

Politics of an Indigenous Landscape:
The Political Aesthetics of Delilah Montoya's, *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, Arizona*

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A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved April 2014 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2014

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to investigate the political aesthetics of Delilah Montoya's photographic landscape image, *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, Arizona* (2004), an image drawn from a larger photo-documentary project by Montoya and Orlando Lara titled, *Sed: Trail of Thirst* (2004). This thesis employs Jacques Rancière's concept of the aesthetic regime to identify how *Desire Lines* functions as a political work of art, or what Rancière would consider "aesthetic art." This thesis shows that the political qualities of *Desire Lines*'s work contrast with the aesthetic regime of art and systems in the U.S. nation state that have attempted to erase an indigenous presence. Thomás Ybarra-Frausto's and Amalia Mesa-Bains' definitions of Rasquachismo, as well as Gloria Anzálúda's concept of Nepantla, are used to assist in identifying the specific politics of Montoya's work. The first portion of this thesis investigates the image's political aesthetic within the context of the politics of art, and the second portion addresses the image's political qualities within the framework of the politics of the everyday life. This thesis shows that *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, Arizona* reveals a Chicana/o aesthetic that challenges the dominant paradigm of postmodernism; furthermore, viewing the content of the image through the concept of Nepantla allows for a political reading which highlights the work's capacity to challenge the Eurocentric view of land in the U.S. Southwest. *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, Arizona* is an indigenously oriented photograph, one which blurs the lines of the politics of art and the everyday and has the power to reconfigure our understanding of the U.S borderland as an indigenous palace of perseverance exemplifying the will to overcome.

DEDICATION

To Iliana and Isabella, may the landscape of the possible be yours to inhabit, explore, and to expand its boundaries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first thank my committee for supporting my project, guiding me, and challenging my ideas. Dr. Garcia, I am very appreciative of all your encouragement and support while working on this thesis; Dr. Swensen, our scholarly discussions have meant the world to me, you rage; and Dr. Malagamba, I am eternally indebted to you for all the time you have invested into my formation as an emerging scholar, and for being a pillar of support during my time in the program. I would also like to thank my peers of emerging scholars and artists who have created a welcoming and intellectually stimulating environment. Without such an environment this project would not have been possible. Claudio, Jenea, Gaby, Matt, April, Jacob, John-Michael, Stephanie, and Heather I would like to thank you all for having a hand in creating that type of environment for me. Thank you to the Arizona State University, Tempe, faculty who have made my time at ASU a pleasant experience. Completing this program would not have been possible without the love and support of my wife Monica. Thank you for following me to the desert and being by my side.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Political two fold

There are histories of the United States Southwest which are older than the U.S. nation-state: non-European histories, indigenous, *mestizo* histories, and histories of the land. These histories have been ignored and silenced by various means, such as the perpetuation of aesthetic regimes which center on Anglo-American colonizing narratives of the American Southwest and its indigenous peoples – a history of profound significance to this discussion. As indigenous peoples of the Southwest, Chicana/o artists, through their work, endeavor to have their histories heard. Organized plans, manifestos, and other means of communication and organization produced by state and national conferences organized by Chicana/o communities, like *El Plan de Santa Barbara (1969)*, have supported and contributed to Chicana/o artistic practices. Thus, one can state this political artistic practice has roots in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. *El Plan de Santa Barbara* elaborated on the agenda and goals raised by the earlier Denver Youth Conference and its *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán (1967)*. The main points in the plan were the placement of Chicanos in higher education and the promotion of a Chicano historical perspective by any communication media available.¹ *El Plan de Santa Barbara* was a call for political activism. Art was the medium through which many would work to achieve the goals set forth by various Chicano Movement plans.² In this regard, Chicana/o artists, collectively, have been producing political works of art for more than forty years. If one includes Mexican antecedents in the Southwest, Chicana/o artists' history of producing art that challenges aesthetic regimes can be traced back to colonial New Spain.³ These artists have been visual archivists of silenced histories, champions of the unseen and the ignored. This practice is particularly evident

in the works created during the first comprehensive exhibition of Chicana/o art, *CARA: Chicano Arts: Resistance and Affirmation (1990)*.⁴⁵

The work of Chicana photographer Delilah Montoya has been an important contribution to the collective archive of exhibited and collected Chicana and Chicano (Chicana/o) visual work. As a testament to the permanence of her body of work, she is the only individual Chicana artist to be represented in both *CARA* and the most recent comprehensive internationally traveling Chicano art exhibition: *Phantom Sightings: Art After the Chicano Movement (2008)*.⁶ In the latter exhibition she is represented by two photographic images from her most recent project, *Sed: Trail of Thirst (2003-2008)*—a photo documentary in which she participated with scholar and community artist Orlando Lara. Lara photographed discarded items in the desert left behind by migrants and other evidence of their presence, while Montoya photographed the land those migrants ventured through in hope of a better life. The project is political in nature, exploring issues surrounding undocumented migrants crossing the Sonoran desert in the state of Arizona.

The images Montoya produced for this project contains political qualities which extend beyond representational mediation and ethical immediacy, what can be generally understood as political activism through artistic endeavors.⁷ As focus of this thesis is the investigation of the political qualities in *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, Arizona, (2004)*(figure 1) , a black and white panoramic landscape photograph taken by Delilah Montoya for *Sed*.(figures 1-8) The panoramic image captures a desert landscape presented to the viewer, from a ground perspective, an intimate view of Tohono O'odham land. In the foreground are small desert plants such as the nopal, cholla, and other small shrubs. The mid-ground contains larger plant life, a saguaro on the left hand side, and various trees that we can assume are palo verdes, typical of the Sonoran desert. Each plant is isolated from the other as they are surrounded by barren land that has been

weathered by the sun for millennia. The background consists of a horizon populated with a distant mountain range, and amongst the range at its center obscured by low forming clouds is Baboquivari Peak. The clouds are a prominent feature occupying one third of the image. The tonal clouds hide the hot desert sun leaving no open sky. On the left side of the image is the presence of a figure. That figure is of a Tohono O’odham man, Mike Wilson, pushing a wheelbarrow as if about to leave our view. He is walking away from water jugs he has strategically placed along a worn path which cuts the land and trails off into the distant horizon. The paths were created by migrates traveling through the Tohono O’odham nation. The entire image is in eye piercing focus. Each limb of the trees are in crisp focus, as are the needles on the nopal off center in the foreground, and the silhouettes of the saguaros, and the mountain range on the horizon. It is a photograph which can be considered a text and one which has received less scholarly attention in comparison to *Humane Borders Water Station*, (2004)(figure 2), and *Migrant Campsite*, (2004)(figure 3) two images that were also part of *Sed* and represented in the *Phantom Sightings* exhibition.

This thesis explores the political qualities of *Desire Lines* within the realm of art and the politics of real life. I believe the image continues the tradition of Chicana/o cultural production. Furthermore, *Desire Lines* is a photographic representation of the Nephantla state, an indigenous experience theorized by Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa, examining the U.S.-Mexico border, describes the border experience as a continual transition between two or more identity states of mind or states of consciousness—a place which many Chicanas call home.⁸ When analyzing Montoya’s work, one must distance oneself from the traditional Western philosophies of art, and utilizing Rasquache aesthetics as a philosophical framework for the sensibilities of this genre of art is of great explanatory value. I argue that Rasquache aesthetics are a critical component in *Desire Lines*, enabling the artist to create a visual representation of the

Nepantla state. This approach allows for the analysis of two different political qualities in Montoya's piece: first, its political capacity for change in the realm of art and second, in the realm of politics of everyday life. I argue that through these two political qualities, the photograph differs from political activism and reconfigures our understanding of the U.S./Mexico borderlands. Henceforth in this thesis the area commonly known as the U.S. Southwest or U.S./Mexico borderland will be referred to as the Borderlands.

Jacques Rancière's concept of the aesthetic regime and "political quality," which he defines as the ability of the unseen to make itself be seen amongst the supernumerary, are an important part of the theoretical approach of this thesis. I explore the image as an artwork and text that has the ability to make seen or heard what is otherwise suppressed, that which Rancière identifies as the redistribution of the sensible.

Rancière's approach to politics is a fluid one which brings together art, aesthetics, politics, and philosophy. He believes art *vis a vis* aesthetics is one in the same with politics: Art and politics cannot be divorced from one another. The political, or politics, as described by Rancière, are acts or events that go against dominating systems or against what he identifies as the police. These acts are where he believes art has a special political quality and capacity for social change; art has the power to show what has otherwise been hidden by specific regimes. The police are a system within a regime which restricts what is accessible to the senses. As previously noted, Rancière's ideas on politics are fluid and help connect art to politics outside of the field of art. This project follows a similar path and aims to identify political qualities in *Desire Lines* within the aesthetic regime of art, as well as explore how its aesthetics speak about the regime of everyday life, one that has tried to silence the indigenous voice. The following chapter, chapter two, looks at Rancière's aesthetic regime of art to provide a topographical reading of the ways in which *Desire Lines* can be considered a political work of art which redistributes

the sensible within that regime. Chapter three explores the aesthetics in *Desire Lines* and how they convey the politics of everyday life as defined by Rancière.⁹

The approach to *Desire Lines*

This project approaches Montoya's Chicana voice as one that is indigenous. A voice that shares an experience with other peoples within the nation states of North America who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and culture, and have been denied their sovereignty by a colonizing society which has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives.¹⁰ Interpreting *Desire Lines*, which is an indigenously centered work, through a western perspective is problematic because the result is an inaccurate western interpretation. This problem arises because the western world places great value on the individual within the idea of community.¹¹ While a western interpretation allows for an understanding of the ways in which an indigenous voice can be heard within a western democratic system, it does not permit identification and description of the specific voice which has been hidden within that system, in this case Montoya's. Because of this issue, I use two Chicana/o concepts to identify the sensibility that is revealed by Montoya's image.

