affect-driven intersubjective subjectification described in part two, as well as by inviting women to participate in the organization of the center in such a way that invites critical thought about the community’s needs, the participants receive training on multiple levels. They acquire new skills, confidence, increased sociality and a wider and more diverse social network as well as perspective and perhaps raised consciousness about community issues related to social and/or ecological justice. In addition, because of the center’s rhizomal organizational structure, WIC diffuses the dichotomy that is often presumed between personal growth and/or empowerment and broader social or structural change that
Lugones debunks in her theorization of I→we intentionality and the recognition that personal tactics for survival and active subjectivity that strategizes toward collective change are often co-extensive.

This chapter’s organization that moves from practices that build relationality to those that build a more thorough-going intersubjectivity, to those organizational patterns that allow diversity and coherence among the different actors suggests a deterritorializing resistance that can avoid cooptation by networked power by virtue of its flexibility and multiplicity; in addition, as a deterritorializing resistance, it can avoid reifying notions of Chicana and Mexican-American identity by emphasizing the heterogeneity of backgrounds, experiences, and needs among activists, and can mobilize Chicana and Mexican-American women and their allies to think through new relationships with each other and to the land. As such, in line with the conclusion of chapter three, I point to the importance deterritorialization as a grounds for resistance and highlight the various ways subjectivity in particular can be deterritorialized to support movements toward social and ecological justice. To return to the guiding questions that drove this project, it is the presence of a strategy of performative intersubjectivity that appears to characterize the environmentalism that grows out of the lives of Chicanas and Mexican-American women. These technologies of intersubjectivity create the possibilities for expanded human/nature/spirit relationalities; and, as chapters four and five show, these relationalities build to a collectivism that is coherent yet flexible, demonstrating the framework for a strong rhizomal movement for social and ecological justice.
CONCLUSION
DETERRITORIALIZING MOVEMENTS
AND THE ECOLOGICAL SELF-IN-COMMUNITY

This conclusion has two goals. The first is to summarize my dissertation’s aims and findings. In this section, I also note the contributions my argument can make to interdisciplinary scholarship, including the revision of feminist theory and methodology. The second goal is to extend the analysis carried throughout this dissertation regarding the process of deterritorialization as a strategy for decolonization. My discussion will build on observations from research conducted for chapters four and five and will begin to sketch out the implications of deterritorialized movements for a theory and practice of radical democracy.

Findings

I began this dissertation wondering about the state of feminist environmentalism in the American academy and how feminist scholars might draw struggles for ecological justice more firmly into their projects. Ecofeminism is the branch of feminist theory most closely associated with environmental concerns. As a field of theory and activism concerned with the relationship between the domination of women and the domination of nature, ecofeminism has been marginalized by feminist scholars for several reasons. Primarily, ecofeminism has been seen to be too universalizing and Western-focused and
it has been accused of essentializing both “women” and “nature” as well as any link supposed between them. Secondarily but of equal importance, there remain disciplinary and geographical divides in the canon of ecofeminist literature. Scholars that approach ecological feminism from humanistic and social scientific backgrounds are not often in dialogue with each other and may not recognize or appreciate the benefits of approaching questions of ecological justice from an interdisciplinary standpoint. Moreover, there remain geographical divides in the ecofeminist canon such as the exclusion of borderlands studies and the activism and cultural production of Chicanas and Mexican-American women. This is a particularly significant omission because of the strong sense of bioregion present in feminist borderlands studies and activism wherein the politics of place (including spatial relations and land, water and biodiversity politics) plays a large role in how efforts for justice are conceptualized.

Despite the marginalization of ecofeminism in the field, our relationships with the environment remain important and feminist scholars cannot avoid theorizing about our responsibilities to human and nature-others. Our work on social justice should include concerns about ecological justice. This dissertation has accounted for these issues as well as the criticisms of ecofeminism mentioned above. The key questions asked at the beginning of this study are: What parts of ecofeminist thought remain relevant and what needs to be revisited? How can we address questions of essentialism and universalism? How can we address the geographical and disciplinary divides in ecofeminism? My contention is that feminist thought about the environment needs to be deterritorialized, set into new motions and new directions by putting it into conversation with that which it
excludes. This dissertation puts ecofeminism into conversation with Chicana environmentalisms and, by attending to Chicana environmentalisms, this dissertation offers a focus on the Southwest that addresses a geographical divide in ecofeminist literature; it offers a focus on intersectionality and the place-specificity of artists, scholars, and activists that responds to the universalizing and essentializing tendencies of which ecofeminist literature is often accused; finally, it offers new ways to think about key debates in the field of ecofeminism that include the role of the body, the role of spirituality, and the connections (if any) between “women” and “nature” in ecological theory and activism.

While chapter one interrogated the given genealogies of ecofeminism and determined its exclusions and “stuck places,” the remaining chapters of this dissertation turned to Chicana environmentalisms in order to explore how ecological narratives are expressed in the work of Chicanas and Mexican-American women. Addressing both the geographical and disciplinary divides that have plagued ecofeminism, I employed textual, iconographic and inter-textual analysis of Chicana cultural production in chapter two; film analysis, including visual and aural analysis and the study of the film’s reception in chapter three; interdisciplinary historical and regional analysis of Chicana and Mexican-American women’s participation in movements in chapter four; and interviews, participant-observation, and textual analysis of media data of a women’s direct action organization in chapter five. Taken together, these chapters reveal a major finding: Chicana environmentalisms display a politics of deterritorialization that aims at decolonization. Chicana environmentalisms represent a complex movement for social and
ecological justice that is open and flexible rather than fixed and bounded—it is a movement that moves toward becoming decolonial. Further, there are two kinds of deterritorializations that drive Chicana environmentalisms toward a decolonial politics: deterritorialization of the self and deterritorialization of movements.

I begin by summarizing my findings regarding deterritorializations of the self. Throughout this dissertation, I argued that the politics of the body, of spirituality, and of the connections between women and their natural and built environments could be usefully explored with a focus on the performative practices that create selves-in-community or performative intersubjectivities. Many of these intersubjectivities are also ecological ones that draw selves into broader landscape and spirit relations that extend one’s sense of self and one’s obligation to the human and nature-others with which one has become co-extensive.

