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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

After the I-Hotel:
Material, Cultural, and Affective Geographies of Filipino San Francisco

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Thea Quiray Tagle

Committee in Charge:

Professor Sara Clarke Kaplan, Chair
Professor Curtis Marez, Co-Chair
Professor Patrick Anderson
Professor Kirstie Dorr
Professor Kalindi Vora
Professor Daniel Widener

2015

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Co-Chair

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015

DEDICATION

**In loving memory of
my best teachers:**

**Aurelio Muñoz Quiray
Rosemary Marangoly George
Candice Tamika Rice**

(Thank you.)

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

After the I-Hotel:
Material, Cultural, and Affective Geographies of Filipino San Francisco

by

Thea Quiray Tagle

Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnic Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2015

Professor Sara Clarke Kaplan, Chair
Professor Curtis Marez, Co-Chair

This dissertation traces the cultural and economic trajectories of Filipino migration to, settlement in, and displacement from the San Francisco Bay Area from the 1960s through the present moment as represented in the work of local poets, visual artists, and performers. *After the I-Hotel* argues that the shifting representations of urban and suburban space over this time period not only reveal the structural forces behind the displacement of old and new Filipino migrants in the Bay Area, but also—and more importantly—are themselves *productive of* theories of Filipino/American subjectivity,

spatiality, and aesthetics rooted in values alternative to the logics of settler colonialism and speculative capitalism which structure the contemporary social-economic milieu.

The two halves of the dissertation center different cultural forms (poetry in the first half and site-specific multimedia installations and performances in second half) in order to trace the shifts in representational strategies used by artists over this time period, partly as response to the changing geographic borders of Filipino/American life in the region and as reflective of the variegated political orientations and lived experiences of feminist and queer Filipino/Americans. The cultural workers profiled in the dissertation, while divergent in their individual artistic practice, evidence a shared commitment to the politics of place. Their works are both spatially and temporally expansive, and extend the genealogy and the geographic borders of Filipino America to include subjects, neighborhoods, suburbs, and regions understood as beyond the material and metaphorical borders of the Philippine diasporic experience. From the printed and performed poetry of Al Robles and Barbara Jane Reyes to the psychogeographic wanderings of Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa, Filipino/American artists *make material* the grounds of the Filipino Bay Area, and in doing so, also redefine the terms of Filipino/American “art,” “community” and “politics” itself. Reading the decolonial spatial aesthetics of these works, this dissertation concludes, can help us imagine new modes of contesting labor exploitation, physical displacement, and violence committed on multiple scales—from the most intimate scale of the individual body to the scale of the national body of Filipino peoples living in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

After the I-Hotel

*It wasn't only a hotel: it was a gathering place that brought them together.
It was celebration; it was ritual. It was bringing back a life.*
- Al Robles (1930 – 2009)

*And I think we have an incredible vision here. And it's a vision, and hopefully a
collaborative action, and a network of actions that are happening at the this point where,
because of all these voices, we're getting some sensation of our personal history,
and our history as it interfaces with each other, and as it becomes a landscape.*
- Carlos Villa (1936-2013)

“It was August 4, 1977. They had lived in the I-Hotel for forty-three years. They never meant to stay so long” (Tenorio 2012, 163). So goes “Save the I-Hotel,” a short story by Lysley Tenorio that mines forbidden feelings between *manongs* (Filipino laborers in the United States in the early 20th century) who worked, lived, and aged together for over half a century. It is a story that students of Asian American Studies have heard before, told a bit queerly. In this version of historical memory, Fortunado falls in love with Vicente, the wisecracking Filipino hotel boy who convinces the Stockton-based newcomer from the Philippines to stay in San Francisco and to live in the Manilatown district’s International Hotel with him. They meet at a taxi dance hall called Dreamland, Vicente drunk and spilling his beer on newcomer Fortunado (“Too long. I’ll call you Nado,” Vicente says), an inauspicious start to a decades-long friendship (166). Their brotherhood is born of shared adversity and shared alcoholic beverages, their lives spent shuttling between “two hotels. One where I work. One where I live... How can you stand it?” (175). One drunken night, Nado kisses Vicente, and “just as he was about to

apologize, he felt Vicente kissing him too” (172); as soon as it happened, it was over, and “all that became of their kiss was longing,” never to be brought up in conversation again (173).

As these stories go, Vicente denies Nado’s advances, choosing instead to start an illicit relationship with Althea, a white woman from small-town Wisconsin working alongside them at the tony Parkdale Hotel at the top of Nob Hill. While Althea and Vicente’s love affair is short-lived—Nado having secretly exposed their trysts in The Parkdale’s penthouse suite with a late-night phone call to management—Nado and Vicente’s fraught friendship persists that fateful August night. For Nado and Vicente (now forgetful with dementia), this was to be their last night together in the International Hotel; they, like so many other elderly Chinese and Filipino bachelor elders in the I-Hotel, were forcibly evicted from their residences after an all-night siege on the building by the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department broke the barricade of bodies guarding the building and the manongs’s room. As in real life, not the hundreds of activists, nor the manong tenant leaders like Wahat Tampao could save men like Nado and Vicente from their fate. Fortunado escorts his addled friend Vicente out of his bedroom when they no longer can stay: “They reached the lobby, stepped over wooden planks and broken glass, and as they crossed the fallen door of the front entrance, Fortunado took Vicente’s hand. ‘Don’t let go,’ he said, then led the way out of the I-Hotel” (Tenorio 2012, 186). Somehow, in the ongoing melee outside the hotel, Fortunado and Vicente are separated; Nado is knocked down and blacks out for a spell, losing Vicente’s hand. To Nado’s surprise, when he awakens and sees Vicente from afar, unharmed, he finds a changed

man very different from the one he saw just two weeks prior “pacing the sidewalk corner, a man stranded on the smallest piece of land” (193):

[Nado saw] the shuttle for the West Oakland Senior Center, and one by one, a line of I-Hotel tenants climbed inside. As the last man boarded, Vicente approached, his feet dragging. From inside the van, tenants beckoned to him, but then Vicente stopped, let the suitcase fall from his hand [...] There was no pacing or panic now, just the stillness of a person taking in the view before him. Vicente looked at Kearny Street, watched police beat down and drag away protestors through the aimless mass, their signs fading and torn, gone. Then, as if he had finally seen enough, Vicente turned away, picked up his suitcase, and stepped into the van. Fortunado imagined him crossing the eight miles of the Bay Bridge, speeding over water as though moving from one country to the next. The van pulled away slowly, and then it was gone. (193)

It is a melancholy ending to the tale, a work of historical fiction fabricated by Tenorio that beautifully gestures to the complex intimacies between manongs with each other, white American individuals, and the state that are impossible to capture in the official accounts of the anti-eviction movement to save the International Hotel as the last site remaining in Manilatown. Does it even matter if Vicente ever romantically loved Nado back for this story to be a tragic one? The failure of a queer romance to blossom between these two characters is but one of the many obstacles that confronted working-class Filipino/American men of the manong generation: the barriers to interracial marriage and property ownership; limitations on where one could work and the meager wages paid once employed; and the final injustice of being evicted from single room occupancies like San Francisco’s I-Hotel all marked these men’s lives as difficult and often lonely from their youth through their twilight years.