Within this discussion, *Desires Lines* is believed to cause a dissensus within the aesthetic regime of art.¹² The Rasquache aesthetic helps explain this dissensus and provides a guide to the topographical reading of Montoya's landscape used in this thesis. I understand the Rasquache aesthetic to be a bicultural sensibility and worldview informed by what has historically been the culture of Mexican and Mexican-American working class communities, and understood to be engendered. In art historical traditional Western theoretical frameworks, the Rasquache aesthetic has not been part of the analysis when studying the photographic works produced by Chicana/o artists. Chapter two explains how the Rasquache aesthetic is critical in the study of the art produced by Chicana/o artists and why the analysis of *Desire Lines* reveals to be a

Rasquache work of art. At the same time the aesthetics in Montoya's photograph do challenge the dominant Western tradition and therefore can be considered political within the realm of art. In chapter three I utilize Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *Nepantla* to give a reading of what is presented to the viewer within the frame of the photographic image and how the image has the power to redistribute the sensible of daily life.¹³ Not only will the concepts of *Rasquachismo* and *Nepantla* help describe the layered indigenous voices of the image but speak to the qualities of the regimes they work against.¹⁴

In the thesis, the aesthetic of traditional landscape photography is identified as a regime whose photographic images are haunted by the specters of Manifest Destiny, a regime which produces photographic images of land that in turn produce narratives in which an indigenous perspective is either absent or suppressed. These images of land can be better exemplified by those produced by Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, two photographers who popularized the modernist aesthetic of strait photography in the early twentieth-century. An example of this aesthetic is Adams' 1942 black and white photograph of *Monument Valley* in Arizona (figure 9). It is a romanticized image of land wherein ideological antecedents can be traced back to the establishment of national parks, pictorial landscape painting, and Manifest Destiny—the nineteenth century concept of “racial [Anglo-American] destiny” which sought to bring prosperity to what is now the American West. Manifest Destiny held the Anglo-American race to be superior, requiring the submission of other races; failure to submit would result in extinction.¹⁵ On the practice of American landscape painting of the West, Gray Sweeney writes, “From the time of the [United States'] birth, artists felt a need to fashion glorious images of the European-American civilization that was expanding westward. These images were often created in response to the impassioned appeals of politicians [of the time] as they called upon their countrymen to fill the empty spaces on the map of the continent with new

democratic and entrepreneurial civilization.”¹⁶ *Expanding Horizons*, a book which examines the evolving paths of nationhood in Canada and the United States as reflected through painted and photographed landscapes, shows how photography replaced landscape painting as the medium of choice to represent the land. The text also explores the means by which aspects of Manifest Destiny were continued through landscape photography.¹⁷

It is important to note that the practice of traditional landscape photography also informs contemporary photographic practices which aim to challenge the tradition. Although contemporary photographers challenge the tradition, they still focus on the Anglo-American relationship with the land, and so aspects of Manifest Destiny’s influence can be seen in their photographs. An example of this can be found in Mark Klett and Bryon Wolfe’s, *Four views from four times and one shoreline, Lake Tenaya*, (2002) (figure 11)—a compound photographic image of land that questions the camera’s ability to capture one moment in time. The moment or moments captured by a camera are moments that are associated with the regime of traditional landscape photography and Manifest Destiny through the role of “artist-explorer,” one which Gray Sweeney associates with the invention of national parks.¹⁸ Critical texts that help expand on the concept of Manifest Destiny and its role in the suppression of indigenous narratives are: *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century American* (1979) by Ronald Takaki; *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History* (1995) by Michel-Rolph Trouillot; and *The American West: Competing Visions* (2009) by Karen R. Jones and John Wills. All the previously listed texts provide insight into the suppression of narratives by the national U.S. national imaginary which informs the aesthetic regime of traditional landscape photography.

Montoya has exhibited *Desire Lines* as part of larger installations in different venues, sometimes including other works that are a part of the *Sed* project. These

installations are critical works in their own right, but will not be the focus of this thesis. *Desire Lines* has been published in different formats and dimensions. The fluidity of the image speaks to the reproductive quality and overall unique nature, both physical and perceived, of the medium of photography. Due to the focus and time constraints of this project, this discussion will center on the image itself and not its format or how it has been displayed.¹⁹ In the review of the literature on the photographic medium, the seminal work by Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, explores the reproduction of art objects and text. The text considers an extensive body of work, exploring artistic media, including film and photography, its history, and the effect of technological advancements on art and culture. His concept of “aura,” the idea of a unique experience an original work of art is believed to possess, will be used to explain traditional approaches to landscape photography and their dissimilarity to *Desire Lines*.²⁰

Other texts have written on photography’s unique perceived qualities, such as Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, a seminal work, which meditates on the idea of photography as a phenomenon with a particular relation to history, and as a marker of the passage of time. Susan Sontag, Another preeminent art critic of the twentieth-century, has also written extensively on photography. In her writings she acknowledges photography as literate, having both authoritative and transcendent qualities.²¹ Others, such as Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault, have written on the relationship the camera facilitates between the subject of the gaze (photographer) and the object of the gaze (object or person being photographed).²² It is important to state that the theories of the previously noted scholars can be used to find alternate interpretations of *Desire Lines* regarding the format of the image and how it is displayed, but in the interest of brevity this project will only discuss display and format in a more focused capacity which precludes a multiplicity of theories and interpretations.

In the project *Sed: Trail of Thirst*, of which *Desire Lines* is a part, there are aspects of traditional activist political qualities, understood as calls to action and mobilization for social change. Although this project will not discuss these qualities in-depth, they are important to briefly note. In 2003, a series of events led to the planning of a photo documentary project that would be later known as *Sed: Trail of Thirst*. Scholar and community artist Orlando Lara, while taking a photography class with Delilah Montoya at the University of Houston, Texas, became intrigued with Tohono O’odham people and their historical homeland in Southern Arizona. The rise in migrants crossing the Arizona-Sonora border through Tohono O’odham land drew Lara’s attention to the area and similar experiences the Tohono O’odham and Chicana/os shared—one of which is a dual experience originating from the U.S.-Mexico border dividing a group of people.²³ Montoya, motivated by both his interest and a recent tragedy in Victoria, Texas, where 18 migrants died of asphyxiation after being abandoned outside of the city in the locked trailer of an 18-wheeler, decided to join him and plan *Sed*.

The *Sed* project, through its direct commentary on political issues and the artistic intent to bring awareness to issues believe to be important to the Chicana/o community, does reveal a more traditional Chicano Movement strategy, as can be seen in works included in the *CARA* exhibition. The premise of *Sed* was to document and raise awareness about the increase in migrant activity along the border and the hundreds of migrant deaths which occurred in the area from 1999-2003. These increases in migrant activity and subsequent increase in deaths was the result of dehydration and escalated militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border in more populated areas of California and Texas.²⁴ The work both Montoya and Lara produced for the project was to be exhibited for the first time at the international photography biennial Fotofest 2004 in Houston, Texas. Exhibiting political works of art at art biennials is a common practice, and these

venues often act as a stage which brings political issues to a larger audience. The series was well suited for Fotofest 2004 as the focus that year was water.²⁵ Montoya and Lara's practice reflects a common artistic approach by Chicana/o artists. Chapter three I discuss how the ambition of the series to make visible the invisible undocumented migrant is a continuation of the Chicano Movement practice of speaking for those whose voice is not heard and how this artistic objective differs from Rancière's redistribution of the sensible.

Alicia Schmidt Camacho's book, *Migrant Imaginariness* (2008), which investigates the cultural politics of the U.S-Mexico borderland, is used to provide context in developing the issues of border politics when comparing how other Chicana/o artists address border politics. Within the text, Camacho discusses the work of Alma Lopez's *Fashion Slaves* (1997) (figure 12), a digital photo collage, and explains how it comments on the transnational garment trade in Los Angeles, California; an industry that has been built on the labor of undocumented women.²⁶ The political activism contained within the work is of a more overt nature than the nuanced political aesthetics found in *Desire Lines*.

In the concluding chapter, chapter four, I expand on the importance of Montoya's photograph and how the image contributes to the political aspects of a larger project. It is a unique image among the many images of land that are prevalent in popular media and the fine arts. By identifying the content of Montoya's *Desire Lines* as the ignored indigenous voice within the police state, one can analyze the *Sed* project and the individual work in a larger context, that of emerging indigenous photographic narratives that share a national indigenous space, one which is liminal, and concerns the origin of indigenous identities; a narrative which is capable of communicating indigenous agency and calls for indigenous communities to be agents of transformation.²⁷ There is an interconnectedness of Montoya's land narrative to that of other indigenous

photographers, such as Native American photographer Will Wilson. This interconnectedness can be appreciated in his photographic image, *Auto Immune-Response 11, (2005)* (figure 13) , a compound color photographic landscape image wherein he investigates his indigenous relationship with the land not by departing from traditional landscape photography, but by using the land to communicate an indigenous narrative from a Navajo perspective.

As stated earlier, the political work of Chicanas/os has been widely ignored by what Rancière calls the police of the aesthetic regime of art, which includes scholars, modern or contemporary art museums, and the art market in general, which are guided by modern/postmodern paradigms and their respective aesthetic regimes. Rancière states that these paradigms are a “contradiction between two opposed aesthetic politics, two politics that are opposed but the basis of a common core linking the autonomy of the anticipation of a community.”²⁸ Chicana/os political art is relegated to the periphery, along with the political aims of that art, by the paradigms found within modernity and post modernity, a position which is not beneficial to the content of the work. It is theory which does not adequately address the Chicana perspective.²⁹ Commenting on the hostile stance toward political art, especially art like *Sed* which was produced for a biennial, Peter Schjeldahl, an art critic for the *New Yorker* and *ArtNews* describes the art made for today’s international art biennials as, “‘festivalism,’ ...works of abstract liberal pathos and self-righteousness directed towards an uncertain audience.”³⁰ In Chon A. Noriega’s, “The Orphans of Modernism,” the frontis-essay for the exhibition catalogue of *Phantom Sightings*, Noriega explains that the unfavorable stance on works addressing political topics similar to the opinions of Schjeldahl’s, has had a detrimental effect on the acceptance works of Chicana/o works by art by the realm of mainstream art. ³¹ In the essay, Noriega asserts Chicana/o art is a phantom overlooked by the paradigm of

modernism. Using Rancière's conceptual framework of the political system helps to circumvent the prevailing, but exclusionary, approach to art.

Thus far there have been no comprehensive studies on the political qualities of Montoya's *Desire Lines* in the *Sed* project, nor has there been an attempt to separate it from the contemporary-postmodern field of art. There are, however, three essays which address other images Montoya produced for *Sed*. In the *Phantom Sightings* exhibition catalogue the following essays are pertinent for this discussion: "Orphans of Modernism," "Phantom sites: The Official, The Unofficial, and the Orifical," and "Theater of the Inauthentic," written by Chon A. Noriega, Rita González and Howard N. Fox, respectively. Of the three essays only "Theater of the Inauthentic" addresses Montoya's images; however, it only does so in passing. Fox argues that "the existence of Aztlán remains theoretical and remote," adding that, "[Chicanos] are less interested in the historical validity of Chicano culture than they are in its presentness, and they are less interested in Chicanos' distinctiveness and special place than they are in how Mexican Americans experience life and identity in a diverse social multiformity..."³² Although some Chicana/o artistic production can fall into the categorization made by Fox, neither Montoya's nor the many other artists works seem to fit into the overgeneralization provided by this author. Montoya's images are concerned with the existence of Aztlán *vis a vis* the liminal state of Nepantla, and they investigate the culture's distinctiveness through indigenous experience. When directly addressing Montoya's text, Fox only touches on the dangerousness of her landscapes, noting they "reveal the existence of unseen populations moving through unknown and perilous places." It is a cursory conclusion for a loaded set of images.