Counter to criticisms that have rendered ecofeminist representations of women and nature as essentialist, a focus on the ways women strategically hail discourses of the body, women-nature links, and spirituality in order to contest and rework hegemonic notions of culture, nature, and history has served Chicanas artists and activists well. As chapters two and three have shown, in staging cultural productions that point to a legacy of the oppressive cultural construction of Chicanas while at the same time forging decolonial images of women in coalition with human and nature-others, artists expose the performativity of identity and enact a self-in-community with allied spectators. This is especially clear with respect to Juana Alicia’s La Llorona’s Sacred Waters (2004) and Lourdes Portillo’s Señorita Extraviada (2001). Similarly, chapters four and five explore
how Chicana and Mexican-American activists use ritualized performances to critique social and ecological injustices and to form bonds with the human and nonhuman-others in their environments to coalesce in movement toward a more just future. The United Farm Workers demonstrated this well in the activisms I discuss in chapter four, including their pilgrimages and fasts. In chapter five, we also witness many rituals of a performative intersubjectivity that is ecological, including the participants of the Women’s Intercultural Center sacralizing their “green” building with notes of their hopes and dreams for themselves and future participants.

Above, I note that throughout the dissertation, there is a theme of the development of a performative ecological intersubjectivity that both reworks colonialist representations of identity and forges new, open and counterhegemonic subject positions for writers, spectators, audience members, activists and their allies. These subject positions are deterritorializing in that they ask artist and activist, spectator and ally, to rethink their relationships with human, nature, and spirit-others and to see themselves as interconnected. The specific means by which these intersubjective connections are forged I have named “technologies of intersubjectivity” or, alternatively, “technologies for the ecological self” wherein the ecological self is already conceptualized as an intersubjective self and a truly intersubjective self should also already be an ecological one, aware of its landscape of human and nature-others.

Technologies of intersubjectivity that deterritorialize spectators have differed somewhat throughout the chapters and have depended on the site of research and the method used by the participants. In chapter two, writers like Anzaldúa (1987) and
Sánchez (2003) deterritorialize themselves and readers by writing a personal narrative that is also meant to be collective in that it speaks for and through the reader. This has the effect of both calling the reader to identify with the author and to stretch themselves to see shared consciousnesses and landscapes presented in the works of these authors.

Visual texts, from murals to installations, have used technologies of intersubjectivity that cause viewers to disrupt their sense of history, or at least the colonial narrative that predominates in histories of Mexican-Americans in the U.S., and to see themselves as implicated in both hegemonies as well as potentially implicated in resistance as they are invited to stand as an ally. Thus, in many of the examples explored in both the chapters on cultural production and those concerned with activist movements, it is the rewriting history that can become a technology of intersubjectivity. Such a technology can reframe historical others and contemporary others (i.e., contemporary artists and activists and their spectators and activists) and push us to rethink our relations to each other, to time and to master narratives that create us as (inter)subjects.

Spirituality is another technology of intersubjectivity that can be seen throughout many of my examples. And, like many of the technologies of intersubjectivity, it connects and is supported by others. For example, in her documentary, Señorita Extraviada, Lourdes Portillo deterritorializes the subjectivity of her spectators in a variety of ways. She uses the camera and editing to disrupt a sense of time and progress, or history. She reads contradictory news stories to disrupt the spectators’ sense of justice and their understanding of the causes of the border violence; finally, she uses spiritual elements such as altar building, the ritualized painting of crosses and stories of the
victims’ lives as sacred to enact a relationality between spectators and border activists fighting for justice. Following this, chapters four and five demonstrate further the importance of spirituality as a technology of intersubjectivity.

Another common technology is place-centeredness and the ways in which activists and artists can conjure a sense of belonging while also raising the specter of spatial relations—including the negotiation of power in the construction of spaces and those who do or do not belong in those spaces. For example, in chapter two, Cherríe Morraga’s queering of Aztlán (1993) claims and troubles place-based subjectivities in the Southwest. Similarly, chapter four showed in detail how Chicana and Mexican-American women participate in movements for social and ecological justice that are rooted in a particular eco-region, but must extend transnationally (or translocally) in order to shift their allies’ thinking beyond the “not in my backyard” syndrome and instead to think globally about changing the politics of production and consumption that figure some people and the environment as exploitable.

Behind each of these technologies of intersubjectivity that can potentially deterritorialize artists, activists, and allies is the fact that they are motivated by an affectual push that destabilizes the subjectivities of participants. Affect is particularly important because it moves us to shift from intellectual engagements to a deeper, embodied sense of ourselves and our surroundings. Affective connections can be inspired by fear, sadness, terror, or hope—emotions at the heart of Portillo’s documentary. They may also be inspired by joy, a deep desire to belong, or the sense of freedom and accomplishment that comes with moving your body in a new way or learning a new skill,
as participants at WIC demonstrated.

The careful negotiation of affect in cultural production and movement politics can have a profound effect on individuals and social movements. Though affect can certainly be deployed to motivate hegemonic organizing, the focus on intersubjective and counterhegemonic relations of belonging that were witnessed across the chapters of this dissertation shows that deterritorializing social movements allows for resiliency in movements as well as alliance-building rather than stagnation through identity politics and calcified logics. The deterritorialization of movements can be witnessed from the evidence that Chicana environmentalisms differ greatly from mainstream environmental and conservation movements, ecofeminism, environmental justice movements. Not only do Chicana environmentalisms show women bringing together cultural production and direct action approaches to activism, but they incorporate elements of many of struggles for justice that include attention to the role of spirituality, social and economic justice, indigenous rights, ethnic and intercultural community-building, and support for women among concerns for the environment. As such, Chicana environmentalisms deterritorialize how scholars have understood the insularity of movements and they require a research methodology that can see activism at the intersections of movements and disciplines.

Thus, deterritorialization, or keeping subjectivity and movements in movement, is a common practice in Chicana studies that deserves more attention for the importance it plays toward efforts at decolonization. Decolonization is, after all, an ultimate deterritorialization from hegemonic logics. Placing interconnection and a deterritorialized
sense of belonging at the heart of efforts at decolonization toward social and ecological justice acts as a direct counter to ruling logics that rely on isolation, objectification of humans and nature, and hierarchizing differentiated human and nature bodies for exploitable use.