Tenorio’s story “Save the I-Hotel” offers no redemptive closure for these men, nor does it give hope that things have improved for Filipino/Americans in the decades

following the I-Hotel's demolition and its later rebuilding. In the small moments of pleasure stolen away from official work time by Vicente and Althea, and in the deep affection and care given to Vicente by Nado even in his most memory-addled years, however, the reader finds some reprieve. Ephemeral but tangible, these passing relations allowed these men to pass the time elsewhere—in imaginative (albeit fleeting) worlds that could allow for a Filipino/American man and white woman to enjoy each other's company without mob violence always threatening, and where two men could be enough for each other in the absence of heteronormative, nuclear families to hold them. The short story reimagines the past not simply to represent or "give voice" to gay manongs who may or may not have lived in the I-Hotel and Manilatown; rather, the story produces what the late José Muñoz has called "alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds" that we can utilize in the present (Muñoz 2009, 27). Animating a past where these queered relations exist is to make the past *work for* the present and for the future; it pushes us, as readers, to reconsider the standard narratives about places like Manilatown and the value it held for its inhabitants.¹ Stories like "Save the I-Hotel" matter, thus, for making manifest the greatest reason to oppose evictions and other processes of "urban renewal" still ongoing—and much accelerating—in major U.S. cities like San Francisco: not to preserve inert buildings from demolition, but to salvage the relationships sustaining working-class peoples who have made these places momentary sanctuaries from the violence of labor exploitation, racial injustice, and sexual discrimination experienced in their daily lives in the United States.

¹ Muñoz writes that the production of alternative spatiotemporal maps calls on the past "to animate it, understanding that the past has a performative nature, which is to say that rather than being static and fixed, the past does things" (2009, 27-28).

This project begins with an ending, in a time of large-scale urban redevelopment projects initiated by a city rapidly reshaping itself as a financial capital, where once it was a base for wartime and postwar industries. It begins with the loss of the International Hotel in 1977, the last building standing in Manilatown—an ethnic enclave that emerged in the early 20th century as a way-station for Filipino migrant laborers on their routes to agricultural, factory, and service jobs up and down the West Coast and which became a permanent home for these men as they aged—and the apparent failure of a decade-long multiracial, multigenerational coalitional social movement to save the I-Hotel’s elderly inhabitants from eviction. The project began in the absences left by the International Hotel—the material sites destroyed, cultural ways evacuated, and affective ties severed by this loss—and I first began to investigate the past so as to better understand the present. In the aftermath, or rather *afterlife*, of the I-Hotel, I wanted to uncover what other places, temporary or permanent, have been made into Filipino/American home-places in the San Francisco Bay Area region; I hoped to unearth some of the diasporic intimacies that have persisted or which have been forged anew despite the absence of central city ethnic neighborhoods like Manilatown, and I wanted to illuminate the challenges geographically disparate and socially separated Filipino/American communities in the Bay Area face today as San Francisco once again seeks to remake itself as a global city for the future.² The initial question driving the research was: What

² Taking the I-Hotel’s built architecture as a starting point, this dissertation investigates the *afterlife* of the International Hotel, or the ways in which the building’s history is (re)imagined and (re)created in order to produce a genealogy of Filipino/American activism, art history, and community presence in downtown San Francisco. Saidiya Hartman, in writing of the afterlife of chattel slavery, deploys the term as an invocation of the ongoing violence and structural racism—the “skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment”—faced by black Americans after slavery’s formal abolition (2007, 6). She writes, furthermore that *she* is the afterlife of slavery, a biological product and racial-sexual subject whose life is overdetermined by the structures of post-Reconstruction American

can be salvaged from places of eviction and demolition, and what can be excavated from the aftermath of acts of spatial violence that are understood to be community-shattering events?

To tell “a collateral story to inhabit the discursive space of [the] absence” of the International Hotel, I map the geography of the Filipino San Francisco Bay Area region between 1977 and 2015 across three registers: the material, cultural, and affective (Clarke 2006, 27). The project alights in urban and suburban locations throughout the region where Filipino immigrants have arrived, settled, been displaced from, and resettled in as places of home and/or work, and documents the social, economic, and political conditions co-constitutive of these places as Filipino/American communities. To narrate the histories of these places, I draw from multiple sources including personal interviews, redevelopment agency reports, and secondary literature on gentrification and neighborhood-based anti-eviction movements. Superseding these more official accounts, I mine cultural texts—poems, visual artworks, embodied performances—that capture memories of Filipino/American homes and lives on multiple scales: of Filipino/American homes as individual or multi-family built structures, of collective communities within the

society. In this sense, the afterlife of “the event” exists on multiple scales, and breaks from a historicism that would insist that what has passed no longer impresses itself in the present.

In borrowing from Hartman, I do not intend to conflate the unique experiences of African Americans with those of Filipino/Americans displaced by redevelopment in San Francisco; rather, I appropriate the term for its breaking open of the linearity of time and the confinements of space. That is to say, in thinking through the I-Hotel’s afterlife, rather than its aftermath, I wish to draw attention to the ways that the traces of its material and affective structures—its now-demolished, previously built form as well as the non-biological, horizontal kinship bonds forged during the height of the I-Hotel struggle—are rearticulated and reworked in present day. For example, from the original bricks encased in glass in the Manilatown Heritage Foundation to the veteran activists that still frequent the space, traces of the 1970s I-Hotel remain in its rebuilt form, encasing the building within an affective field that is unique to this residential hotel and not found in other, similar SROs (single-residency occupancy residential hotels) in San Francisco.

larger neighborhood or city, and of the discursive place that Filipino/Americans occupy within the national “home.” The cultural productions by Al Robles, Barbara Jane Reyes, Carlos Villa, Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa and the Mail Order Brides that I read here uncover ongoing issues facing Filipino/Americans that have escaped attention in the historical accounts—of the experiences of LGBTQ Filipino/Americans in San Francisco’s South of Market district, for example—and engage in the clearing of discursive space *for* Filipino/Americans in histories of social movements and the formation of artistic canons that they have been erased from. They channel energies in excess of the durable archive, to tell stories of Filipino/American survival over decades of combating economic exploitation, anti-Filipino racism, and waves of urban renewal programs throughout the region. The materialized and imagined collectivities that these cultural works gesture towards and/or generate themselves are, I argue, comprise the affective architectures of Filipino San Francisco enduring in the decades following the eviction of the manongs from the International Hotel.

After the I-Hotel narrates a cultural geography of Filipino/American communities divergent along generational, class, gendered, and sexual differences; this social history spans a roughly fifty-year span of time, its geographic epicenter being the city of San Francisco and expanding outwards to other suburban and urbanized areas of Filipino settlement including the East Bay suburbs and Silicon Valley. It begins with the International Hotel, but investigates how can we rethink the temporality and spatiality of the I-Hotel beyond a moment that has “passed on” into history’s annals; it reconsiders the I-Hotel as a more than physical site that has been built, demolished or destroyed, and rebuilt more than once, to imagining the I-Hotel as part of a larger genealogy and

geography of spatial justice movements that have been and which are still being waged throughout the city of San Francisco and in the larger Bay Area region. *After the I-Hotel* thus traces the overlapping and contradictory geographies of Filipino San Francisco, laboring to expand our understanding of the history of Filipino/American communities in the region including but not limited to that of the manong generation who inhabited I-Hotel and the post-1965 heterosexual families in the suburbs. It asks: How do Filipino/Americans with different relationships to the nation and to the city imagine themselves as connected to and/or disconnected from other Filipino/Americans of differing class background and employment, sexual orientation and gender identity, citizenship status? Further, it explores the solidarities and antagonisms between Filipino/Americans with other communities of color and LGBTQ/queer communities in the city, after the heyday of Third World coalitional politics in 1960s-1970s San Francisco and the systemic dismantling of radical organizations by the state. *After the I-Hotel* is, at its heart, a search for moments of possibility in the midst of historical and spatial voids—the places in the archive where queer(ed) and other marginalized lives are absented, and the times of social connections and intimacies that have persisted in the absence of ethnic neighborhoods like Manilatown and home-places like the International Hotel.