Following Fox's work, the only other essay within the exhibition catalogue, that addresses Montoya's work directly is a biographic essay written by Noriega. This is the second of three published essays addressing images from *Sed*. It addresses only the

superficial qualities of Montoya's images – their formal aspects – by describing what is within the frame of the photograph. Noriega does include one note on an interesting aspect of the image, however. He writes that, “[*Humane Borders Water Station and Migrant Campsite*] do challenge the tradition of landscape photography for the Southwest, but they resonate with depopulated urban landscape,” as is true of the work of Christina Fernández, who was also included in the exhibition.³³

The last essay addressing *Sed* images is an article written by Ann Marie Leimer for the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies 35th Annual Conference entitled *Chicana Photography: The Power of Place*. In this essay Leimer uses the concepts of space and place as defined by art critic Lucy Lippard in combination with cultural critic Michel de Certeau's idea of “the practice of everyday life” to investigate how selected works by Laura Aguilar, Kathy Vargas and Delilah Montoya, “investigate the body, and, memory, and the issues of identity formation in relation to location.”³⁴ Commenting directly on Montoya's work, she writes that, “Certeau's idea of a text write large in the land by daily human movement comes into powerful play,” pointing to the traces of human interaction with the land seen through the debris, worn paths through the land and the absent human form³⁵ The images, she adds, “reveal the practice, the daily lived reality of migrating,” concluding that they, “capture the desolate beauty of the desert landscape embedded with historical narratives of migrants.”³⁶ Although Leimer's reading of Montoya's texts are more substantial, her essay still does not address or the political qualities of the texts.

The method by which the *Phantom Sightings* exhibition catalogue engages Montoya's work is helpful in exploring how Modernism and Postmodernism have attempted to conceal political qualities in the works of artists within the field of art and other disciplines. The essays in the catalogue and Leimer's article are helpful when drawing comparisons to other Chicana photographers. Both texts are useful for a formal

reading of Montoya's photographic images, as well as drawing comparisons between Montoya's approach and those of her Chicana/o contemporaries.

Others have written on the politics of Montoya's past projects and the aesthetics of those projects, namely, Alicia Gaspar de Alba's essay, "There's No Place Like Aztlán: Embodied Aesthetics in Chicana Art (2004)," and *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (2007) Laura E. Pérez's text. Gaspar's essay identifies the aesthetics of Aztlán in the work of Chicana artists and associates it with home and place. Of Montoya's untitled 1992 series, a photographic series where she super-imposes glass jars on religious iconography over images of exterior environments (referred to as the "glass jar series"), Gaspar writes, "Delilah's aesthetic [is] an embodiment of spirit—of the land, culture, and daily life of her mother's homeland and her own chosen place of political allegiance."³⁷ Her position on Aztlán as an aesthetic utilized in Chicana art is useful when discussing the Nepantla state since Nepantla is non-patriarchal and a less static approach to Aztlán.³⁸

Pérez, in *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, addresses Nepantla qualities in artwork by Chicana artists. Pérez understands politics to be the voices of active descent against Eurocentric intellectual colonization, an expression of culture and reinterpretation of difference.³⁹ She also notes in "*Tierra, Land*," that the politics of spiritual aesthetics, for some Chicana artists, is associated with the politics of remembering and discusses the importance of land in Chicana works of art." Although Pérez only addresses Montoya's altar-photography and book art, the activist political qualities she writes about in her book are also applicable to Montoya's photographic image, *Desire Lines*. As an alternative to the politics of *Desire Lines*, one could utilize Pérez's approach and analyze the image's spiritual aesthetics, aesthetics which are just as critical, but would require a separate project.

In general, one can state that scholars have not addressed the political qualities of Chicana art or any works produced by Chicana/os using Rancière's conceptual framework focused on political regimes rather than form of activism. It is a framework that helps to shed light on the political qualities of Chicana art that work against aesthetic regimes. This means, how their voice is heard through their art within a regime, not by activism but by persuading the viewer to see the world differently. The following chapter will explain how *Desire Lines* has the political capacity to make a Chicana/o voice heard within the aesthetic regime of art.

¹ Mario Barrera, *Beyond Aztlán*, 41-44.

² A copy of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* can be found through the following link, <http://www.nationalmecha.org/documents/EPSEB.pdf>, and the role of the artist is listed on p.19 as an integral component for the execution of the movement's goals.

³ I am referring to indigenous imagery being introduced for Catholic churches in Mexico by Native artist during their construction. The introduction of a Native sensibility produced churches whose aesthetic differed from the aesthetics of Spain.

⁵ Alicia Gaspar de Alba's book *Chicano Art: Inside/Outside the Master's House*, addresses the politics of works in the exhibition, and the politics of the exhibition itself.

⁶ *CARA* was a traveling exhibition of Chicano art curated by the Wight Gallery at UCLA. It was a showcase of 140 works of art produced between 1964 - 1985 by 90 artists. *Phantom Sightings* was organized by LACMA and has travelled internationally.

⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: on Politics and Aesthetics*, 137.

⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Interviews = Entrevistas*. 246-248.

⁹ Ethical regime of images, and the representable regime of art are the other two regimes of art identified by Rancière

¹⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 6-7.

¹¹ Alternatives to organizing communities are the concept of cultural citizenship, or an indigenous sense of "people"/community which differs from Giorgio Agamben's "people"/bare life" and "People," the restricted value put on "bare life."

¹² Dissensus is a term used by Rancière to describe the defining quality of the political. Dissensus is the friction between the unheard voice and the police within a regime.

¹³ The sensible as Rancière understands it.

¹⁴ This follows Chris Anderson's concept of indigenous density, or how indigeneity can help reveal the "whitestream."

¹⁵ Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies*, 3-4.

¹⁶ Gray Sweeney, *Masterpieces of Western American Art*, 6-7.

¹⁷ Hilliard T. Goldfarb. *Expanding Horizons*, 14.

¹⁸ Gray Sweeney. "An 'Indomitable Explorative Enterprise': Invention National Parks," in *Inventing Acadia*, 133-134.

¹⁹ Montoya later produce installations of and based on her images, and Lara wrote on the project in greater depth also producing two short documentaries entitled, *Elizabeth's Story* and *El Buddha* that delve deeper into migrants and border issues.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art: Second Version," The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility and other writings on media. p23

²¹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 47-48.

²² Andreas Lohmann, *Postmodern Art-Photography*, 7-9.

²³ Patricio Chavez, "Multi-Correct Politically Cultural," in *La Frontera/The Border: Art About the Mexico/United State Border Experience*, 10-11.

²⁴ Orlando Lara, "Artist Talk : Sed : A Trail of Thirst."

²⁵ The FotoFest exhibition theme archive can be found at, <http://www.fotofest.org/ff2004/index.asp>

²⁶ Laura Pérez, *Chicana Art*. 173.

²⁷ Thomas Biolsi, "Imagined Geographies: Sovereignty, Indigenous Space, and American Indian Struggle." 238-241. Biolsi writes of an imagined national space, which can including the ethnic national idea of Aztlán and the Nèpantla State.

²⁸ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 198-199.

²⁹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul: Hacidendo Caras*, xxv. This belief can be seen reflected throughout Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Smith writes how research on indigenous issues need to move away from the theories that center the sensibilities of European origin. On this topic, in her introduction she writes that Eurocentric methods (which I believe include modern-postmodern paradigms), "deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to... forms of cultural

knowledge.” In the case of art specifically, it limits what is considered art and what roll it is allowed to play.

³⁰ Ben Davis, “What god is political art in times like these,”
www.artinfo.com/news/story/37024/what-good-is-political-art-in-times-like-these

³¹ One can also look towards Gaspar’s *Inside/Outside the Master’s House* for examples of mainstream art institutions rejection of artwork produced by Chicana/os.

³² Howard N. Fox, “Theater of the Inauthentic,” in *Phantom Sightings Exhibition Catalogue*, 76.

³³ Chon Noriega, “Delilah Montoya (artist biography),” in *Phantom Sightings Exhibition Catalogue*, 173.

³⁴ Ann Marie Leimer, “Chicana Photography: The Power of Place,” 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁷ Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “There’s No place like Aztlán,” 129-130.

³⁸ Constance Cortez, “The New Aztlán,” in *the Road to Aztlán: Art from a Mythic Homeland*, 367.

³⁹ Laura Pérez, *Chicana Art*, 2-3.

CHAPTER 2

LO RASQUACHE

A key facet of Rancière's definition of politics is the action of pushing against the status quo. Without the action produced by standing against and working around the status quo, that is, creating dissensus, politics as he defines it does not exist. What is left in the absence of politics is a regime. This fluid conceptual framework of politics is useful in understanding the nature of politics within Western democratic societies, art, and how the two can be interconnected. Rancière's concepts provide a means to understand how people and ideas, or what Rancière totalizes as the sensible, are hidden and denied a voice in society. The aesthetic regime of art is guided by standards of modern and postmodern aesthetics. Within this regime, Chicana/o sensibilities which inform Chicana/o cultural production have yet to be accepted by mainstream art institutions, art markets, and art scholarship in general. Within the dominant sensibility of landscape photography, *Desire Lines* can be mistakenly read as a postmodern project. However, if considered within the context of the tradition of Chicana/o cultural production, a Rasquache aesthetic can be read through the inverted use of tropes which are mistaken with a postmodern aesthetic. *Desire Lines* speaks against the standards of the postmodern paradigm that has ignored work produced by Chicanas/os that communicate a Chicana/o sensibility. This inversion of the traditional tropes of photographic representation of land follows the Rasquache strategy as understood by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Amalia Mesa-Bains, of making do with scarce resources; it also creates a Rasquache aesthetic that departs from the traditional visually loud interpretations, as will be discussed later in this thesis. *Desire Lines*, within the realm of art, is an example of work which causes dissensus. *Desire Lines* is not merely constructed according to the aesthetics of the dominate paradigms; it also makes visible

a Chicana/o sensibility informed by the Rasquachismo aesthetic which is also understood to be both a world view and survival strategy. The employment of the Rasquache strategy in the production of political art is not new, however the Rasquache sensibility communicated in Montoya's image is unique. It is subtle compared to traditional interpretations of Rasquachismo, like the early work of Teatro Campesino in utilizing found objects to create stages and costumes. This subversion allows for the communication of a political aesthetic that has the potential to reveal within the aesthetic regime of art a Chicana/o sensibility, one that has been pushed to the periphery and continues to be ignored within the mainstream realm of art. This chapter will review key literature on the Rasquache aesthetic and its interpretation in examples of Chicana/o art, then identify modernist and postmodern tropes of dominate landscape photography. Lastly, *Desire Lines* use of those tropes to communicate a new, subversive, Rasquache aesthetic that redistributes the sensible in the aesthetic regime of art will be considered.