Given these findings, my dissertation makes some important contributions to both theory and methodology. From the standpoint of feminist theory, I have articulated the concept of performative intersubjectivity and explored its role in struggles for ecological and social justice among subaltern artists and activists such as the Chicana and Mexican-American women that have been studied here. My concept of performative intersubjectivity expands Judith Butler’s groundbreaking work in feminist theory by looking to the ways (inter)subjectivity is staged through body/nature/spirit relationalities. By extension, this concept also highlights the importance of place and spatial relations in constructing (inter)subjectivity performatively.

In addition to the conceptual framework offered by “performative intersubjectivity,” I have reclaimed deterritorialization as a subversive politics for decolonization. As I show in the introduction, critics have argued that “deterritorialization” evacuates the politics of privilege and place. However, as the many examples of the dissertation reveal, Deleuze and Guattari’s work on deterritorialization parallels what many Chicana feminists, including Gloria Anzaldúa, have found in Chicana writing and activism. Moreover, Chela Sandoval has convincingly argued that French poststructural theory such as Deleuze and Guattari’s reflects the decolonizing movements of subaltern activists like the Chicana/o movements of the 1960s and 70s. I
strive to continue Sandoval’s academic coalition-building by drawing feminist and Chicana studies into dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy to yield productive ways to think about subjectivity and movement politics.

Lastly, my theoretical contribution lies in resuscitating elements of ecofeminism, including debates around the body, the women-nature link, and spirituality, and pointing to new directions in theories of ecofeminism, environmental justice, Chicana studies and French poststructural theory by drawing those fields together to interrupt and enliven each other. Ecofeminism (and feminist studies broadly) needs to be deterritorialized—ecofeminist philosophy must be shifted from its stuck places, denials, and embarrassments about essentialism, which may or may not be justified. Cultural production and activism from Chicanas and Mexican-American women do in fact demonstrate impulses to deterritorialize subjectivity and movements, and as such, unifying the fields of ecofeminism and Chicana studies around Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of deterritorialization has proved fruitful. It is also very important to bring these fields together because Chicana studies remains marginal in feminist studies, yet contributions from Chicana studies can potentially re-orient not only how we understand feminist environmentalism, but the politics of subjectivity and movements. As I have shown throughout, these topics are intimately intertwined so that this project has become as much about deterritorialization and decolonization as it is about environmentalism in feminist studies.

Noting that there are many ecological narratives that are highly visible, but remain undertheorized in Chicana studies, I found that contributions from Chicana and
Mexican-American scholars, artists, and activists had much to offer interdisciplinary feminist and environmental studies; further, Chicana studies could also benefit from greater attention to a prominent, but undervalued theme that runs throughout much cultural production and activism in the field.

This dissertation contributes to feminist study by virtue of its methodological innovations as well. In drawing together different movements, such as the environmental justice movement, ecofeminist activism, Chicano nationalism, workers’ movements and women’s anti-violence and ecological protests, I contribute to our understanding of the interconnectedness of movements. I highlight the need for interdisciplinary approaches to scholarship that can read across disciplines and their theory production. In line with this, I offer a methodological innovation by reading cultural production, historical and intellectual genealogies, and activism together using research methods from the social sciences and humanities to understand how complex subjectivities and movement politics are negotiated when they do not fit easily into any singular disciplinary or social movement framework. This counteracts one of the more striking limitations of environmental literature—whether it is mainstream, ecofeminist, or environmental justice literature.

Thus, in addition to the deterritorializations mentioned above that have included the deterritorialization of subjectivity and of movements, my dissertation has attempted one further deterritorialization, that of the academy and the ways it is disciplined to limit thought and erase the complex experiences and resistance strategies of those it continues to marginalize. Herein lies a related contribution—the need to theorize social and
ecological justice in terms of scale. My dissertation has shown how Chicana environmentalisms demonstrate coalitions between selves (i.e. intersubjective relationalities), coalitions between movements and finally, a need to work from an interdisciplinary framework that forges coalitions between academic disciplines. All three strategies of deterritorialization are aimed at decolonization and I hope this dissertation has played a small part toward that end.

Discussion

To conclude this study, I open up one final “line of flight” by looking more closely at deterritorialization and the question of scale. As I conducted research for this project, I planned to limit myself to discussion of my major finding: the role of technologies of performative intersubjectivity as the key element driving the success of Chicana environmentalisms. However, my research for chapters four and five, in particular, began to suggest that further research on performative intersubjectivity at the scale of movements is necessary and it may bear direct implications for theories of civil society’s development of a decolonizing radical democracy.

While I argue that performative intersubjectivities have been fostered by numerous strategies depicted throughout the dissertation, how can these localized and place-centered selves-in-community move in synchrony toward a wide-scale and effective movement for social and ecological justice? Can a deterritorialized self-in-community that is at the heart of a flexible rhizomal movement such as is discussed in chapters four and five form the basis of theory for radical democracy? This discussion is only very tentative at this point and I leave it to other scholars and future projects to flesh these
connections out. Here, I briefly identify some directions in democratic theory that provide a useful starting place to think the possibilities for a deterritorialized, rhizomal political movement. Because I see the politics of subjectivity and movements as a question of scale, I conclude this discussion by pointing back to research in this dissertation that highlights the role of cultural production in promoting both diversity and cohesion among deterritorialized selves-in-community as a means to think about what might drive a theory of radical democracy.