**Building, and Losing, Manilatown and the International Hotel:
The History of an Ethnic Neighborhood**

The International Hotel as a physical site is significant for its being not only a catalyst for the consolidation of the Asian American Movement (AAM) and the tenants rights

movement in San Francisco, but also for its being a casualty of a forty-year long San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) campaign to rid the city of “urban blight” and to rebuild the city as an international banking capital. The International Hotel as a built structure and as a symbol of citywide housing rights activism operates as a monad, or as a flashpoint illuminating multiple, intersecting historical trajectories—the building’s loss marked the destruction of the first Filipino/American ethnic enclave within city limits; the I-Hotel anti-eviction social movement was seminal to the foundation of Third World solidarity campaigns in the Bay Area; and Manilatown continues to serve as a case study of the violence inherent to so-called beautification and redevelopment schemes initiated by the city of San Francisco in concert with private developers and transnational real estate speculators. To tell the story of what has arisen from the rubble of the I-Hotel, thus, one must first return to this place and time.

Returning to the International Hotel is also crucial, in that locating Filipinos in the Bay Area today most often leads to suburbia—the military towns of Vallejo and Richmond in the North Bay; the South Bay communities in Daly City; and eastward, in Fremont and other Silicon Valley locales. Further afield, the cities of San Jose and Sacramento are home to hundreds of Filipino/American families, most of whom immigrated after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act removed racial restrictions and created preferential categories amenable to Filipinos. To historically situate the ability for these formations of the Filipino Bay Area to thrive, however, one must witness the gains and losses of the manong generation’s struggle for just and equitable living and working conditions in the region. The manongs’s youth and twilight years were marked by transience, with decades in between spent within the borders of the city. Their story is

unique because of the colonial status of the Philippines in relation to the United States at the time of their arrival and first settlement, yet resonates in important ways with other forms of displacement experienced by working class, poor, and non-white people in San Francisco and other urban centers around the country.

Even as historical Filipino neighborhoods have been erased from the maps of many of the cities the manongs had a role in constructing, the manong figure looms large in Filipino American Studies historiography; their social and economic barriers to progress are instructive examples that debunk the myths of American exceptionalism and liberal multiculturalism.³ As Filipino American Studies scholars such as Antonio Tiongson, Lucy San Pablo Burns and Ruby Tapia have documented, the manong generation was made up largely of single men of varied educational and class background who arrived in the United States to achieve the “American Dream” of social progress, only to be met with exploitative labor conditions; restrictive housing and property covenants; anti-miscegenation laws; and virulent anti-Asian racism such as the 1930 Watsonville Riots, a five-day long orgy of bodily violence and property destruction against the Filipino bachelor community living and working in this agricultural center 95 miles south of San Francisco (Tapia 2006, 65). Like other non-white migrant communities desired for their labor but who were never expected to establish permanent settlements, Filipinos were recruited to work in the San Francisco Bay Area and

³ The trope of the United States as exceptional and always having been a “great multi-ethnic democracy” effaces its role as an imperial power over nations like the Philippines; its spatial foundations in settler colonialism and genocide of indigenous peoples; and its economic foundations in chattel slavery and coolie labor. Jodi Melamed identifies liberal multiculturalism as a discourse emerging in the United States after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and during the Cold War; stressing a framework of legal equality, possessive individualism, and economic liberty, liberal multiculturalism (and, today, neoliberal multiculturalism) emphasizes the representation and integration of racial difference as the basis of antiracist politics, to “deflect attention from the devastating and accelerating consequences of private capital’s economic prerogatives for black and brown lives” (Melamed 2011, 97).

California's central coast region in the early 20th century (Molina 2006, 27). They were not the first people of Asian descent to live and work in this region—during the Gold Rush of the 1850s, a large Chinese population came to San Francisco not as prospectors or fortune-seekers, but as exploited workers to build the transcontinental railroad linking Midwestern and Northeastern industrial cities to the recently conquered lands in the American West.⁴ Unlike the Chinese, however, Filipino labor migrants to the United States were afforded a unique status that came with it additional burdens and particularized spatial politics; their ability to arrive in the U.S. at a moment of xenophobic immigration laws that barred other Asians from entry led to the development of ethnic Asian communities closer in social and spatial proximity to Latino/a migrants and black Americans, in both the cities and in the agricultural centers where they labored.

Subject to the U.S. doctrine of Manifest Destiny, which was used as justification for the “pacification” of Native American tribes in the United States, the Philippines was violently settled by American troops, along with Guam, Puerto Rico, the sovereign kingdom of Hawai'i, and Cuba between 1893 and 1898. While immigration by other “Asiatic” peoples to the U.S. in the early 20th century had been effectively suspended through the 1884 Chinese Exclusion Act and subsequent national origins quotas, people from the Philippines were exempt from such restrictions due to their status as “U.S. Nationals”; unlike other Asians classified as “Mongolian” by the state—a status that rendered them as “aliens ineligible to citizenship” —Filipino men were permitted free

⁴ For a longer historical account of Chinese immigrant labor in the United States, see Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (2005); on the sexualized racialization of Chinese bachelor communities in San Francisco, see Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (2001).

movement to and from the United States in the period between the 1899 ratification of the Treaty of Paris and the passage of the 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act (Isaac in Galang 2003, 91). As colonial subjects of the United States, Filipinos became prime candidates for continuing the backbreaking, devalued forms of manual labor necessary for the expansion and growth of California, the new center of agricultural production in the American West. Preferred to the African American workers who had begun coming to the industrialized North and industrializing West Coast during the Great Migration, and preceding the *braceros* recruited from Mexico between 1942 and 1967, Filipino men contributed millions of dollars to the California economy while being on the receiving end of racial violence applied to the individual and collective body.⁵

It was during the first half of the 20th century that residential hotels in San Francisco adjacent to Chinatown such as the International Hotel, the Clayton Hotel, and the Royal Hotel became some of the most affordable, and safest, living options for the manongs. Because of their itinerant lifestyle as seasonal agricultural workers or traveling longshoremen, the bachelor manongs were only in need of housing for days, weeks, or months at a time, until old age or infirmity required they retire from their transient employment.⁶ They were further barred through restrictive racial covenants from renting

⁵ As Angelo Ancheta documents: “In 1929, the California legislature urged Congress to limit Filipino immigration and instructed the state’s Department of Industrial Relations to study and report on the ‘Filipino problem’... Representative Richard Welch of San Francisco introduced federal legislation in 1930 that would have included Filipinos among the categories of Asian excluded from the United States. Welch claimed that U.S. labor interests were threatened by the latest ‘horde of unassimilable Asiatics’ and the ‘third invasion’” (2006, 94).