Rasquachismo

Chicana/o scholars Tomás Ybarra-Frausto and Amalia Mesa-Bains have written about the Chicana/o sensibility in both the dominant masculine form, Rasquachismo, and the specific feminine form, which is known as Domesticana. Their work attempts to identify and historicize these Chicana/o sensibilities. They consider Rasquachismo as one of the defining characteristics of Chicana/o cultural production, informing literature, film, theater, music, and the visual arts. It is an aesthetic that has roots in the Mexican vernacular and has transformed itself into a bicultural sensibility, as seen in the work of artist in both the U.S. and Mexico. As the name implies, Rasquachismo is the aesthetic of the underdog, the Rasquache or downtrodden, seen as un-American by the dominant culture.¹ Not only is it an identifiable aesthetic, but also a worldview and survival method employed by a majority of Chicanos and poor Mexicanos in the United States.

Rasquachismo is also a social reality for many Chicana/os, and the Rasquache strategy has proven to be effective at making the most out of minimal resources. Making do with the resources at hand is at the center of Montoya's subversive Rasquache aesthetic.

Tomás Ybarra-Frausto identifies the dominant form of the Rasquache aesthetic as one that utilizes bright colors, high intensity, shimmering and sparkling, and a look and feel that can be read as flamboyant. Its resourcefulness is in the use of recycled objects, whatever is at hand, to *hacer rendir las cosas*, "to make things last." This reuse, as he explains, can be seen in the use of automobile tires as planters, or repurposing plastic containers as flower pots or storage containers.² The Rasquache aesthetic is visually distinctive by how space is used. There is a sense of *horror vacui*, a fear of empty space, but it is the visual product of making use of all available space. This aesthetic is not only a real lifestyle; it is also displayed in many art forms. One good example is found in performance art, notably the performance of Guillermo Gómez-Peña in works such as *Border Brujo* (figure 14), *El Naftaztec*, and the many characters of his most recent project, *Corpo Insurrecto 3.0: The Robo-Proletariat*. The surface treatment of each character is an amalgamation of Rasquache, kitsch, and pop-objects. They are examples of how he has investigated and reinterpreted facets of Rasquachismo and reinterpreted them into a Rasquache-baroque, or what Gómez-Peña has trademarked as the "robo-baroque aesthetic, cyborg-kitsch and acid humor."

As mentioned earlier, the Rasquache aesthetic is also gendered. In her essay "Domesticana: The sensibility of Chicana Rasquache," Amalia Mesa-Bains further explains the Rasquache aesthetic by addressing the Rasquache Chicana sensibility of Domesticana through the analysis of women of color, feminist theory, and how the sensibility is influenced by the sphere of domestic space. The domestic space includes, "home embellishment, home altar maintenance, healing tradition, and personal

feminine pose or style.”³ Domesticana is an engendered aesthetic and, like its male counterpart, stems from resistance to the dominate culture, but it also draws from women’s experience in their own communities. Within their communities, women encounter male domination that manifests itself as restrictions within the Mexicano and Chicano cultures. As Mesa-Bains notes, “Domesticana comes from a spirit of Chicana emancipation grounded in advanced education and, to some degree, Anglo-American expectations in a more open society.”⁴ It is a worldview that does not share the affinity for the monumental found in dominant male forms of Rasquachismo. An example of Domesticana in Chicana art can be seen in the altar-installations of Mesa-Bains. As feminist works, according to Laura E. Perez, the installations appropriate and transform the aesthetic of material accumulation and become “an aesthetic of accumulation of experience, references, memory and transfiguration,” creating a critical space that re-examines the cultural gendered past of Chicana’s.⁵ It is important to note that Perez believes the aesthetics of fragmentation and recombination utilized in Mesa-Bains altar installations are not situated in the postmodern experience, instead they are situated in the historic experiences of many Mexican-Americans having to make do with what is at hand.⁶ Montoya’s *Desire Lines* is not simply a postmodern strategy, but one that is also uniquely Rasquache.

Mesa-Bains, Gómez-Peña, and other Chicana/o artists and scholars have shown in their artwork and scholarship that this art and its understanding are meaningful and powerful when they recover meanings buried within the lived experiences of the Chicana/o Rasquache. In the context of art, these recovered histories were an important theme throughout the art exhibition CARA, in which artists “recast icons, objects, and practices that are rooted in the oral and popular tradition of Chicana/o culture.” The aesthetic as employed by the artists in CARA is used as a form of resistance to

“hegemonic standards in the art world.”⁷ The standard that Gaspar de Alba mentions is the policing aesthetics of modern and postmodern paradigms in art according to Rancière. In the context of the dominant aesthetic, Gaspar de Alba sees the implementation of the Rasquache aesthetic as an act that turns the ruling paradigms upside down by moving outside the modern/postmodern aesthetic and evading its power, while at the same time empowering Rasquachismo. This is the nature of political art, art that challenges the hegemonic standards, or what Rancière would identify as examples of the police, “gate keepers” which set the standards of what is acceptable. The Police are what keep a regime in place. In a similar fashion, Montoya’s *Desire Lines* works against the aesthetic regime of art, but in a less obvious way.

Gaspar de Alba and Celeste Olalquiaga identified a third degree of Rasquachismo, defined as the act of reframing vernacular iconography and traditions. In many ways, this reframing has historically made the Rasquache aesthetic easy to identify and able to keep with the tradition of standing out from the dominate aesthetic. In Ybarra-Frausto’s foundational essay on the aesthetic, “*Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility*,” he lists a variety of objects, practices, and art which can be considered as belonging to the vast sensibility, including Mario Moreno Cantinflas, The Royal Chicano Air Force, early *Actos* of El Teatro Campesino, ASCO’s *No Movies*, Paintings on velvet, *Calaveras* of José Guadalupe Posada, and the film *Born in East L.A* (1987). Lowrider cars and art, films portraying Barrio hardship via a Rasquache prespective, such as Gregory Nava’s *Mi Famila* (1995), or the more recent *La Mission* (2009) by Peter Bratt, could also be considered examples of the Rasquache sensibility. Film exhibiting a Rasquache sensibility could even be extended to include Robert Rodríguez’s *Machete* (2010).⁸

Like cinema, the altar-installations of Mesa-Bains, and other female artists, and performance art, especially the characters created by Gómez-Peña, the Rasquache

aesthetic is prominently displayed via subject matter and/or surface treatment. *Desire Lines* has not been discussed as a Rasquache photograph, unlike works by other artists like Ricardo Valverde's *Boulevard Night* (1980), Joe B. Ramos', *Lowrider couple* (1979), José Galvez, *Home Boys/White Fence* (1983), and Louis Carlos Bernal's, photo series of domestic interiors of Mexican-American homes in Tucson, Arizona. More recent photographers and examples of this practice of the underdog perspective include, Christina Fernandez's Manuela *S t i t c h e d* series (figure 15), and of course the entirety of Delilah Montoya's *Sed* series. In all these examples, one finds documentation of the life and times of *los de abajo*, the underdog. *Desire Lines*, and to an extent the other images in the *Sed* series, communicate the Chicana/o vernacular which supersedes the documentarian nature of the medium. Montoya uses a conceptual approach to the Rasquache aesthetic, transforming photography into a Rasquache tool.

There are three identified degrees of Rasquachismo. The first degree is comprised of icons, objects, and vernacular practices rooted in Chicano/a traditions. Examples of this degree include the practice of altar building and the Calaveras of José Guadalupe Posada. The second degree of Rasquache is the appropriation of commercial "ethnic" paraphernalia taken from Mexican and Chicana/o culture, such as Aztec imagery or the reproduction of Mexican canonical works of art on mugs, posters, calendars and other commercial goods by artists like Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Third degree of Rasquachismo is the appropriation of the first two degrees by Chicana/o artists in works which act to subvert the dominate aesthetic by contrasting with the aesthetic and by evading the control of rules of the aesthetic regime of art.⁹ Following the conceptual Rasquache trajectory outlined by Celeste Olalquiaga and discussed by Gaspar de Alba, it can be seen that Gómez-Peña forces the development of aesthetic qualities of the third-degree towards an interpretation that is more obviously against the dominate culture

creating an aesthetic what is within realm of the baroque or that which can be considered grotesqueness, extravagance, complexity, and flamboyance. If the development of Rasquachismo can tend toward the convoluted, or what some scholars have labeled “the divine excess,” it can also be analyzed using an opposing approach. Montoya’s photographic image is an example of a fourth-degree of Rasquachismo, the unanticipated or guerrilla Rasquache. It is unlike the previous degrees of Rasquachismo in that it is obscure; it lies within the landscape of postmodern photographs avoiding detection because of its subtle and silent characteristics. Even if one discovers the nature of Montoya’s image, there remains a level of deniability that makes it uncontainable.

The manner in which Montoya uses the medium of photography can be considered Rasquache. Her choice of medium has been overlooked in analyses because, traditionally, formal analysis of photography in other Chicana/o pieces, have been viewed through the lens of modern and postmodern paradigms. Although viewing *Desire Lines* through the lens of postmodernism is useful in understanding how and where Chicano/a art fits (or doesn’t) within the mainstream art world, it detracts from unique approaches and developments in the Chicana/o aesthetic. Presenting a counter position which speaks against the aesthetic regime of art is not new for Chicana/o artists and scholars. *CARA* and *Phantoms Sightings* approached the politics of Chicana/o art and addressed this problem, though in two different ways. *CARA* addressed how mainstream art ignored Chicana/o artists, and *Phantom Sightings* investigated the perception of Chicanas/os moving past that issue. However, that generalization in *Phantom Sightings* does not apply to every artist in the exhibition. The questions posed by each exhibition have raised the issue of contemporary Chicana/o art and artists moving past an identifiable Chicano aesthetic and assimilating or merging into the main stream aesthetic. The latter, assimilating or merging into the main stream aesthetic is the

general augment that is made in the essays by Chon Noriega and Howard Fox in the exhibition catalogue from *Phantom Sightings*. They argue that Chicana/o artists have moved away from the goals of the Chicano movement. This is not the case for most of the work in *Phantom Sightings* and certainly not for the work of Montoya as it continues to come from the Rasquache tradition of art as a subversive tool.