Outlining Governing Logics

To begin sketching a democratic framework for the deterritorialized self-in-community, I’ll make explicit one of the theories that has undergirded this project and which has been important to the work of many of the theorists from whom this dissertation has drawn: Michel Foucault’s notion of “governmentality” and the construction of the self that is regulated (and yet challenges) those governing logics (1991). In his work, Foucault distinguishes the modern period from the classical age, tracing a move from sovereign power to a sense of power as displaced and capillary-like. At this time, a new interest in the human sciences that produce the individuated subject sits at the center of studies (1990). The sciences, in tandem with the congealing form of the modern nation-state, work to classify, order and code individuals. Classification and ordering both makes bodies useful and generates a surveillant gaze that is internalized within a self-policing, self-disciplining citizen-subject. Griselda Pollack elaborates on this point: “The formation of the human subject is an effect of discourses that 1) divide the population, sick and healthy, mad and sane, and so forth; 2) classify scientifically by
abstracted categories, the speaking subject of grammar, the producing subject of political economy, the living subject of the natural sciences; and 3) subjectify, that is, produce the category of a self” (1994, 6). This abstract process comes not merely from state decree, but is enacted in the everyday micropractices of subjects in accord with and sometimes resisting governmentality, or in other words, the regulatory systems and techniques of governing that order populations. Nancy Campbell elaborates that regularity and repetition “are the stuff of governing mentalities, the practical logics of gender relations, class conflict, and racial formation that may interrupt and contradict, but also consolidate and propel, the ‘game’ of governance” (2000, 52).

Today, neoliberalism has become the dominant form of governmentality and movements must track its logic and modes of subjection in order to forge successful campaigns for resistance. Building on Foucault’s work, Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd locate nation-building at the center of a presumed project of universal modernity that undergirds neoliberal philosophy. They write, “The state is the form through which nations enter the modern world system. But the state form entails more than a pragmatic adjustment to that world system; it implies not only an assimilation to a hierarchized system of global power, but compliance with a normative distribution of social spaces within that state’s definitions” (1997, 7). Drawing the state and global capitalism together, Aihwa Ong (1998) extends Lowe and Lloyd’s theorization of the both hegemonizing (i.e., nation-building) and fragmenting (i.e., categorization, division of the population) nature of contemporary neoliberal governmentalities. Ong’s research on the Asia-Pacific region shows that the state becomes flexible, moving with transnational
logics. That is, Ong illustrates the ways in which China has developed governing mentalities that order its population such that some citizens carry multiple passports, travel and relocate abroad while contributing to China’s sense of nation and the structure of the state and economy from afar. Other populations are made flexible in order to accommodate other aspects of China’s transnational modernity. Ong names this fragmenting governing technology as the creation of “zones of sovereignty” in which subjects experience relative degrees of freedom and flexibility. These zones are differentiated by gender and class hierarchies (7); for example, women’s factory labor is sought and linked to Confucian ideologies of local rootedness, domesticity and docility, while masculinity is tied to risk-taking, mobility and a fraternalism within transnational networks (20). Instead of understanding the role of corporate globalization and supranational structures such as the World Bank, IMF and a host of NGOs as eroding the sovereignty of China, Ong sees the state as making different biopolitical investments in its populations as a means to adjust to the transnationalization of global flows of capital and people, ultimately consolidating state strength (239).

Ong’s example provides contemporary evidence that under neoliberal governing mentalities, not only does capitalism act as a deterritorializing machine, but so too can the state. As Deleuze and Guattari and their philosophical successors Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued, the only way to negotiate with networked and deterritorializing relations of power is to resist in form (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, Hardt and Negri 2004, 58). Given this context, the question remains how to construct a governing mentality that allows for free and flexible subjects that are not consolidated by
nation-building and capitalist desires? In a Deleuze-Guattarian sense, how do networks of desire stretch across a variety of geographical, political, cultural and economic scales as well as differences of gender, race, class and even species? And, equally important, how can coalitional networks account for the ways in which governing or hegemonic discourses have built structures that distribute resources and privilege differentially? In forging connections with each other, we cannot ignore our current positionalities even as we move toward new associations. The remainder of this chapter takes these questions up and considers them central to a project on radical democracy.

**Deterritorialized Coalitions as a Response to Neoliberal Governmentality**

Throughout this dissertation I have argued for a collective sense of the self that is constructed through ritualized practices, including citations and miscitations of norms that yield an ecological performative intersubjectivity. While the scale I considered differs from that of the *multitude* envisioned by Hardt and Negri in that I have focused on localized collectivities, but broadened the scale of relationalities to include landscape and spiritual relations as well as those which extend across historical time (e.g., subjectivities developed in relationship to the memory of earlier struggles), there are important parallels between our approaches. Hardt and Negri’s explication of the multitude can help elaborate future directions for my idea of an emerging self-in-community.39 They write,

> We have tried to describe in the course of this chapter how the development of the multitude is not anarchic or spontaneous but rather its organization emerges through the collaboration of singular social subjects. Like the formation of habits, or performativity or the development of languages, this production of the common is neither directed by some central point of command and intelligence nor is the result of a spontaneous harmony among individuals, but rather emerges in the space between, in the social space of communication. The multitude is created in collaborative social interactions. (222)
It is “the space between” that might provide the most useful starting place for thinking about relationship between individuals and movements, between intentionality and docility.

In Chicana studies, the space in between is sometimes referred to as a “third space,” the space within and between ruling logics. It has been conceptualized as the negotiation within and between normative masculinity and femininity, patriarchal nationalism and white feminisms. Further, Emma Pérez names its subversive potential by demarcating it the “decolonial imaginary”—a third space that recognizes “that time lag between the colonial and postcolonial, that interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated” (1999, 6). In The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History, Pérez deviates from a historical narrative that is linear, favoring a cyclical understanding that always brings the present and the past together. Pérez notes, “it is in the maneuvering through time to retool and remake subjectivities neglected and ignored that third space feminism claims new histories” (127). Historicity is centrally significant for Pérez whose ultimate aim is to revise the past in ways that open up postcolonial futures. Necessarily, her work advocates deconstruction—what are the stories that have been told? What aims have they served? What exclusions have they produced? What emerges when stories are troubled and read against the grain? Third space texts offer negotiated, performative resignifications of key historical figures (e.g., Malinche) and narratives act as a means to question the terms of framing under which subjects become legible. In so doing, they disrupt the ruling logic, create more space within the given categories and allow subjects-in-community to emerge as legitimate
(inter)subjects. Indeed, it is possible that performative subversions might stretch the categories that frame our logic to the point of incoherence, potentially freeing up a line of flight that extends beyond dualistic logic and opening up new ways to think and act.