⁶ In addition to the working-class manongs were the *pensionados*, middle-class Filipino men who came to the U.S. to pursue higher education at schools such as the University of California-Berkeley and City College of San Francisco. When they were forced to quit their schooling during the Great Depression, some remained in the United States, working in the service sector in San Francisco and other West Coast cities; they found employment in restaurants, hotels, private whites-only social clubs, and large department stores

or purchasing homes in white neighborhoods. To accommodate these men, a Filipino ethnic enclave was formed adjacent to Chinatown, based on the fact that Filipinos were racially categorized as Asians and that white settlers “assumed that Filipinos would be housed adjacent to the Chinese” (Habal 2007, 10). Kearny Street, from Pine Street north to Pacific Street, became the hub of the growing Filipino community, and was “a primary destination for new arrivals in need of housing and information about jobs” (FANHS 2011, 17). It was an important way-station on these men’s migratory journeys, a place to catch up with friends, learn about new job opportunities, send telegrams and money to family members in the Philippines, and rest for several nights before moving on to more profitable agricultural and industrial centers elsewhere on the West Coast. First colloquially dubbed “Filipino town,” the entire area was also referred to as “Kearny Street” after its main thoroughfare and, later, was known as Manilatown.⁷

Of the hotels lining Kearny Street, it was the International Hotel that became a central home-place for the manongs, and later, a place where intense battles over housing rights were waged. By the 1930s, up to 30,000 Filipino workers lived in thirty-seven hotels in the area, with the International Hotel being one of the nicest options available.

throughout the city (FANHS 2011, 8). These men, too, needed affordable housing in San Francisco, and found themselves living in residential hotels alongside their *kababayan* (countrymen), producing homosocial kinships across difference, the formation of which would likely have been improbable in the motherland. In the literature on the I-Hotel struggle, all elderly male Filipino tenants are referred to as manongs and I will follow that convention even if some were actually pensionados.

⁷ The Filipino Oral History Project of Stockton recorded this unnamed manong’s memory of traveling up and down the West Coast that was typical of many bachelor workers’ experiences in the 1920s: “I didn’t want to stay [in America]... Gee, you don’t know anyone. And you can’t find work. But then Filipino contractors were looking for people to go to work picking raspberries... On my first day I earned one dollar for a whole day’s work. I didn’t know how to work yet. Later I improved...improving a little every day and earned a little more money. The most I received then was \$2.50 a day. That was in 1926. Then I left Seattle and took the steamship Alexander the Great to San Francisco. It took one day and one night. That evening I slept at the International Hotel on Kearny Street. The next day I took the ferryboat, the Delta Queen on the river to Sacramento. There I met one kababayan, townmate, and stayed there picking peaches” (1984).

Compared to other similar rooming houses in Chinatown and Manilatown, the International Hotel was attractive for its more spacious rooms and more generous light, and had 184 boarding rooms on the two upper floors, with commercial and community space on the ground level and basement (Habal 2007, 10). Price and location were a factor too: with an ideal location adjacent to Chinatown and the Barbary Coast, these hotels were single-room occupancies offering shared hallway bathrooms and a communal kitchen facility for a low price; in the 1960s, a room in the International Hotel could be rented out for a relatively modest fifty dollars per month (Salomon 1998, 96).

By all accounts, the International Hotel was not a luxurious place for the manongs to reside over the decades: by the 1950s and 60s, it was a far cry from the exclusive, high-end, whites-only entertainment and lodging site of the early 1900s.⁸ Rather than the rooms inside the I-Hotel, it was services provided by local Kearny Street businesses, and the “brotherhood” formed within these spaces, that were of greatest value to the now-elderly manongs. Al Robles remembers: “Next door [to the I Hotel] was Tino’s Barber Shop and next door to that was Bataan Drug Store, the Bataan Pool Hall, the Bataan Restaurant... Lucky’s Pool Hall. That pool hall has a history all the way up to now. The Filipino boys all know each other. We are drawn together. We all come from the same place. We feel at home here” (qtd. in Habal 2007, 21). For meals, manongs could dine

⁸ By the time of the I-Hotel protests in the 1960s and 1970s, the hotel was actually in its third iteration. The first structure called the International Hotel was built in 1854 on Jackson Street near San Francisco’s tony tourist and banking districts, and was moved to 848 Kearny Street in 1873 (Habal 2007, 9). After the great San Francisco fire and earthquake of 1906, the International Hotel was demolished and rebuilt as a luxury accommodation in the city center which catered to visiting dignitaries; it was marketed as “the very best hotel for the price,” near to the “post, express, telegraph offices, and U.S. Land Office,” with rooms in “first-class order” and a restaurant “supplied with the best that the market affords (Advertisement, undated, courtesy of University of California, Santa Barbara, Davidson Library, Department of Special Collections, California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, Santa Barbara, California, 93106-9010, United States).

cheaply at the Mabuhay restaurant on the first floor of the I-Hotel, or the Filipino restaurants just across the street: Bagong Sikat, Blanco's, the Sampaguita, and other cheap *turo-turo* joints. Asian restaurants in Chinatown and nearby Nihonmachi (Japantown) added Filipino items to their menus to cater to the manongs, too. Portsmouth Square, bordering Kearny Street and bisecting Manilatown and Chinatown, offered a relaxing outdoor location where, to this day, elderly Filipino and Chinese men play checkers and practice tai chi. And for illicit pursuits, Filipino, Chinese, *and* white patrons frequented Manilatown's pool halls, bars, music clubs, and back room gambling dens while local elected officials—many of whom also patronized these places—looked the other way. Finally, the Kearny Street Workshop, founded in 1972 and the first Asian American collective art space in the nation, was on the ground floor of the International Hotel. Here, young Asian American Movement radicals and manongs worked together to produce posters, flyers, and other political art, such as the published collection *We Won't Move: Poems and Photographs of the International Hotel Struggle* (1977). The I-Hotel was thus a centralized location ideally situated for the production and maintenance of a vibrant, autonomous community where Filipino men could look out for one another and take care of their own needs in the absence of state support and opportunities for social mobility and integration.

While hardly fulfilling the promise of the American Dream for these men, Manilatown became both a site of pleasure and necessity, a strange place in a foreign land that the manongs transformed into their own. The new suburban areas of Richmond and Daly City, removed as they were from the social life of Manilatown, were simply not an option for the manongs, who, in their twilight years, had finally found comfort,

stability, and a community on Kearny Street that could not be replicated elsewhere. For manongs such as Felix Ayson—an elderly farmworker who became a leader of the I-Hotel anti-eviction movement—the International Hotel and other such residential hotels were their permanent homes and sources of community in the United States. These former way-stations were transvalued and transformed by these manongs into safe havens, the preferred places of residence for manongs who became too old or infirm to work or who were forcefully pushed out from their jobs because of increasing anti-Filipino sentiment and the effects of postwar deindustrialization and then globalization on the Bay Area and West Coast.⁹ When the manongs finally did leave Manilatown, it was often not of their own volition—the redevelopment of Manilatown in the service of corporate interests remains a stain on San Francisco’s imaginary of itself as a multicultural, liberal city, and was only the first of many high-profile eviction cases that have plagued the city over the subsequent fifty years.¹⁰

Eviction as Strategy: San Francisco’s Brand of Urban Redevelopment

By 1967, The International Hotel was the sole remaining single-room occupancy residential hotel for the elderly manongs in Manilatown, and the fight to save it from

⁹ In one of the most heartbreaking scenes from Curtis Choy’s film, *The Fall of the I-Hotel*, Manong Felix Ayson says to the camera: “Most of my time and my years in America I spend in this hotel, so it is my home. Whenever no work in the country, I come here and find a job in the city, and I live here.” Ayson had lived in the hotel since 1928; he died a year after the eviction, probably of heartbreak himself (qtd. in Habal 2007, 175).