Modern and postmodern landscape.

One key identifier of the Rasquache strategy that addresses the few resources available in the Chicana/o communities is the idea of making due with the resources available. I believe that the strategy of making do with what you have can be conceptually extended to the visual resources of traditional mainstream landscape photography in which no Chicana/o has had a critical hand in participating and shaping the practice of landscape photography until Montoya's work. There is a notorious absence of Chicana/o photographers focused in non-urban landscape photography. What exactly is Montoya making the most of? To construct *Desire Lines*, Montoya used tropes that belong to modern and postmodern approaches to landscape photography. Today, landscape images are rampant in popular culture as they are reproduced in mass media venues, making them a familiar presence in the imagery of diverse societies. The images are reproduced within the pages of media specializing in "outdoor living" or the "outdoors," such as *Arizona Highways*, *Outside* the magazine, and *Landscape Photography Magazine*. These hard copy media, along with their digital media counterparts, continue to proliferate images of land following the modernist aesthetic. This aesthetic and its practice center on an original encounter with uninterrupted nature, and the photographer's ability to produce a stunning image of the land, one which, ironically, aims to reproduce the concept of what Walter Benjamin identifies as aura, understood as the power of artwork to have authority, authenticity, and unattainability, and to

epitomized beauty. It is ironic because, according to Benjamin, the photographic medium is meant to destroy the aura of the work through its mechanical reproduction and the new technology of digital reproducibility. This may be the case in regard to the photograph as an object, but experiencing the image in the object, the aura is still present, communicating an original moment in nature and, at the same time, present in popular landscape images.

Contemporary landscape photography has its roots in picturesque and straight photography. Although both practices have ideological differences, they share the idea that the photographic medium has the ability to create and communicate an idealized beauty.¹⁰ Edward Weston and Ansel Adams popularized straight photography during the first half of the 20th century through their images of the U.S. Southwest. Examples of these images are Adams' photograph *Monument Valley, Arizona* (1943) (figure 9), and Weston's image *San Carlos Lake, Arizona* (1938) (figure 10). Identifiable tropes of the modernist landscape include the absence of humans or their placement within the frame to aid the trope of nature's monumentality, captured with extreme detail. In both works, the three tropes of straight photography are emphasized. Adams uses a wide angle and a ground perspective to create a monumental view of land by amplifying the size of land formations. To achieve a similar effect, Weston creates his image of San Carlos Lake using an aerial perspective. Both photographs are considered documents of nature's untouched beauty and grandeur, treasures belonging to the U.S.. These images are meant to elicit awe from the viewer. For the modernist the camera is seen as honest, "it enables him to reveal the essence of what lies before his lens with such clear insight that the beholder may find the recreated image more real and comprehensible than the actual object."¹¹ Modernist images of land contributed to the creation of grand narratives of nation, and those narratives do not allow for alternative narratives of land.

Postmodernist landscape photography challenges modernist aesthetics by questioning the sanctity of the original experience, the originality of the artist, and the grand narratives modern landscape images perpetuate.¹² This can be seen in works such as Sherrie Levine's re-presentations of Eliot Porter's Landscapes in *After Eliot Porter* (1981) (figure 18); Mark Klett's re-photography image, Mark Klett and Bryon Wolfe's *Four views from four times and one shoreline, Lake Tenaya* (2002) (figure 11); or, Richard Misrach's *Desert Fire No. 249, (1985)*(figure 17), from his *Canto Desert* series. Their work operates within Fredric Jameson's flat earth theory, wherein he argues that "the disappearance of depth model where work has to be explored by referencing truth through another theory." Sherrie Levine's re-presentation of Eliot Porter's Landscapes challenges the idea of the original. Mark Klett's images challenge ideas of strait photography in regard to the original encounter with nature. Lastly, Misrach's *Canto* series challenges the idea of nature as untouched and interrupted beauty by suggesting pollution in the photograph.

The images by Sherrie Levine, Mark Klett, and even the images by Misrach's *Canto*, which comment on the environmental impact humans have on the land, are apolitical by Rancière's definition of politics. They do not have qualities that redistribute the sensible. These images rely on modern aesthetics that are necessary for the viewer to access meaning, which "prevents us from understanding the transformation of the present situation."¹³ Those images reinforce the aesthetic regime of art by not challenging the aesthetic.¹⁴ Montoya's *Desire Lines*, on the other hand, reaches outside the regime to create an aesthetic work that challenges the modern approach, and this is done through Montoya's repurposing of formal tropes in modern landscape photography.

Identifying the subtle Rasquache aesthetic in *Desire Lines*

In order to identify the subtle Rasquache aesthetic one has to identify where the use of postmodern landscape tropes are used in the image. *Desire Lines* can be read as being influenced by postmodern aesthetics because of its use of modernist tropes to, in turn, to challenge modernist ideas, like a focus on nature's monumentality and an emphasis on capturing detail. Monumentality can be seen in the image through the panoramic format and Baboquivari Peak as an insinuated focus of the image. However, low forming clouds with a tonal composition reminiscent of Adams' clouds in his photographs of Yosemite National Park obscure the monumental Baboquivari Peak. The clouds obscure the mountain that might have otherwise been the focus of the photograph; its obscurity refocuses the viewer's attention to the foreground, a space that suggests an intimate view of land, land that is not pure, land that is accessible, land that is inhabited.

Another similarity to a modernist approach akin to Weston and Adams photographs is in how Montoya uses a large format camera to capture a great amount of detail; it is a Garflex camera that uses an 8"x10" negative allowing for the capture of a vast amount of visual information. The entire image is in eye piercing focus. Each limb of the trees is in crisp focus, so are the needles on the nopal off center in the foreground, and the silhouettes of the saguaros, and the mountain range on the horizon. Montoya, however, does not use the sharp focus to replicate an image of untouched nature; instead she uses detail to capture how the land has been interrupted by human activity. This is presented to the viewer through the water jugs and migrant made trail through the desert. Additionally, the land in *Desire Lines* is interrupted by the presence of Mike Wilson, who is pushing a wheelbarrow as if about to leave our view. He has presumably left the white plastic jugs that appear scattered throughout the foreground. The rich

detail, produced by the small aperture in the camera, allows Montoya to capture aspects of the scene almost invisible to the eye, such as the path created by human traffic over the land. The artist describes these paths as scars over the land. The use of these tropes by Montoya allows her work to be analyzed within the context of the mainstream cultural practice of landscape photography while simultaneously challenging the aesthetics of postmodernism. The Rasquache aesthetic is subtle and easily to confuse for a postmodern approach. This guerilla characteristic give it a political capacity for change.

Analyzing the image within the context of postmodern practices allows one to argue that her work functions in a similar fashion to that of Richard Misrach's *Desert Canto* image. He, too, inverts the tropes popularized by Weston and Adams to document starkly different images of land. However, if we analyze *Desire Lines* in the same fashion, we overlook the Chicana/o sensibility that informs the image of land. Contextualizing *Desire Lines* within the tradition of Chicana/o artistic production reveals the Rasquache aesthetic. If a formal analysis is done, it shows that focus of the narrative created by Montoya goes beyond the approach provided by the photograph in *Phantom Sightings* as described by Chon Noriega when he writes of its documentary nature. He understands the *Sed* images as documents that trace the traveling of migrants through the Sonoran desert.¹⁵

Montoya's images are among the first examples of photographic works produced by a Chicana/os with a focus on rural landscapes. Montoya uses the tropes of modern and postmodern photographic traditions to stitch together a Chicana/o approach to landscape photography. She, like other artists whose work reflects a Rasquache aesthetic, makes do with what is available to her to subvert the dominant aesthetic. The intent is not to challenge modern versus postmodern approaches, but to criticize them by validating a Chicana/o aesthetic. What is presented is a representation of land created

with a Chicana/o aesthetic, a voice generally hidden by the aesthetic regime of art. Montoya's work in *Sed* can be considered a continuation of her previous photographic endeavor, *Shooting Tourists* from (1995). Jennifer A. González notes that Montoya ritually assesses the cultural role of photography, documenting the gaze of the tourist.¹⁶¹⁷

The subject of *Desire Lines* has a political quality that goes beyond documenting the movement of migrants crossing the border. It speaks to the politics of everyday life and redistributes the sensible established by the geopolitical demarcation of the border and the land policy of the United States.

¹ Tomás Ibarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo," 3.

² Ibid, 5.

³ Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Domesticana: the Sensibility of Chicana Rasquache" 159-166.

⁴ Ibid., 167.

⁵ Laura Perez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, loc. 983/3652.

⁶ Ibid. loc. 976/3652.

⁷ Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Masters' House: cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition*, 12.

⁸ Although these films are informed by genres and aesthetics in cinema, such as Rodriguez being influence by exploitation films, considering them as part of a Rasquache tradition is worth further investigation.

⁹ Gaspar de Alba, 13-14.

¹⁰ Picturesque photography would reproduced the ideal through editing while strait photography as it name entails is an image with little to no editing, persevering the organic experience of land and its grandeur.

¹¹ Weston, "Seeing Photographically," *Photography Reader*, 106.

¹² Steve Edwards, *Photography Reader*, 182.

¹³ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 199.

¹⁴ Ibid., 198-230.

¹⁵ Chon Noriega, "Delilah Montoya," in *Phantom Sightings*, 152.

¹⁶ Jennifer González, "Negotiated Frontiers," 18.

¹⁷ In, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval is referring to postmodernism in the global sense; however, postmodernism as understood in the aesthetic regime of art can also be part of the neocolonial dimensions. Sandoval describes postmodernism as a devastating and neocolonial global transformation, one that must be confronted and posed in all its neocolonial dimensions. Montoya's *Desire Lines* contributes to this opposition to neocolonialism. Investigating how *Desire Lines* works in opposition to neocolonialism is a subject worth further investigation.