Third space acknowledges that there is no outside to power, but that there are instabilities within any given social system or regime of truth where alternative perspectives, modes of knowledge and signs of agency can be discerned and emphasized.

**Theorizing the Space between the Individual and Collective with an Eye for Plurality**

What is significant about the negotiation of the third space is that it is a collective negotiation facilitated by the telling of new narratives. I turn to its collective nature, particularly the space between subject constitution and collective, coalitional agency first. In order to collaborate within coalitions aimed at undermining hierarchies of classification and domination, Grewal and Kaplan write, “we have to rearticulate the histories of how people in different locations and circumstances are linked by the spread of and resistance to modern capitalist social formations even as their experiences of these phenomena are not at all the same or equal” (1994, 5). This work is necessary to show us where we are, including a sense of our positionalities as historically constituted and sedimented by relationships mediated through privilege and hierarchies of domination. But it does not tell us much of where we could be.

I turn to the possibilities of coalition, looking first at the constitution of a coalitional consciousness. Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983) distinguishes from “home” and “coalition” where home is a place in which differences of experience, identity and privilege are relatively small. Coalition, on the other hand, is a place made of
difference—it is a necessary place to work from if social justice is sought, but Reagon warns that it is a dangerous place. Awareness of the stakes in social action and of the positionalities and privilege associated that inhere among our allies serves as the first step toward developing a coalitional consciousness (see also Keating 2005). Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorization of affinity politics avoids identity-based coalition-building by advocating a “new tribalism”—a movement toward “nos/otras,” which signifies a play on “nosotras” (we, feminine) and “otras” (others, feminine). AnaLouise Keating explains, “Joined together, nos + otras holds the promise of healing: We contain the others, the others contain us. Significantly, nos/otras does not represent sameness; the differences among ‘us’ still exist, but they function dialogically, generating previously unrecognized commonalities and connections” (2005, 7).

With the understanding of coalition as a place of difference and dialogue, María Lugones (2003) follows Anzaldúa’s move to generate a mestiza consciousness created from crossing borders and searching for difference. Lugones offers two key strategies for negotiating that space of difference to create coalition: “world-traveling” with loving perception and streetwalker theorizing. The two work in tandem and challenge individuals to make literal and metaphorical border-crossings to another person’s “world.” Crossing to another person’s world requires full attention, a loving rather than arrogant perception, a willingness to see another as they see themselves while seeing yourself through their eyes. It requires overcoming social fragmentation by challenging spatial fragmentation by “hanging out” (221). Lastly, like Anzaldúa’s nos/otras, it asks us to develop a more relational self that deindividuates. This is, perhaps, one of the most
important features of world-traveling that actively contests the biopolitical pressures of sovereign subject formation. Counter to the “I” of the modern subject, Lugones posits an “I → we” to illustrate the collective, interactive nature of intentions and agency. She explains, “The success of intentions that lack sociality is of a different order. They succeed in keeping one from being exhausted by oppressive readings. They are indeed not worldly… Enacting resistance as social and worldly requires an interactive understanding of intentions” (15); thus, while individual acts are important and necessary for survival, we also need to theorize an alternative sociality of intentions to move against oppression collectively.

While Lugones offers concrete suggestions for building an intersubjective coalitional consciousness, Chantal Mouffe’s “Hegemony and New Political Subjects” (2000) theorizes coalition from the perspective of a political theorist for radical democracy; their frameworks are mutually supporting. Both advocate solidarity within a pluralist democracy and while Lugones theorizes an active intersubjective resistance (I → We consciousness), Mouffe’s move toward de-individuation is grounded in replacing an individual sense of rights and liberty with a notion of solidarity as key to democracy. And, as with Lugones, Mouffe distinguishes between resistance as a response to domination and that which acts on a broader social order as a struggle for the democratization of social life (303). Here, Lugones offers a “street-level,” collective resistance that moves with power wherein the resistance is immanent and cannot be predicted in advance. Mouffe also advocates for the preservation of difference and allowing for dissensus within a collectivity, but stresses the need for a framework that
produces solidarity; she argues the need for a new, expansive hegemony that can draw “a chain of equivalences between all the democratic demands to produce the collective will of all those people struggling against subordination.” (307).

Anna Marie Smith explains Mouffe’s writing and her work with Ernesto Laclau, writing that “Politicized resistance is discursively constructed; subversive practices never automatically follow from the simple fact of exploitation and oppression. The authors’ central argument is that a resistance discourse can only become politicized insofar as the democratic revolution is reappropriated and redefined in specific historical conditions and transferred to the social site in question” (6). Mouffe’s aim is not to interpellate docile subjects playing out lives dictated by ideology, but to hail radically resistant subjects that challenge governing mentalities—it is a hegemony that encourages self-determination and self-government rather than the subject-consumers caught in the trend to commodify and privatize goods, rights, and liberty as they are directed to do under neoliberalism.

**Coalitional Counter-Hegemonies in Motion**

Notably, as Pérez and other scholars of Chicana studies have shown, the construction of a counter-hegemony relies on a subversive retelling of history that retains the political, economic and cultural conditions under which oppression is maintained. My research throughout this dissertation has shown both the micropolitical efforts of moving together through specific strategies of intersubjectivity oriented toward resistance as well as the macropolitical efforts of developing broad counter-hegemonies. For example, I depicted strategies of coalition-based movements wherein California maintenance workers connect with California farmworkers, California farmworkers connect with fruit
consumers across the country, Anglo students and church members connect with Chicana/o and Mexican-American human rights activists, environmentalists and recent immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border. In these cases, activists struggle together in the name of an open, flexible notion of justice where the end is not given in advance, but worked toward collaboratively in daily practices and enunciations—a rhizomal movement that reflects Lugones’ theories on a street-walking, world-traveling mode of resistance. Yet, in addition to the open-ended nature of these movements, they also show counter-hegemonizing functions as Mouffe would support. For example, oppressive historical narratives are challenged and histories are created anew by activists and artists; these narratives are shared among activists from various struggles (e.g., the importance of the UFW protests for later worker struggles and environmental justice activisms). Art, including quilting, muraling, street theater, and other forms of collective creative expression, plays an especially important role in the creation of a discourse of resistance that is accessible to many.