¹⁰ Some of San Francisco’s more recent claims to fame as a politically progressive, multicultural city include its permitting of cannabis clubs for medical marijuana usage; extending health insurance coverage for sex-change operations for municipal employees; its 33% Asian/Pacific Islander population; and its appointment of a transgender person to the City’s Human Rights Commission (Hartman 2002, 1-2).

demolition lasted a decade, until the fateful eviction night of August 4, 1977. After an all-night battle waged between the San Francisco Sheriff's Department with hundreds of activists drawn from a multiracial, multigenerational coalition, the I-Hotel was lost, its elderly inhabitants never able to return. The decade-long I-Hotel campaign marked the first large-scale anti-eviction mobilization in San Francisco, setting a precedent for subsequent affordable housing and tenants rights movements in the city, from the Trinity Hotel protests in the mid-1990s to the Google Bus blockades in 2014.¹¹ But how did eviction become a spatial fix, a viable solution to the city's economic woes and spatial constraints for new development?

Where once San Francisco was under threat of being "Manhattanized," as of 2015 the City by the Bay, and not New York, has become the poster child of gentrification in the United States; astronomically rising rents of existing housing stock, record-breaking numbers of Ellis Act and no-fault evictions, and the influx of investment in (and new construction of) downtown office spaces for start-up and established technology industry firms are changing the urban landscape at unprecedented rate.¹² This is hardly a new

¹¹ See: Shaw, Randy. "Historic Trinity Plaza Deal Finalized." *BeyondChron*. June 9, 2005. <http://www.beyondchron.org/historic-trinity-plaza-deal-finalized>.

Also see: Bowe, Rebecca. "April Fools Day in San Francisco: Acrobats block Google Bus." *San Francisco Bay Guardian*. April 1, 2014. <http://www.sfbg.com/politics/2014/04/01/april-fools-day-san-francisco-acrobats-block-google-bus>.

Newsweek reported in 2014 that, since 2011, 69% of no-fault evictions in San Francisco have occurred within four block of a private bus shuttle stop for tech company employees, making the Google bus blockades a potent form of protest against evictions (Kloc, Joe. "Tech Boom Forces a Ruthless Gentrification in San Francisco." *Newsweek*. April 15, 2014. <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/04/25/tech-boom-forces-ruthless-gentrification-san-francisco-248135.html>).

¹² In 2013, *Al Jazeera America* reported that San Francisco had the highest job growth rate in the technology industry, employing 36,600 in 2012 alone; that housing prices in the city increased 26% between 2011-2012, with the median home price rising to almost \$600,000; and that the average rent of a two-bedroom property was over \$1,900 per month (The Stream Team. "Gentrification in San Francisco." *Al Jazeera America*. November 1, 2013. <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/the-stream/the-latest/2013/11/1/gentrification-insanfrancisco.html>)

pattern, however, and the city's first large-scale experiments in gentrification coded as "urban renewal" or "urban redevelopment" can be traced as early as 1948, with the formation of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) that year.¹³ The city's role in the destruction of Manilatown is less widely known and reviled as its redevelopment projects in the Western Addition and Fillmore (so structurally racist it is colloquially termed "Negro Removal"), but what is remembered about the fight to save the International Hotel was its being the first instance of large-scale mass mobilization against evictions bringing together activists from across racial, classed, national, and sexual lines.¹⁴

Coined by sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe distinct processes of urban respatialization in London after World War II, gentrification was identified by Glass as a complex process including "the rehabilitation of old housing stock, tenurial transformation from renting to owning, property price increases, and the displacement of working-class residents by the incoming middle class" (Lees et. al 2005, 5). Likewise, geographer Neil Smith identified gentrification as the "reinvestment of CAPITAL at the urban center, which is designed to produce space for a more affluent class of people than currently occupies that space" (2000, 294; emphasis in original). These definitions of

¹³ In partnership with private-public entities such as the Bay Area Council, the Blythe-Zellerbach Committee, and the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association (SPUR), the SFRA in the 1950s under its head Justin Herman grew to a staff of several hundred, worked in close relation to Mayor Christopher's office, and had control over eight renewal projects and tens of millions in federal subsidies (Hartman 2002, 18). The passage of federal urban renewal legislation by Congress in 1949 and 1954, and the distribution of federal monies to the SFRA to "assemble land, clear it of offending uses, and finance redevelopment" greatly empowered the SFRA to undertake its sweeping spatial reorganization of the city between the late 1950s and the 1970s (Walker 1998, 4).

¹⁴ The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's A-1 and A-2 Projects in the Western Addition and Fillmore are discussed in greater depth in Chapter One of the dissertation.

what now is dubbed the stage of “classical gentrification” was used in the U.S. context to describe largely residential transformations, as disinvested inner-city neighborhoods were “upgraded” by middle-class white pioneer gentrifiers who improved housing stock on an individual building-by-building basis with assistance from the state in the form of preferential mortgages and home improvement loans. In the case of Manilatown and other San Francisco redevelopment projects, however, gentrification has been a much more complex process, that is not only or even about the transformation of working-class housing stock into middle-class housing stock but about the razing of entire working-class neighborhoods to suit the designs of corporations, financial institutions, and municipal government seeking to remake the city into a global banking and financial capital beginning in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁵ It is thus more useful to deploy the definition of contemporary gentrification proposed by geographers Elvin Wyly and Daniel J. Hammel, who argue that “gentrification underwrites new configurations of highest and best use, reallocations of neighborhood public services, and realignments of police practices and public space regulation... [T]he interests and priorities of gentrifiers are a foundational element of the post-industrial city as growth machine” (2005, 36). This expanded definition posits gentrification as a systemic process undertaken in different

¹⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes of the impact globalization and national recession had in the state of California: “The mid-1970s recession produced many other kinds of displacements, related to the movement of dollars away from gold and capital away from production. Steep unemployment deepened the effects of high inflation for workers and their families. Big corporations eliminated jobs and factories in high-wage heavy industries (e.g., auto, steel, rubber) decimating entire regions of the country and emptying cities of wealth and people. Even higher unemployment plagued farmworkers and other who labored in rural extractive industries such as timber, fishing, and mining [...] Urban dwellers left cities, looking for new jobs, for cheaper housing (given the inflated cost of houses and money), or for whiter communities, and suburban residential and industrial districts developed at the same time that city centers crumbled. Those left behind were stuck in space, lacking for social or financial mobility to follow capital, while at the same time international migrants arrived in the US, pushed and pulled across territory and state by the same forces of equalization and different that were producing the US cataclysm” (1998, 178-179).

proportions by the city, private developers and investors, small and large businesses, and affluent individuals, resulting in the increased surveillance and disciplining of working-class people—primarily people of color and LGBTQ people at that—and, evidenced in the case of San Francisco, the use of eviction as a strategy of large-scale spatial reorganization favoring profits over human lives.¹⁶

Interdisciplinary art scholar Rosalyn Deutsche identifies two qualifications a city must possess as a international center of business: having a high proportion of corporate headquarters doing the majority of their business in foreign sales, and having a centralization of international banks and international corporate-related services (law, accounting and advertising firms). Deutsche argues that by the 1970s in the United States, only New York City and San Francisco had emerged as such global cities; these cities were able to do so through radically reorganizing urban space to attract international capital, and were greatly enabled by the global outsourcing of blue-collar labor (1996, 16). By 1968, the “Manhattanization,” or high-rise expansion of San Francisco’s Financial District had been underway for more than a decade, and was accelerating; city planners expected to expand downtown upward with numerous high-rise office buildings, and to move outward into adjacent neighborhoods (Habal 2011, 127). Two features mark this period in San Francisco, with the first being the large scale displacement of working-class people from neighborhoods within the city without