CHAPTER 3

NEPANTLA

When Rancière discusses his ideas concerning the interconnectedness of politics and aesthetics, the politics of daily life are seen as a the secondary political aesthetic, while the primary political aesthetic is that of the regime of art. This chapter will explore the political aesthetics of Delilah Montoya's black and white photographic landscape image *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, Arizona*, (2004) as they apply to the politics of daily life. *Desire Lines* has the potential to redistribute the sensible and reveal a previously hidden narrative of the Borderland. The Anzaldúa concept of Nepantla, "a space in between," is what makes possible to carry on the redistribution of the sensible by integrating at the same time the powerful reference to an indigenous way of living the Borderlands. Without Nepantla, the image only documents migrant corridors. By producing a landscape image representative of the state of Nepantla, Montoya provides a racialized view of the land and an image of land that differs from the traditional, postmodern images of the area. Her image communicates an indigenous narrative of land that has been hidden by the effects of Manifest Destiny. Montoya's image has the ability to cause dissensus in what Rancière identifies as the ability of a political work of art to stand against dominant belief systems and show what is hidden from the supernumerary, reconfiguring the dominate view of land in the borderlands. Works by other Chicanas/os have addressed the politics of everyday life and the ways in which popular and traditional images of land are racialized, creating alternative associations. The political qualities of these works differ from both *Desire Lines* and the Nepantla state created in it which challenges normative views of the borderland and its inhabitants.

Chicana art politics and regime

Chicana/o scholars have addressed political aspects of the cultural production of Chicanas/os. Notable for the purpose of this project are *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition* (1998), by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, and *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (2007) by Laura E. Pérez. In each text, the authors address specific political aspects of previous examples of work by Montoya. Gaspar de Alba's book presents an interdisciplinary study of the seminal Chicana/o art exhibition, *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985* (1991), which was the first comprehensive and nationally touring exhibition of art produced by Chicana/o artists.¹ In her book she offers analysis of the aesthetics and politics of CARA as well as a cultural critique.² In addition to a comprehensive overview of the artists and the work represented in the exhibition she examines the public reception of CARA.³ In *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, Pérez explores the power of spiritual aesthetics in challenging Eurocentric colonizing forces and how these challenges are communicated in the work produced by Chicana artists.

In *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation*, the artwork, including Montoya's, is discussed within the context of the political goal of representation inside mainstream art institutional spaces. These institutionalized spaces are racialized, privileging whiteness and the mainstream aesthetics of high culture, one by which the work of Chicanas/os does not abide.⁴ The artworks in CARA are described by Gaspar de Alba as "opposing the ideology of individualism," the core of "art for Art's sake" in the ideologies of the hegemonic systems of modernism and postmodernism.

Both Pérez and Gaspar de Alba discuss the political quality of artwork by Delilah Montoya. It is important to mention their approach to the artist early work, because *Desire Lines* displays some of the same qualities found on the series *Se Abre el Mundo/The world Opens up #1 & #2* (1981), a pair of cibachrome photographs (figure 19). These photographs depict different approaches to landscape. Of the pieces Gaspar de Alba writes, “Montoya’s photo collages, *Se Abre el Mundo/The world Opens up #1* and *#2*, poetically portray the beginning of this ritual” (the author is addressing the crossing of the border) “as a journey into canyons and hills, the world of the ‘American Dream’ a golden illusion in the distance.” It represents the first step of what Christopher D. Geist and Jack Nachbar describe as the first rite of passage; “the preparation” ritual, “a rite of passage which marks a transformation in status of life style,” and points to immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border as a unifying rite shared by many in the Chicana/o community.⁵ Her work within the context of the exhibition is an affirmation of a Chicana/o experience exhibited and affirmed in “the master’s” house.⁶

Laura E. Peréz analyzes the spiritual aesthetic of art produced by Chicana artists and the ways in which the work participates in the demystification of “post-‘Enlightenment’ mythologies of racial, cultural, gender, and sexual superiorities within the collective social imaginary from which we draw and build of visual, verbal, and bodily languages of artists recite, as well as that of intellectual discourse.”⁷ In her text she uses several pieces by Montoya to expand on how the work of Chicanas demystifies post-Enlightenment. Peréz addresses the importance of Delilah Montoya’s *Se Abre El Mundo/The world Opens Up* by writing that, “[they capture] the experience of visually and spiritually heightened

awareness that characterizes one aspect of communion with nature.”⁸ This communion with nature is important, because *Desire Lines* also explores a Chicana/o spirituality that has connection and reverence for land different from the relationship that has been displayed and operationalized by a Eurocentric view. In many cases this view has been guided by ownership of the land informed by the ideology of Manifest Destiny. Many other indigenous peoples share the spirituality Pérez sees in Montoya’s artwork.⁹

Both approaches toward analyzing the political qualities of *Se Abre El Mundo/The world Opens Up* series were addressed are important: they speak to the power of these images and the complexity of Delilah Montoya’s work. Considering *Desire Lines* via Rancière’s ideas on politics and aesthetics can complement previous approaches and explain what Montoya is revealing to the viewer. As Gaspar de Alba shows a journey in her analysis of *se Abre El Mundo*, Pérez shows the connection to land.

Jacques Rancière ideas on the aesthetics of politics are focused on the concept of the redistribution of the sensible. This focus on the sensible provides an understanding of how art and the politics of everyday are connected, and how art has the potential to effect politics. Sensible means all that is made available to the senses, and accepted and understood by the senses. Previously, it was noted that the aesthetic regime of art has hidden the Chicana/o aesthetic from what is available to the senses. There are other regimes working in the same way outside the realm of art. Rancière sees these images as “systems of constructed forms that determine what presents itself to sense experience, politics revolves around what is seen and invisible,” they control what is seen and accepted.¹⁰ It is important to note that Rancière also believes democracy only exists when there is a

redistribution of the sensible, meaning that the absence of dissensus results in a police state.

Scholars have investigated ways in which Native Americans and migrants of color in the United States have, historically, been ignored and be considered hidden amongst the white majority. Ronald Takaki, in his book *Iron Cages*, gives a comparative analysis of “white Americans” perception of Native Americans, Blacks, Asians and Mexicans by analyzing U.S. policies and how they have shaped race relations in U.S. Westward expansion. The philosophy of Manifest Destiny impacted Native and Mexican populations. The anti-immigrant sentiment was also reflected by enacted laws like the Dawes Act of 1887, which favored European migrants, and the 1790 Naturalization Law that made Chinese migrants ineligible for citizenship. These sentiments and policies are a reflection of the police state that has kept native populations and migrants of color hidden. *Impossible Subjects; Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern Americana*, by Mae M. Nagai, gives another view of how immigration policies and the idea of “illegal alien” has shaped the idea of race and citizenship in the United States by examining immigration policies from the 1920s. With regard to the geopolitical U.S.-Mexico border, Alicia Schmidt Camacho, in her book *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* analyzes how labor conditions for working women in the maquiladora industry on the Mexican side of the border have been hidden. Camacho when addressing migrant crossings in the Sonora desert, details another hidden situation, as she describes the factual disappearance of people and untold loss of life.

The imaginary of migrants in the Borderlands is indeed a reality that creates “a psychic wounding,” the loss of political significance that comes with the

act of crossing. This loss of political significance comes through the exploitation of the migrants, their economic hardship, and being treated as hidden second class citizens.¹¹

Works of art which convey aspects of the issues addressed by Schmidt Camacho are considered “intolerable images” by Rancière. The intolerable image describes what the images reveal, what is hidden by the regime, and what capacity for change is possessed by the image. Due to the subject matter the images unveil they are difficult to view. Their existence is not sanctioned by the aesthetic regime. *Desire Lines* follows an aesthetic outside the modernist paradigm and speaks to the police state that dehumanizes migrants. However, there is a precept to what an intolerable image is: its meaning is not anticipated. *Desire Lines* works exactly in this manner. When viewing the image, nothing on the surface can be read as a direct comment on the aesthetic regime it fights against.

To better understand what an intolerable image is, one must first understand what it is not. Consider the horrible images that came from Abu Ghraib, a U.S. prison for enemy “combatants” in Iraq (a term that itself dehumanizes detainees). Those images of torture, intolerable to view speak to the dehumanizing nature of U.S. policies; however, one must believe those images are a product of governmental policies and not the result of individual actions. The viewer must be engaged in a disagreement with the policies that allow the conditions under which the acts captured by the lens are reproduced, to feel guilt when viewing the images; they are thought of as images intended to produce guilt.¹² An intolerable image is an image that is active, “The virtue of activity, counter-posed to the evil of the image, is thus absorbed by the authority of the

sovereign voice that stigmatizes the false existence which is knows us to be condemned to wallow on in.”¹³

Seeing Nepantla in *Desire Lines*

Delilah Montoya presents an image that, on its surface, is not intolerable; it seems to be an idealized landscape upon preliminary observation. However, it does present the viewer with an image that communicates a subject hidden by an aesthetic regime. Revealed in her work is an indigenous landscape communicated through the concept of Nepantla. How or why is this visualization of the state of Nepantla intolerable? In order to address this question, one must consider the mainstream imagery which presents the western land of the United States and the landscapes produced under that police state. The visualization of the state of Nepantla forces the viewer to confront what has been hidden in the landscape by that police state.

The “frontier” is an important concept that has racialized how the land of the western part of the U.S. is interpreted, a view of land that still persist today. The “frontier” embodies land as wild, pure and empty. From its early beginnings this idea of the frontier, reflected an ethnocentric view that contributed to foundational ideas in the U.S. nation state. The concept of the frontier also includes the belief that the Borderlands function as a safety valve for American discontent, and is the location were the nation’s pioneer spirit can be revitalized.¹⁴ This pioneer spirit is a major facet of the U.S. national imaginary. Patricia Nelson Limerick, in “The Burdens of Western American History,” explains that the image of Western history is tied to a simple notion of progress, one which is fostered by the idea of the frontier, an area of open space that offers the opportunity for independence and the establishment of civilization in an

another wise wild area.¹⁵ To this white notion of progress is that of the preservation of land as natural national monument. The creation of national parks in the early 1900s fostered the preservation of the concept of the frontier long after the idea of the frontier was believed to have passed. Karen R. Jones and John Wills speak to this connection:

“Romanticism and cultural nationalism proved philosophical underpinnings for the glorification of western scenery. However, the shift from appreciation to preservation gained its principal thrust from the process of westward expansion itself. In this sense, the nation park movement signified a post-frontier phenomenon: a reaction to the breakneck speed of continental conquest.”¹⁶

The concept of frontier that was solidified through the land preservation of national parks can be interpreted as contributing to the police state, upholding a regime of the sensible; the regime does not allow the visibility of indigenous connections to the land and creates a racialization of land that is different from the white mainstream. The political aesthetic of *Desire Lines* challenges this aesthetic regime, by providing a representation of *Nepantla*—a different racialization of land—thus redistributing the sensible.