Art as a Mobilizer of Pluralist Collectivities

As chapters two, three, four, and five show, one cannot separate organizing for social and ecological justice and the politics of movements from visual and narrative cultural production—they support and co-produce each other. My contention has been that recent Chicana cultural production, rather than relying on the consolidation of an essentialist Chicana identity that is exclusionary, uses strategies of deterritorialization that both critique norming systems and put forward an open-ended potential for alliance-building. For example, as I note in chapter two with respect to Yreina Cervántez’s
*Nepantla* triptych and *Big Baby Balam*, her work makes connections between the body as text, the individual in relation to her historical and geographical context, and the spiritual nature of the self that can motivate change. She uses the codex form to educate about the history and heritage of indigenous culture while critiquing oppressive master discourses such as social Darwinism, the privileging of European artistic traditions that rely on a limiting perspective, policies that limit bilingual education in California, etc. Alongside these critiques, Cervántez’s self-representation is multiple, representing her imbrication in the *neapntla* state, or state of being in-between, in a third space. She sees herself as both human and animal, subjectified by subjugating ruling logics, but open to reconfiguration in her efforts to raise consciousness and reach out to others in resistance. For her as for many other Chicana artists, cultural production is a way to heal and nurture the self, but more than the personal element of creativity, it is meant to reach out and connect with spectators to heal the community. That is, cultural production, which reaches a large audience, can act as a way to move intersubjects from I→We and from localized action to the broad-based, collective action of movement politics.

The relationship between cultural production and direct action activism reinforces the deterritorializing nature of the (inter)subject and pushes movements into rhizomal directions, enacting movements that are flexible, fluid, and multiple in contrast to bounded, hierarchical, static such as those based on strictly identitarian principles. Further, this interplay between cultural production and direct action activism yields the potential to create counter-hegemonic discourses that enable an ecological intersubjective awareness of the self. Chapters two, three, four and five identified specific technologies
of the intersubjective self, such as the resignification of human/landscape/spirit relations; such technologies are performative and are produced in the tensions within and between cultural production and direct action. These technologies may be consciously cited as in the case of Sandoval’s resistant subject who strategically hails discourse, or they may be unconsciously staged by those who resist at the “street level,” as Lugones theorizes. Nonetheless, what I hoped to show were concrete examples of scholars, artists, and activists who create successful movements toward decolonization and toward social and ecological justice that employ a model of deterritorializing politics. And, counter to critiques that suggest the apolitical nature of deterritorialization and its incompatibility with large-scale social movements, I hoped to show how activism that employs deterritorializing strategies destabilizes binaries between the personal and the political, the individual and the collective, the multiplicitous (inter)subject and the multitude as a social body. In addition, these chapters collectively orchestrate the how a social movement can emerge from multiplicity and fluidity and yet maintain enough coherence that it can make itself legible to new allies.

While I highlight micropractices, such as the performative acts that construct intersubjective relations of belonging among human and nature-others, there is much to be done in thinking about the possibilities of a borderless, transnational movement for radical democracy premised on relations among deterritorialized subjects, particularly a model that does not evacuate the specific political, economic, and social conditions that structure our ability to affect and be affected and which mediate our opportunities and belongings. This dissertation begins theorizing on a relatively small scale of recent
movements along the Mexico-U.S. border and across the Southwest, yet I hope this discussion becomes a line of flight away from this project and calls others to pursue the role of deterritorialization and rhizomal politics in theorizing radical democracy.
Introduction

1. Deleuze and Guattari also theorize “deterritorialization” and schizoanalysis in response to Freudian psychoanalysis, which they see as reductionist and dangerous in that the continued citation of the Oedipus-complex acts as an explanation of social phenomena that merely reproduces the complex. In so doing the complex continues to limit and trap desire so that it desire can only remain conceptualized as lack (lack of the mother or desiring object, lack of the phallus, etc.). In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari see desire as productive and that which only seeks to grow, make multiple connections and keep the body in movement. Thus, deterritorialization, for Deleuze and Guattari, is essential in order to free desire and subjectivity from its Oedipal trappings. See Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

2. See Arjun Appadurai’s “Disjunctures and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” in Readings in Contemporary Political Sociology, Kate Nash ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000) for a contemporary analysis of deterritorialization informed by postcolonial theory. Appadurai contests theories that global capitalism leads to cultural homogenization, suggesting instead that capitalism leads to deterritorialization that dislocates people, capital and commodities while also creating new opportunities for artists, travel agencies, media companies, etc. to create new representations to link dislocated people to an idea of home. As such, “ethnoscapes,” “mediascapes,” “technoscapes,” “financescapes,” and “ideoscapes” act as disjunctures between the economy, culture and politics that have both fragmenting and hegemonizing effects on community-belonging and state control of that sense of belonging.

3. See also Irene Gedalof’s “Taking (a) Place: Female Embodiment and the Re-Grounding of Community” in Sarah Ahmed et al., Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration (Oxford: Berg Press, 2003). Gedalof looks at the specifically gendered nature of the reproductive work of producing a sense of belonging after forced displacement. She asks: “Is it possible both to take into account and value the work that women do to reproduce a sense of ‘home’ and community belonging and to challenge the constraining effects of prevailing models of identity that tie women to a particular model of community?” (92). She answers that question by looking at Foucault’s notion of “biopower” and the uses to which bodies are put as well as the unintended effects of that power that might offer resistance. She also considers Irigaray’s theory of female embodiment to consider how women’s specific reproductive labor might render new becomings where reproductive labor is not seen as static and repetitive, but performative repetitions of difference (106).


Chapter One

5. I want to clarify that when writers discuss “the Western origin” or “ecofeminism in the West” as Karen Warren’s Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers (2000) does, they are typically referencing ecofeminisms produced by Anglo-American women. As my dissertation will show, Chicana environmental activism is generally excluded from accounts of...
ecofeminism and accounts by those who work in other Western nations such as France retain a marginal presence.