¹⁶ Rosalyn Deutsche writes that “Redevelopment... was hardly a matter of the city enlisting the real-estate industry to fulfill the needs of its residents. Rather, real estate and other capital interests enlisted city government to supply the conditions to guarantee their profits and reduce their risks”(1996, 26). She gives the example of urban planning in New York City, beginning in the 1970s, that “government subsidies to real-estate developers are not limited to direct financial outlays or to tax abatements and exceptions. Benefits also accrue from the city's administration of institutional allowances for building, especially through its bureaucratic procedures and zoning regulations" (44). We see strong, if not identical, similarities in San Francisco over this same time period, as is comprehensively documented in Chester Hartman’s *City for Sale: The Transformation of San Francisco* (2002).

alternative housing options provided for them. Many moved to the East Bay and South Bay, San Jose and the Peninsula; while some went to newly integrating suburbs, many left to other, less desirable accommodations. Second, the reorganization of city space radically reconfigured its workforce and economic infrastructure. Ports, markets, warehouses and formerly light industrial businesses were moved out of San Francisco and to the East Bay or out of the Bay Area altogether¹⁷; Redevelopment Agency funds were allocated for the development of high-rise office space, luxury housing for new white-collar workers arriving in the city, and the construction of cultural centers such as the Yerba Buena Center and Moscone Convention Center.¹⁸ Previously undesirable parcels of land—such as the disinvested Kearny Street neighborhood—became venues for speculative real estate investment from backers as far away as Hong Kong and Thailand.¹⁹ Displaced working-class people—many of whom were immigrants and/or

¹⁷ Between 1960 and 1966, there was a “displacement from San Francisco to Oakland of most shipping after the Mechanization and Modernization contracts signed by the Pacific Maritime Association and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union... which allowed for containers to replace hand loading and unloading of ships. This made large areas of San Francisco’s southern bay shore economically redundant and eliminated crucial employment opportunities historically filled by the City’s African-American population” (Welch 2011, 155).

¹⁸ In a single generation—from the 1960’s to the early 1980s—San Francisco shifted its economic base from manufacturing and distribution to services, replaced its capital stock of low-rise factories and warehouses with high-rise office buildings, and transformed its labor force from blue collar to white collar. Massive capital investments were required to permit the concentration of employment required by the new economy: high-rise buildings were constructed downtown to provide office space; public transportation systems BART and Muni Metro were built to access the labor force and move people from the expanding East Bay suburbs to the city’s financial centers; and the construction of the Moscone Center and new downtown hotels transformed tourism into a basic industry employing 14% of the city’s private sector labor force. A quantum expansion of the San Francisco International Airport, in addition, was undertaken to address regional needs in an increasingly global marketplace. This infrastructure and the entrepreneurs and labor force it attracted are, according to SPUR, the foundation of the city’s current economy, and represent much of the competitive advantage leveraged by the city’s basic industries (“San Francisco Economy: Implications for Public Policy.” *SPUR*. July 1, 2000. <http://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2000-07-01/san-francisco-economy>.)

¹⁹ By the time that the eviction order on the I-Hotel was finally carried out by the Sheriff’s Department, the ownership of the I-Hotel had changed hands several times. Its final owner was the Hong Kong-based Four

people of color—now commuted to the city from far away to work as unskilled or low-skilled labor, in the private homes, hotels restaurants, and other places of leisure catering to white collar workers in the expanding business and financial sectors. As in New York, artists and musicians were some of those who both resisted and benefited from gentrification—the hippies, for example, were countercultural rebels that resisted redevelopment in places the Haight-Ashbury, even as they were able to remain precisely because they were not African American as their neighbors were in the Western Addition.²⁰ Even as the City by the Bay has been celebrated for its iconoclasm and creative energy, since the 1960s city has favored the interests of capitalism and private property over the livelihoods and homes of its working-class residents; while valued for their bringing “culture” to the city in the form of jazz, art, and “ethnic cuisine,” working-class black, Latino, and Asian communities have been the first targeted for eviction and displacement, as populations not worthy to be invested in by the city or private interests.

Eviction was an easy spatial fix to solve the “problem” of inner city neighborhoods like Manilatown in the late 1960s and 1970s, poverty-stricken places adjacent or near to the Financial District and other downtown areas deemed prime for capital investment. San Francisco had no regulations in place to protect tenants’ rights to housing: there was no rent control, no rent increase protections, and evictions were as

Seas Investment Company, run by a liquor magnate from Thailand with ties to organized crime (Shaw 2011, 287).

²⁰ “Tentatively planned to be the A-3 project area of the Western Addition redevelopment area, by 1968 the Haight-Ashbury was saved from redevelopment by the hippie invasion. The huge influx into the neighborhood not only changed the City’s plans for the area but also dramatically changed the social and political dynamics within the neighborhood” (Welch 2011, 158-159). The politicizing of the new hippie residents in the Haight-Ashbury by longtime residents and other activists from the Inner Sunset, Eureka Valley, and other San Francisco neighborhoods who would also be affected by UCSF’s planned hospital extension efforts in the city provides an example of the importance of coalitional work with white allies in anti-redevelopment movements.

simple as the landlord dispensing an eviction notice and awaiting the sheriff's arrival. At the national level, federal tax laws also gave incentive for landlords to evict poor and working-class tenants—renovating rental units for occupancy by higher-paying tenants could be deducted from landlord's taxes as business expense. Depreciation deductions and mortgage interest tax break for owners also made residential real estate a popular tax shelter in San Francisco at a time when high incomes were still taxed at 70% rate (Shaw 1998, 287-288). In the case of the International Hotel and Manilatown, its utility as a residential area with small ethnic businesses for its local residents was deemed as an inappropriate usage of land during this period, with SFRA head Justin Herman famously saying that "this land is too valuable for poor people to park on it" (qtd in Salomon 1998, 95). Property owners seeking to cash in by evicting tenants, upgrading or outright demolishing residential buildings, and selling their buildings or empty lots to corporations also saw the I-Hotel and its tenants as disposable; any resistance to eviction was seen as "standing in the way of progress."²¹ As a top SFRA priority in the late 1960s and 1970s, the Financial District Redevelopment Project had no need for the Filipinos "parked" on the valuable real estate occupied by the I-Hotel; the City's goal was to attract and keep international businesses to enlarge its tax base, and the I-Hotel site was deemed an ideal location to build a parking lot for white collar workers in the trading companies, banks, and other corporations in the area (Salomon 1998, 94-5). Rezoned as part of the Financial District and subject to the SFRA Redevelopment Project, Manilatown and its

²¹ The attorney for I-Hotel owner Milton Meyer and Company said in 1969 of the tenant resistance that "these poor unfortunates did not realize what they were subjecting themselves to. Don't let this single little case stand in the way of progress" (qtd. in Habal 2007, 42).

immediate surroundings lost 4,000 low-income units that were replaced with parking lots and high-rise office buildings, including the TransAmerica Pyramid and the Bank of America world headquarters, with the I-Hotel being the last building in the ten block radius of Manilatown still standing by 1967.