Gloria Anzalúda’s *Nepantla* describes experiences in and of the borderlands. *Nepantla* is a Náhuatl word meaning “*la tierra de enmedio*,” and as Anzalúda points out, it is a place of transformations, an in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space that lacks clear boundaries. Because of the unclear boundaries a sense of belong is challenging, making it an unsafe place for indigenous people. It also represents a process of *mestizaje*, not the cultural and racial process during the colonial Spain in the Americas, which denounced the dark body, but a reappropriated one that provides another “reading of culture, history, and art on binaries of right and wrong. It is a way to understand how people negotiate multiple worlds every day;

identities in flux.”¹⁷ Nepantla provides a different understanding of race and a view of the land in the West as a different racialized space.¹⁸

Nepantla is not an empty space, but an inhabited space with habitants moving both in it and through it. The Nepantla inhabitants embody the qualities of that space: precarious, always-in-transition. The “frontier” and Nepantla are different spaces. On the one hand, the frontier is imagined as the representation of purity and clear defined lines, a desolate space free of people, an idea of pure unaltered space whose emptiness is an invitation for white exploration and progress. Alternatively, Nepantla challenges purity and draws ambiguous borders. In *Desire Lines*, Nepantla can be read in three ways, each one touching on a precept of the Anzaldúan theory: First, the land viewed both as a metaphor and literal location; second, through the presence of a figure which can be read as the embodiment of the new mestiza/o consciousness; third, through the agency of the absent figure of the migrant.

As previously mentioned, Nepantla, as Anzaldúa describes it, is an in-between land and dangerous space for the mestiza/o. The photographic landscapes by Montoya embody this view. The land she has photographed has belonged to the Tohono O’odham people for a millennia, and recently it has been a desert location with a rise in migrant deaths. Migrants cross the desert from Sonora, Mexico through Tohono O’odham land in the U.S., often times carrying with them insufficient water to keep them hydrated and alive while passing through the vast desert landscape. In Montoya’s image, the aridness of the land is conveyed by the sparse vegetation of saguaros, chollas, palo verdes, and other desert vegetation. The details in the image leave little doubt about the harshness of the land. Its bleakness is accentuated by the detail captured by the camera:

everything is in focus. The cracked and baked land in the foreground and the numerous water jugs juxtaposed to the dry land trailing off into the horizon are seen with stunning clarity. The jugs of water were placed by the figure to the far left, Mike Wilson, an activist who has dedicated his efforts on the prevention of migrant deaths on O'odham land, a person who is also Tohono O'odham.

The landscape is as dangerous as Nepantla, but it is also a place of transition, simultaneously an in-between place/space and a place of origin, a home. According to Anzaldúa transition makes Nepantla dangerous, it is "the state of transition between time periods, and the border between cultures... [an] ascertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity"¹⁹

We can see this danger communicated in the location as a current place. With this photographic image, Montoya has documented migratory paths through the Tohono O'odham land. As the title suggests, the migratory lines are lines of desire, a desire for an economically better life. The lines, for those traversing the dangerous paths, they may lead to financial mobility through new resources, and a newfound prosperity. As Luis Alberto Urrea writes in his novel, *The Devil's Highway* (2005), about the true story of 26 men who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border, 12 of whom perished in the process in 2001, migrants are driven by the search for prosperity and a better life.

The lines/paths made by people migrating through the desert establish the landscape as a place of transition. It is the location which one group of people crosses on their way to a new state of being. This landscape and the migrants crossing it can be interpreted as the in-between of what José David Saldívar,

Walter Mignolo , Aníbal Quijano , and Immanuel Wallerstein describe as the Global North and Global South, or what can be understood as the dividing middle of two colonial systems. In *The Devil's Highway*, Urrea writes that people are dying in the desert because of “the politics of stupidity that rules both sides of the border.”²⁰

Baboquivari Peak, the tallest peak on the distant horizon, is visible in the photograph, though partially obscured by clouds. For the Tohono O’odham, Baboquivari peak is a sacred place, a place of origin, a location of transition. As example of its sacredness to the Tohono O’odham, the mountain top is the location from which *I’toi*, Elder Brother, lead “the people” from the inner world that lies within Baboquivari Peak into this contemporary world. With this layering of the contemporary and historic, Montoya draws parallels between the Chicana/o and O’odham experience of having ancestral land divided by the geopolitical border between the United State and Mexico. This layering of meanings acts as a bridge between ingenuous identities, like that of the Chicana/o, influenced by the old colonial process of mestizaje.

Nepantla in *Desire Lines* is also brought to light by the presence of activist Mike Wilson. His indigenous origin challenges the “frontier” idea that the Borderlands are an empty wilderness, reminding the viewer of the millenarian presence of Native Americans in this land. Not only does he further disrupt the possibility of the image being influenced by the concept of the “frontier,’ but his presence in the photograph can also be read as an embodiment of the new mestiza/o consciousness. As Anzaldúa points out, a mestiza/o is not only biological, but an umbrella term which acknowledges that certain aspects of identity don’t disappear, aren’t assimilated, or pressed, and that identity is a

changing cluster of components and snap-shifting activity. The mestiza/o consciousness allows for the creation of identities that shift around the work “we” have to do. It is not only a biological mixing, but also a mixing of ideas and beliefs. This consciousness is part of those who inhabit the state of Nepantla.

Mike Wilson is Tohono O’odham, but he has fought against his tribal government, and chastised them for doing nothing to keep migrants from dying on O’odham land. Because of the inaction of the tribal government, he has taken it upon himself to place water jugs along migratory paths throughout O’odham land, an action that has caused him to be expelled from the reservation. He is simultaneously a part of community and disassociated from the community. Additionally, both O’odham and Christian faith traditions inform his belief system. He is an embodiment of different world views in which he has negotiated his own O’odham identity around work he feels needs to be done. As a figure within the landscape, his role is similar to the quintessential example of mestizaje, The Virgin of Guadalupe. She is seen as both the Christian Mary Mother of God and the native *Tonantzin* deity mother to gods. Wilson can also be read in a similar dual fashion as the Christian “good Samaritan,” and a representation of *I’itoi*, the Elder Brother in the middle of the maze of life, the maze of migratory lines. This new mestizaje is a consciousness of the borderlands that avoids the death of culture produce by rigidity, where static identity is either something or not, a linear impulse of Western reasoning. Anzalúda’s words provide another example of this new mestizaje:

“*Soy un a masamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.”²¹

As a queer woman of color and a Fronteriza, she is describing herself and her experience of inhabiting the in-between states of sexuality, of the U.S. and Mexican cultures, and how she as a Nepantlera creates a new understanding of what each identifier means. The figure of Mike Wilson also challenges what is traditionally O'odham, what it means to belong to a group and what it means to be outside that group.

Finally, a third way Nepantla is in *Desire Lines* is through agency, the ability to initiate change. Agency can be seen through the placement of water jugs by Wilson, but also by the absence of migrating figures. The lines over the land represent the choice of migrants to do whatever they feel necessary in order to find new resources, even if its at the risk of death. Although migrants are victims of policies on both sides of the border, they are not passive. Their absence is important because it translates to a small victory; without their bodies being present, it is assumed they have traversed the transitional space of Nepantla safely and reached their destination. What other evidence can be seen of this hope for success? For this we look towards representations of water in the image.

Water is present in the photograph, most readily apparent in the jugs that trail off into the horizon and become integral to the landscape. They lead the viewer to the second representation of water and, in turn, hope. The clouds obscure our view of Baboquivari Peak. Clouds in the desert are few and far between. If they are present, which is a rare occurrence, they are high in the atmosphere, resembling feathers in the sky. An example of this phenomenon can be seen in Ansel Adams silver gelatin print, *Monument Valley* (1947). It is a classic photographic representation of an Arizona desert landscape, with no clouds in the sky. The clouds in *Desire Lines* are of significance, they are

monsoon clouds. They are a source of water and the source of continuous life in the desert. The monsoon clouds in the frame are a source of hope for the viewer.

Nepantla is read in the *Desire Line* in various ways. The first is the desert and Baboquivari Peak as a place of transition, a middle ground. For migrants crossing the desert, it is a place of uncertainty, and, as alluded to by the presence of the water jugs, it is a place of danger.²² It shows the path of transition from past to future, and from future to past. For the Tohono O’odham, Baboquivari Peak is a sacred place, a place of origin and the location of transition from which *I’itoi* lead “the people” into this world.²³ With this layering of images, Montoya draws parallels between the O’odham experience of having their ancestral land divided by the geopolitical border between the United States and Mexico, acting as a bridge between Native identities, those whose identity has been influenced by U.S. Indian policy, and those influenced by the colonial process of mestizaje.²⁴

The second way in which Nepantla is presented in *Desire Lines* is through the inclusion of activist Mike Wilson. As Anzaldúa points out, a mestiza/o is not only biological but an umbrella term which acknowledges that certain aspects of identity do not disappear, are not assimilated or pressed, and that identity is a changing cluster of components and snap-shifting activity. Mestizaje creates identities which shift.²⁵ It is not only a biological mixing, but also a mixing of idea and beliefs. In the case of Mike Wilson, he is Tohono O’odham, yet at the same time he has fought against his tribal government and chastised them for doing nothing to keep migrants from dying on O’odham land.²⁶ Because of the inaction of the tribal government, he has taken it upon himself to place water jugs along migratory paths through O’odham land, an action which has lead him to be expelled from the reservation.²⁷ This friction with the O’odham Nation places him

outside the community. Additionally, he is informed by both traditional O’odham and Christian faith traditions. He has negotiated his own O’odham identity to include aspects not necessarily O’odham. This is an example of the “new mestizaje,” a consciousness of the borderlands that avoids the death of cultural through rigidity, where as a static identity is either something or not, a linear impulse of Western reasoning.²⁸

In *Desire Lines* Delilah Montoya presents an image of land that is drastically different than that of land that draws from the frontier model, models which reflect whiteness through landscapes that are empty, pure icons for the U.S. national narrative. Her image is an intolerable image that reveals to the viewers an indigenous land which communicates a fluidness of people unrestrained by borders or static identities. She communicates this through the disposition of the viewer not knowing beforehand what is within the frame, an active image points to different politic of the sensible. Montoya’s image is not a weapon in the battle for indigenous or migrant rights, however, it does reconfigure what can be seen, indigenous landscapes, an aspect of indigeneity not dependent on whiteness. She gives us a new landscape of indigenous possibilities with in the U.S.

¹ Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House: Cultural Politics and the CARA Exhibition*. 1, 7, 91. The exhibition’s nation tour included the cities of: Denver, Albuquerque, San Francisco, Fresno, Tucson, Washington, D.C., El Paso, and the Bronx. It featured 12 pieces of art from 140 Chicanos and 40 Chicanas. The exhibition was organized through the UCLA Wight Art Gallery, the first major collaboration of Chicana/o scholars and artist with a “main stream” art institution.

² Ibid., 1-157.

³ Ibid., 161-197.