6. Often those who write about Deleuze, such as Christa Albrecht-Crane (2005) or Eugene Holland (1999), write of Deleuze as though his ideas or work is central while omitting or failing to cite Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari are clear that they share many ideas and write collaboratively as a single “assemblage.” In A Thousand Plateaus, they write, “Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd… Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognizable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think” (1987, 3). As such, I point to the problematic omission of Guattari in the scholarly literature that take up their ideas and will alternately cite “Deleuze” for Deleuze’s single-authored work, “Deleuze and Guattari” for co-authored texts or “Deleuze-Guattari” for ideas that circulate through multiple texts that may be single or co-authored such as “deterritorialization” and “lines of flight.”

7. I emphasize that there are many ways to capture the reality of the field of ecofeminism and while I hope this account of ecofeminist genealogies and interruptions to them points to some important questions and new directions regarding the ways we have thought and may yet think ecofeminism, this account does not aim to be conclusive or to provide the truth regarding ecofeminism.

8. In particular, see Cudworth (2005). She asserts, “Perhaps more than any other variety of feminist theory, ecofeminism has been subject to a sustained and harsh critique” (114). Though I explore some of the reasons for this treatment of ecofeminism, see chapter five, “Ecofeminism and the Question of Difference,” for more on the ways in which critics “burn the straw women” of ecofeminist theory such as Mary Daly and Susan Griffin, whose work is made to stand in for all of ecofeminism and is often taken out of context (112).

9. Gates’ “A Root of Ecofeminism: Ecoféminisme” (1998) notes that, in the U.S., “D’Eaubonne’s books are hard to find and her work all but inaccessible to those who do not read French” (16). My search for d’Eaubonne’s treatise shows that the text remains difficult to locate, whether in its original French or in English translation. Gates’ essay aims to bring d’Eaubonne’s work to a broader audience while entrenching her work more firmly in the canon than the superficial citation of her work usually affords. The essay offers a brief overview of d’Eaubonne’s ecofeminist philosophy and the French political context of its emergence.

10. See Catriona Sandilands for a discussion of the ways in which Gibbs and Carson are not only hailed as the foremothers of American ecofeminism, but are scripted as “eco-crusaders” for a “motherhood environmentalism” that relocates environmental politics into the private sphere, figuring women as green consumers and protectors of the family as a means to support a conservative family values agenda (1999, xi-xxi). Sandilands is wary of ecofeminist formulations that appeal to maternalist narrative for these reasons.


12. For good examples of work in this area, see Ruether (2005), MacKinnon and McIntyre (1995), Waskow (2001); for a collection that offers empirical essays that both support and challenge ecofeminist theology see Low and Tremayne (2001).
13. For more on this topic, see Mary Judith Ress’ *Ecofeminism in Latin America* (2006), which focuses on the specific geographical context of emergence and the historical development of ecofeminist thought in Latin America.

14. Though Sandilands writes Bina Agarwal onto her map of socialist ecofeminism, Agarwal herself has denounced ecofeminism and opted for the label “feminist environmentalist,” a distinction I think is important to note in developing an ecofeminist genealogy. See Agarwal 1997.

15. Clare Hemmings’ “Telling Feminist Stories” (2005) interrogates the kinds of stories feminists most often tell about the development of the “second wave” of Western feminism, including the ways in which it is simplified and in which certain key authors and readings of their work tend to dominate discussions of feminist history while detailing a trajectory of feminism as a “relentless march of progress or loss” (115). She concludes by looking to the ways we might tell feminist stories with an eye for complexity. I copy her remarks here as they fully mirror my own project with respect to ecofeminist thought in the West. She asks, “How might feminist theory generate a proliferation of stories about its recent past that more accurately reflect the diversity of perspectives within (or outside) its orbit? How might we reform the relationship between feminism’s constituent parts to allow what are currently phantom presences to take shape? Can we do feminist theory differently?” (130). Hemmings suggests looking at discontinuities (e.g. the shift from the “essentialist 1970s” to the “difference-centered 1980s” and hunting for links and continuities rather than full ideological breaks. She also suggests attention to the politics of citation, reviving the work of marginals within the field and reassessing their contributions (e.g. linking Judith Butler’s work to Monique Wittig rather than understanding her work as Michel Foucault’s legacy, 130-131).

In disrupting the narrative of radical and socialist ecofeminism within a strictly Anglo-American context, I hope to have begun the task of gesturing toward alternate stories and, ultimately, new ways to do ecofeminism differently. I will continue to build on this destabilized ground throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

16. Shiva employs the notion of prakriti or prakriti shakti from her own Hindu Indian cultural imaginary to celebrate the idea of a feminine principle—a “primordial energy which is the substance of everything, pervading everything… nature, both animate and inanimate, is thus an expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos” (Shiva 1997, 62).

17. For a non-reductionist approach to theorizing spirituality, see M. Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005) and Laura Pérez’s *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altitudes* (2007).

18. See Sandra Harding’s *The Feminist Standpoint Reader* (2004) for an excellent collection of essays by foundational standpoint theorists Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding, among many other contributors. Together, the essays work to identify the nature of standpoints, including the controversies and limitations of standpoint theory.


Chapter Two

20. The volume editors also misrecognize Sánchez’s work. They write, “By using multiple metaphors—earth, water, ecosystems, cosmology—she outlines the complexity of forging a ‘mestiza consciousness’” (7). The editors underscore the metaphoric function of writing as epistemological rather than ontological and suggest that the multiple metaphors represent an
effort to “speak truth to multiple constituencies” (7). However, in this passage, the metaphors are parallel rather than multiplicitious. Their ecological function is elided in the readings of both the editors and Rosaldo. This is a key oversight that requires more attention. See Gabriela Arredondo et al, eds., *Chicana Feminisms: A Critical Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

21. Teatro Campesino stands as another example of grassroots cultural production associated with the farm workers’ movement.