In order to demolish the International Hotel its longtime inhabitants would have to be evicted—forcibly extracted from their residences with little justification for their removal—as had been the residents of similar single-occupancy residencies and residential hotels throughout the district.²² The first eviction notice to I-Hotel tenants came in October 1968, four months after the property’s owner, Milton Meyer and Company, had applied for permission to demolish the hotel (Habal 2007, 32). Unlike similar cases of eviction, the elderly tenants of the International Hotel who decided to stay—and some of whom had been active with farmworker, service worker, and dock worker unionization movements in their laboring years—organized themselves and led a resistance movement against eviction for a decade.²³ Felix Ayson, Claudio Domingo and Wahat Tampao were some of the most active tenant leaders, educating their fellow tenants; organized and mobilized meetings and demonstrations; and vowed to developers that if the building were demolished, they would have to do it “over our bodies” (qtd. in

²² The January 1969 eviction and subsequent demolition of the Palm Hotel, a half-block from the International Hotel, was instructive and a further motivation for I-Hotel tenants to fight collectively against eviction. The city had not made plans to relocate the Palm’s approximately ninety tenants (75% Filipino), and they were left homeless after eviction (Habal 2007, 42).

²³ Habal notes that at the beginning of December 1968, 182 people lived in the I-Hotel’s 184 rooms, with a majority of residents being Filipinos. By the end of May 1969, approximately 65 tenants remained, with just over 50 of them being Filipino. By summer 1971, 60% of the tenants were Filipino, 30% were Chinese, and the remaining 10% of the tenants were white, Latino, or black. Moreover, most of the Filipino tenants remaining after the initial panic caused by the first eviction notice were over the age of sixty-five; they remained, in part, because they had fewer alternatives for mobility and fewer resources than middle-aged or young tenants (Habal 2007, 22 and 34).

Habal 2007, 42). They were primarily supported by Filipino/American student activists from UC Berkeley and San Francisco State College (now University) and recently immigrated Filipino radicals who had escaped Martial Law in the Philippines. Housing and labor activist Bill Sorro, student activist Emil de Guzman, and poet and housing activist Al Robles were some of the most visible Filipino/Americans working with the manong tenants over the decades. During large-scale actions and in negotiations with the City, the I-Hotel's allies included "Civil Rights activists, labor leader and rank-and-file members, religious spokesmen and their congregations, anti-war and anti-imperialist activists, advocates for gay rights, and organizers for district elections" (Habal 2011, 126). By the mid-1970s, the I-Hotel campaign had gathered enough notice and backing from the greater public that saving it became a major topic in electoral politics, with even Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk declaring their public support of the campaign (Habal 2011, 127). The Asian American Movement and Third World liberation movements were galvanized in large part through their involvement with the I-Hotel campaign²⁴; the slogan "We Won't Move!" became a rallying call not only to preserve the homes of the manongs, but also served as a city-wide mantra for all working-class, queer, and otherwise marginalized peoples against the spatial reorganization of the city as a playground for the business elite.

While the International Hotel was ultimately lost—with the Sheriff's Department breaking down the barricades and storming the building in the early morning hours of August 4th to evict its remaining tenants—the I-Hotel struggle had tremendous impact on

²⁴ See: Kordziel, Beverley. "To Be Part of the People: The International Hotel Collective." *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*, eds. Steve Louie and Glenn Omatsu. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2006. 241-247.

subsequent tenants rights movements throughout the city and state. A few notable gains in the years immediately following the I-Hotel eviction are instructive: The visibility of the I-Hotel movement, along with the rapid increase in downtown high-rise construction and rising real estate values and rents, had “increased insecurity and hence militancy among tenants, particularly among seniors with a high voter turnout record” (Shaw 1998, 289). Increased activism around getting and passing propositions on the ballots in the California elections of November 1978 and 1979 resulted in the first moderate Rent Stabilization Ordinance in June 1979, passed by Mayor Dianne Feinstein (291). Tenants rights coalitions successfully lobbied city politicians to pass a citywide moratorium on single-room occupancy residential hotels (SROs) being converted into tourist lodgings in 1979, followed by the passage of the Residential Hotel Ordinance legislation in 1981.²⁵ The creation of new tenants organizations in 1980, including the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, the Affordable Housing Alliance, and the North of Market Planning Coalition, also strengthened citywide tenant activism; many were modeled on the coalitional and poor-people-centered politics of the I-Hotel movement that preceded them (293). The International Hotel’s afterlife thus continues in the ongoing struggles of tenants in San Francisco and the larger Bay Area region, including and exceeding the hotel’s eventual reconstruction and reopening in 2005 as low-cost housing for the elderly.

²⁵ “Like the moderate rent control [legislation, it] had many loopholes but gave tenants unprecedented safeguards. The city’s Residential Hotel Ordinance became an ongoing battleground, with tenants successfully strengthening the law with legislative reforms in 1985, 1987, and 1990. The Residential Hotel Ordinance is arguably the most successful land-use regulation in San Francisco’s history, having accomplished its goal of preserving the city’s largest supply of low-cost housing. The law’s broad political support is a legacy of the I-Hotel struggle” (Shaw 1998, 292).

The Material, Affective, and Cultural Production of Space: The Project's Theoretical Framing and Political Stakes

After the I-Hotel centers an analysis of cultural production in its excavation of the social history and the physical, cultural, and affective geographies of Filipino/American life in the Bay Area region in the afterlife of the I-Hotel. David Harvey writes that “the production of images and of discourses is an important facet of activity that has to be analyzed as part and parcel of the reproduction and transformation of any symbolic order,” and I take up his call in this study of the competing visual, performative, and textual discourses that are productive of Filipino/American subjects as belonging to—or not belonging in—both the symbolic spaces and material places of the San Francisco Bay Area from the 1960s through the present moment (Harvey 1991, 355). It is clear that in order to more deeply understand how the “geographical configuration of the landscape contributes to the survival of capitalism” in San Francisco and the impact it had on Filipino/Americans, it is not enough to analyze the production of subjects in/and place through economic shifts alone (Smith 2008, 4). Rather, to attend to geography is to study “space, place, and location in their physical materiality and imaginative configurations” (McKittrick 2006, x). The destruction of Manilatown in the 1970s—its literal erasure from the San Francisco city map—was made possible in part by the success of the discourses deployed by politicians like Mayor Joseph Alioto and real estate elite like the President of Milton Meyer Company, Walter Shorenstein; they used the language of progress and modernization as benefits of “urban renewal” and “redevelopment” (terms far preferable to eviction in their covering over of the human cost of displacement), and deployed an understanding of housing as a commodity to be exchanged like any other

(Habal 2007, 45). They did not see the values of “‘home’ and community that stood outside the cash nexus,” and made their non-support of the International Hotel tenants one of “[being unable to] supersede the fundamental dynamics of capital” (45). In response to the City’s support of private property rights, the I-Hotel tenant activists framed their fight for housing as a human right; their work, like that of the artists I write about in the subsequent chapters, centered on transvaluing the International Hotel into a cultural center and the manongs as still having worth in their old age outside of their former roles as abjected manual laborers. Even after the International Hotel was demolished and reduced to a pile of rubble, activists, students, and cultural workers used the memory of the International Hotel to produce new imaginative configurations of Filipino San Francisco—some of their efforts to do so are those central to this project.