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Ibid, 71-80. Geist and Nachbar identify three stages in a rite of passage, the second being transition, and the third celebration. We can also interpret Montoya's *Desire Lines* as a representation of both preparation and transition.

⁶Ibid., 7-14.

⁷ Laura Pérez, *Chicana art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*. 2.

⁸ Ibid., 134.

⁹ Renya Ramirez, *Native hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*. 67. In an interview on the topic of Sweat lodges, Jeff Smith, expands on this communion or connection with nature important to native identities say that it is away to connect with one's own heritage.

¹⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. 13.

¹¹ Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 299-301.

¹² Jacques Ranciere. *The Emancipated Spectator*, 84-85. In the text Rancière gives examples of images from Vietnam, however I feel the more recent images substitute well and function in a similar fashion.

¹³ Ibid., 87-88.

¹⁴ Patricia Nelson Limerick, "The Burdens of Western American History." In *The legacy of conquest: the unbroken past of the American West*. 322-349, 345.. Limerick points out that the concept of the frontier as safety vales is a concept from Frederick Jackson thesis, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, 1893. believing that is a place of opportunity and escape, defused social discontent in America. This idea is communicated through his quote, "So long as free land exists, the opportunity for a competency exists, and economic power secures political power."

¹⁵ Ibid., 322-324.

¹⁶ Karen R. Jones and John Wills, *American west competing visions*. 198.

¹⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, and AnaLouise Keating. *The Gloria Anzaldúa a reader*. 209.

¹⁸ Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 55. Racial formation is defined as the social historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed. In this particular case race the dominant understanding of indigenous races is transformed from one of inaction to one of action.

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- ¹⁹ Liz Wells, *The Photography Reader*, 180.
- ²⁰ Ibid, 215.
- ²¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Borderlands*, 81.
- ²² Orlando Lara, "Project Premises: Sed : A Trail of Thirst." Project Premises: Sed : A Trail of Thirst. <http://www.orlandolara.com/thirst/project.html>
- ²³ Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at dawn: a borderlands massacre and the violence of history*. 15-16.
- ²⁴ Norma Alarcón, "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of "The" Native Woman." In *Living Chicana Theory*. 371, 374-375.
- ²⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Gloria Anzaldua Reader*, 211.
- ²⁶ Mike Wilson, "CENSORED NEWS.": Mike Wilson: Tohono O'odham Chairman lacks moral authority to speak against SB 1070. <http://bsnorrell.blogspot.com/2010/05/mike-wilson-tohono-oodham-chairman.html>
- ²⁷ Orlando Lara, "Project Premises: Sed: A Trail of Thirst."
- ²⁸ Carlos Gallegos, *Chicana/o Subjectivity and the Politics of Identity: Between Recognition and Revolution*. 79.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis was to exam the political qualities of *Desire Lines*, a Chicana/o landscape work of art by Delilah Montoya. It is one image in a series of landscapes which documents migratory paths that leave scars on the land in the Sonoran Desert, Arizona. *Desire Lines* and Montoya's other *Sed* images speak to the plight of the migrant, a group of people who have largely been invisible to the social majority and who are unacknowledged in daily life and public discourses.¹ This thesis has explored one method that can be used to analyze the political aspects of the image. This project also identified qualities of the police in the aesthetic regime of art which have kept a Chicana/o voice through the acceptance of the hidden Rasquache aesthetic and explained how *Desire Lines* has the potential to create dissensus by revealing the Rasquache aesthetic. The dominant national narrative of land in the Borderlands is racialized and the narrative acts enforce a police state that has kept hidden indigenous relationships to land. Montoya, through her images, reveals a specific indigenous narrative which has been hidden. What she shows the viewer is a visual representation of the liminal concept of *Nepantla*. The political aspects of *Desire Lines*, both in the realm of art and everyday life, are connected using Jacques Rancière's theoretical framework on politics and aesthetics. Montoya's image show the viewer a reconfiguration of what has been taken as fact by the dominate culture, namely that the Borderlands are an empty space in need of civilized economic development, an assumption influenced by the idea of individual ownership of land seen as an economic resource for the nation state. *Desire Lines* underscores the relationship of land to the indigenous, the fact that there can be more than one indigenous narrative, and the interconnectedness of these hidden narratives.

The act of redistributing the sensible is not limited to revealing a single idea, or groups of people that have been made invisible by the police state. Once the sensible is redistributed, it leads to more questions and possibilities and in turn works toward equality in a democratic society through a multiplicity of voices participating in the sensible. Montoya's work embodies this quality of the political. Her works ask how other people of color have worked within the photographic tradition of landscape photography to produce work that reflects a questioning of photographic images which communicate and makes visible their sensibility.

Montoya produced an image with layers of political meaning. In this thesis, as with the titles of *Desire Lines*, and the larger photo documentary project, *Sed: Trail of Thirst*, there is a thirst and desire for justice, for social and political change, but, most of all, for indigenous populations at home in search of or for a new place where they can be seen a politically relevant.

Rancière's conceptual framework of politics is important to the field of art because it allows for an approach to art outside the dominant postmodern approach. It assess art not by an aesthetic model, but by identifying the aesthetic model it represents and makes visible. Art by Native Americans has a history of being seen as craft by the dominant society, and along with Chicana/os artists, Native Americans have struggled be widely accepted. They are, of course, two different indigenous groups who have been affected by two different colonizing models. Their goal is to be considered "People" within the hegemonic systems of U.S., and to have both their art and themselves valued within that political system. Giorgio Agamben believes that "People," signify two polar opposites. People in the lower case form for Agamben , which he identifies as *vita nuda*, a multiplicity of excluded bodies. In contrast, the term "People" within western politics is

a whole integral politic body governed by the exclusion and division of “People” with value and those “people” seen as lacking value.² Delilah Montoya’s image, *Desire Lines*, challenges how we view art and what is seen within the U.S. national narrative. It is a creative act which Anzaldúa has described as “link[ing] inner reflection and vision—the mental, emotional, instinctive, image, spiritual, and the subtle bodily awareness—with social, political action and lived experience to generate subversives knowledges.”³ Gloria Anzaldúa and other Chicana/o scholars know firsthand that creative acts and the politics of everyday life are not disconnected, but intertwined. Montoya’s work is important because it can be seen as a focal point where many political issues come together to ask important questions.

Analyzing the political aesthetic of an image is only one way of approaching Montoya’s work, but using the concept of political aesthetics also has its limits. As stated throughout this discussion, it is a way of understanding how the image is political within the very specific context of western democracy. It is very much related to viewing the voice of the colonized through colonizers’ knowledge, that knowledge referring to western democracy as a way of organizing the individual and society. This leaves many other indigenous interpretations and meanings for the work. An example of a different approach would be to apply Laura Perez’s concept of the spiritual aesthetic.

Scholars like Chon Noriega, Jennifer González, Thomás Ibarra Frausto, Amalia Mesa-Bains, Laura Perez, Amelia Malagamba have asked why the work of Chicana/os is important and where does it fit within the dominate discourse about art? This has been the focus of study for the past four decades. Chon Noriega and Jennifer González have addressed where Chicana/o art fits in the pantheon of the main stream, Amelia Malagamba has written on how the work of Chicana/os addresses “borders” as place, and

Perez, Mesa-Bains, and Ibarra-Frausto on the aesthetics of Chicana/o art. Within the discourse of mainstream art, Montoya's image answers the question "Can the Rasquache aesthetic maneuver within main stream aesthetics, communicating in a visual language which can be understand while simultaneously communicating a Chicana/o sensibility?" Montoya's image is proof of a continual negotiation of Chicana/o sensibilities and approaches to issues. Her image highlights the fact that issues of equality and indigenous identity (concepts crucial to the Chicano movement) are still present in the work of Chicanas/os. *Road to Aztlán* (2011) (figure 21) by Montoya is a direct reference to the Chicana/o national idea of Aztlán. When comparing *Desire Lines* with *Road to Aztlán*, however, one sees the "road to Aztlán" is idealized by the picturesque representation of land. The ideas brought to light by the Chicano Movement are still relevant, especially since the work of Chicana/o artists by the mainstream art world is not equal. It is still being debated that if Chicana/o art via the Latina/o umbrella has a place in the mainstream. One need only read the public debate between Alex Rivera and Philip Kennicott on the topic of "Latino Art" to see that the issue of acceptance and validity is still an ongoing question for those within the mainstream.⁴ This discussion serves as another means by which the voice of indigenous can be seen and heard, helping to correct the devastating effect of a colonial past and colonial present.

¹ Amelia Malagamba, *Caras Vemos, Corazones no Sabemos*, 15.

² Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, 29-33.

³ Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We Call Home*, 542.

⁴ Alex Rivera and Phillip Washington Post, "Alex Rivera, Philip Kennicott debate Washington Post review of 'Our America' <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/style->

blog/wp/2013/11/01/alex-rivera-philip-kennicott-debate-washington-post-review-of-our-america/

Images



Fig. 1. Delilah Montoya, *Desire Lines, Baboquivari Peak, Arizona, 2004*



Fig. 2. Delilah Montoya, *Campsite, Ironwood, Arizona, 2004*



Fig. 3. Delilah Montoya, *Humane Border, 2004*



Fig. 4. Delilah Montoya, *Paseo*, 2004



Fig. 5. Delilah Montoya, *A Power Line Trail, Arizona*, 2004



Fig. 6. Delilah Montoya, *Saguaro 1, Arizona*, 2004



Fig. 7 Delilah Montoya, *Saguaro 2*, 2004



Fig. 8. Delilah Montoya, *Tribal Lands*, 2004



Fig. 9. Ansel Adams, *Monument Valley, Arizona*, 1947



Fig. 10. Edward Weston, *San Carlos Lake, Arizona, 1938*



Fig. 11. Mark Klett and Bryon Wolfe's, *Four views from four times and one shoreline, Lake Tenaya, 2002*



Fig. 12. Alma Lopez, *Fashion Slaves*, 1997



Fig. 13. Will Wilson, *Auto Immune-Response 11*, 2005



Fig. 14. Guillermo Gómez Peña, *Border Brujo*, 1989



Fig. 15. Christina Fernandez, *Manuela STITCHED: Fashion International*, 1996



Fig. 16. Delilah Montoya, *Se abre el mundo/The Earth opens up, #2*, 1981



Fig. 17. Richard Misrach, *Desert Fire No. 249*, 1985



Fig. 18. Sherrie Levine's, *After Eliot Porter*, 1981



Fig. 19. Delilah Montoya, *Shooting Tourist*, 1995



Fig. 20. Orlando Lara, *Surveillance*, 2004



Fig. 21. Delilah Montoya, *Road to Aztlán*, 2008

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