23. This is, I think, a step beyond Butler who has been criticized as focusing too much on representational concerns rather than material concerns. She addresses this criticism in *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Following Foucault, Butler’s understanding of the relationship between discourse and materiality leaves space for a materiality firmly shaped by discourse. However, following Elizabeth Grosz and Deleuze and Guattari, I argue for a stronger sense of materiality that does not de-emphasize the power of discourse, but that suggests the strengths of an anti-representationalist stand on questions of metaphysics. Such work also recognizes the inherent instability and excess of the body that exceeds discursive framing. The introduction to this discussion explores this distinction. For further reading, see Elizabeth Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.)

24. For an alternate reading of *Venus Envy III*, see Laura Pérez’s *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Pérez argues that the citation of the spiritual symbolizes “the transcendence of social gender, and indeed their [the feathered, branched vestiture figures’] styling would appear to confirm this” (67). Placed next to the large moss-covered female body and surrounded by images of famous feminists, I contend that the installation does not seek to transcend gender altogether, but to pose more reflective understandings of gender performance and to move us from rigid gender (and human) identities toward becoming-nature and becoming-spirit. This move is toward an intersubjective stretching of the self.

Chapter Three

25. Amy Carroll maps the border as the feminized, racialized other of the U.S. through the shifting paradigm of the Border as brothel zone to the Border as maquila zone. See “‘Accidental Allegories’ Meet ‘The Performative Documentary’: Boystown, Señorita Extraviada, and the Border-Brothel-Maquila Paradigm” in *Signs* 31 (3) (2006): 357-394.

26. This is more true now than ever given the increasingly obvious role of the drug cartels in perpetuating violence in their efforts to supply drugs to a largely American market. For more information on Secretary of State Hilary Clinton’s acknowledgement of the role of American’s in narco-trafficking, see for example Mark Landler’s “Clinton Says U.S. Feeds Mexico Drug Trade,” New York Times, March 25, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/26/world/americas/26mexico.html.

27. The reviews were collected from a variety of sources; I surveyed all reviews that were available on the internet without a newspaper or magazine subscription. They include: Basem Boshra, “Justice Is Missing for Murdered Women,” *The Gazette*, Montreal, Quebec (August 20, 2002); Calvin Wilson, “Señorita Extraviada,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (September 12,

Chapter Five

28. The original group consisted of two Sisters of Mercy, who were white women that had traveled throughout Latin America before relocating to Anthony to fulfill their obligations to “serve people who suffer from poverty, sickness and lack of education with a special concern for women and children” (sistersofmercy.org). The other women have largely consisted of women who are recent immigrants from Mexico or who have remained in Anthony for many years. Interviewees have self-identified as Hispanic and the staff note that the center serves an almost exclusively Hispanic population. There are a few white men and women on the staff at the time of my research, but many of the staff are local women that self-identify as Hispanic and who have lived in the region.

29. It is important to note that while the terms Mexican-American and Chicana are used here, most of the women interviewed self-identify as Hispanic.

30. All quotations in the text from staff and participants at the WIC were gathered through interviews and private conversations I had with women at the center in October 2009. Most of the names provided are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of my interviewees. However, there are some exceptions: Mary Carter, the Director, and staff members Alma and Elena wanted to maintain their identities. Josie Bassan, who is also quoted in this chapter, was not interviewed for this project. Her comments were taken from an interview she filmed that can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTgH-ZsRxwM.

31. Due to financial constraints, my research trip was reduced from a planned three months to three weeks. I anticipated that it would take three months to accumulate media resources about the center, to make connections with staff, acquire permission to observe classes and to meet with staff and participants that would agree to be interviewed. In reality, the center director and staff were accustomed to having scholars visit the center for much shorter periods of time than even my abbreviated stay afforded. Staff immediately welcomed me, introduced me to class instructors and participants, told me which days they would like to be interviewed and showed me around town. Their familiarity with the research process made my research so much easier and I accumulated much more data than I had imagined I would have at the end of a three-month stay. I am very grateful for their cooperation!

32. Here, I offer the possibility of WIC as a potentially queer space that can disrupt norms of gender and heterosexually normative relationships by rewriting roles for women and empowering women to reject subject positions conditioned to passivity. Though I cannot say
that the center is or is not GLBTQ-friendly and did not get a sense that there were any out women participants or staff based on discussions with one of my interviewees that has worked at the center for a year, there is a possible queer reading of the women-centered space, especially as it orients women to rely on and care for each other and reorients their relationships with men toward equity and fairness. In this way, the center challenges heteronormativity insofar as “heterosexuality conditions women’s accountability to men, which demands that we not be accountable to each other” (Rowe 2005, 31).

33. The idea of an “authorizing discourse” was originally coined by Talal Asad in Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Parallel examples to the case of WIC can be seen in Carolyn Moxley Rouse’s Engaged Surrender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). There, she takes this idea up to explore how religion acts as an authorizing discourse with which to negotiate gender expectations in the family and community. Additionally, in Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 1994), Marguerite Guzmán Bouvard shows how the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina use motherhood as an authorizing discourse that legitimizes their activism against a conservative political regime in order to demand recognition of and information about their disappeared children.

34. Pablo Vila discusses the ways Mexican regional differences play out in the tensions of the multicultural borderlands between Mexico and the U.S. in Ethnography at the Border (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

35. WIC displays women’s art for sale in their gallery space.

36. Retablos are religious or devotional paintings that originate in Mexican folk art traditions.

37. There are exceptions to this. Painting classes tended to be quieter, allowing the students and instructor to move around and talk to each other about their current work and have other, quiet side conversations while preserving the painters’ focus. However, after the paintings are completed, they become highly social artifacts; the works are hung in the gallery and other social spaces and become topics for conversation and admiration.

38. This distinction also parallels the distinction between molar and molecular politics drawn by Deleuze and Guattari, a distinction that can also be summarized as that between difference (molecular politics) and identity (molar politics). See A Thousand Plateaus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) and Anti-Oedipus (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). See Paul Patton’s “Deleuze and Democratic Politics,” in Radical Democracy: Politics between Abundance and Lack, Lars Tønder and Lasse Thomassen, eds., 50-67 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) for more on difference and identity in the political theory that draws from Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari favor constant deterritorialization that emphasizes movement through the production of new lines of flight and new becomings; their ultimate goal is that molecular movement drives de-individualization to the radical anti-humanist point of becoming-imperceptible.

Conclusion

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