The scholarship of critical geographers such as Clyde Woods, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Neil Smith, and feminist geographers such as Katherine McKittrick and Doreen Massey influence my attention to both the physical and imaginative elements that produce abstract space into materialized places of Filipino/American life in the greater San Francisco Bay Area; their work extends diaspora and immigration studies analyses of the constitution of racialized and ethnic social formations by focusing on the ways that the physical landscape is produced by, and simultaneously is productive of, interpersonal relations and the movement of capital, bodies, and cultural forms. In its most general sense, geographical space can be understood as “the space of human activity, from architectural space at a lower scale up to the scale of the entire surface of the earth.”²⁶

²⁶ Smith 2008, 93. Further on scale, Sallie A. Marston writes that “Scale is constituted and reconstituted around relations of capitalist production, social reproduction and consumption, and that attention to all

This framing of space as produced, reproduced, destroyed, and recreated through processes of societal activity is at the heart of my critical geographic inquiry into the possibilities for Filipino San Francisco; rather than accept space as an empty “container” for human interaction to occur “in,” *After the I-Hotel* studies the ways in which Filipino/Americans of varying class, educational, gendered and sexualized backgrounds have actively produced space into differentiated places of Filipino San Francisco through banal and spectacular articulations of living, acting and working (Smith 2008, 116).

While mass mobilizations are crucial to the (re)production of place—as the I-Hotel struggle briefly discussed above clearly demonstrates—this project centers an analysis of the ways in which Filipino/American literature, visual art, and performance contribute to producing Filipino/American place in San Francisco, especially in the absence of an urban ethnic enclave like Manilatown to contain and sustain them. It is inspired by site-specific studies of the uses of art and culture in Latino/a communities in New York and Los Angeles conducted by Arlene Davila and Raul Homero Villa, respectively; like Davila and Villa, I maintain that cultural work is central to the ongoing labor of organizing housing rights struggles, for its role in generating creative modes of resistance to displacement and other anti-social forms of urban planning that can be directly applied or which are necessary towards imagining new possibilities. Of the mundane daily acts and the spectacular cultural productions emerging from the *barrios* of Los Angeles, Villa (2000) writes:

Manifesting alternative needs and interests from those of the dominant public sphere, the expressive practices of barrio social and cultural

three sets of relations is critical to understanding fully the social construction of scale” (“The social Construction of Scale,” *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 2 (2000): 221).

reproduction—from the mundane exercise of daily-round and leisure activities to the formal articulation of community defensive goals in organizational forms and discursive media—reveal multiple possibilities for re-creating and re-imagining dominant urban space as community-enabling place... Collectively, these community-sustaining practices constitute a tactical ethos (and aesthetics) of barrio logic ever engaged in counterpoint to external *barrioization*. (6)

In the case of the “post-International Hotel” moment, cultural productions by Filipino/American visual artists, performers, and writers have provided valuable evidence of the endurance of Filipino/American communities in the Bay Area, even after being displaced from ethnic enclaves like Manilatown. Al Robles, Barbara Jane Reyes, Carlos Villa, Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa and others whose work is analyzed in this project were chosen for the ways they map imaginative sites of Filipino/American history and memory retroactively, for the present, and into the future—these places operate on multiple temporal registers as heterotopias capable of sustaining Filipino/American life at a time of great geographic dispersal and economic disparities.²⁷ They labor to revalue lives produced by the state and private developers as “blighted” or as disposable, creating spatial imaginaries that reconfigure individual subjectivity, kinship and support networks, and concepts of Filipino/American place in the city, region, and nation. In imagining other modes of reality and ways of reclaiming place even in times of economic uncertainty and sociopolitical precarity, Filipino/American artists “force us to rethink

²⁷ The concept of *heterotopia* is taken from Michel Foucault, who writes: Utopias “are sites with no real place. They are real sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They represent society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. There also are in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society- which are something like counter sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted... Because these sites are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, *heterotopias*” (24; emphasis in original).

perceptions, boundaries, and limitations” and in doing so, “objectively advance other struggles for change” (Widener 2010, 289). As such, their work does double duty: as supplements to the official archive, they excavate the ways Filipino/Americans in San Francisco, over the course of the 20th century and early 21st centuries, have survived despite intense economic duress, anti-Filipino racism, segregation, and waves of redevelopment, eviction and displacement. As future projections and utopian articulations of hope, these works also enable us to imagine new strategies for fighting against the ongoing and increasing forces of “urban renewal” in the San Francisco Bay Area, elsewhere in the United States, and globally.

Like other critical geographic studies, this project attempts to “make visible social lives which are often displaced, rendered ungeographic” by engaging with narratives that expose forms of “rational spatial colonization and domination” or the “profitable erasure and objectification of subaltern subjectivities, stories, and lands” (McKittrick 2006, x). This illumination occurs by my dual exploration of both the “geographies of domination”—or the material practices and imaginative processes that have been undertaken by the state and social actors to subjugate colonized and enslaved peoples and their lands—as well as the geographies of the oppressed, comprised of their own knowledge, experiences, and negotiations over place.²⁸ In three discrete yet overlapping

²⁸ McKittrick 2006, x. An example of this dual process was documented in the late Clyde Wood’s masterful study of the historical emergence and contemporary manifestations of “plantation bloc” geographies in the American South, and the ways in which African American peoples have engaged in creative and critical modes of reclaiming place in the South. In *Development Arrested* and later articles, Woods demonstrates how the blues tradition has functioned to organize working-class African Americans, giving a new voice to communities facing severe spatial and social fragmentation (2005, 1008). Combining African American folklore, spiritual traditions, and musical practices, the blues ethic of social justice labors to materially and imaginatively “break the bonds of dependency” in all its forms including “racialized impoverishment, enclosure and displacement, neoplantation politics, the arbitrariness of daily life, the denial of human

ways, I uncover the labor that writers, artists, and performers do to “make space” for Filipino/American communities living and working the San Francisco Bay Area.

1. *Cultural workers “make space” for Filipino/Americans by generating life-affirming and anti-colonial spatial theories.*

This project argues that in their “re-imagining dominant urban space as community-enabling place,” cultural workers are *productive of theories of Filipino/American space and place rooted in values alternative to the logics of settler colonialism and speculative capitalism which structure the socioeconomic and physical landscapes of the city and the region* (Villa 2000, 6). In the discourse of the SFRA, city politicians, private developers and real estate speculators, Filipino/Americans and other working-class and queer people of color are rendered as “out of place” and “out of time” in the modern urban cityscape. The manongs—aged out of profitable labor, and taking up valuable real estate in downtown San Francisco’s International Hotel—are but the first example that this dissertation addresses. As the following chapters aim to illuminate, cultural works discursively transvalue inhospitable urban space into life-giving places for people of color, queer people, and women, and these acts perform essential critiques of

rights, cultural imposition, the manufacturing of savages, regionally distinct traps, and the desecration of sacred places” (1009).

In Chapter One, I engage with the poetry of the late Al Robles as productive of and deploying a unique Filipino/American blues epistemology that labored to capture the lives of the manong generation in Manilatown at a moment of intense SFRA redevelopment schemes in the neighborhood. Like the African American blues tradition, the Filipino/American blues is an organizing tool used in conjunction with collective actions to save the International Hotel and fight against the denial of housing rights to an aging population deemed no longer economically useful to the state. Tracing Robles’s blues ethics and its aesthetics thus allows me to inquire into the multiple modes of resistance to displacement practiced by Filipino/Americans in collaboration and solidarity with other communities of color, especially the African American residents of the Western Addition/Fillmore district. It is but the first of several inquiries in the subsequent chapters into the ways in which racial capitalism is consolidated over and against Filipino/American migrant populations in San Francisco, and the various modes of creative actions undertaken in opposition to these acts of discursive and material violence.

redevelopment campaigns to “clean up” neighborhoods deemed in need of commercial development and increased police surveillance. More than represent existing ethnic and racial minorities as a cohesive political entity, the cultural productions I analyze here actively labor to expand notions of “beloved community” to include those left out of dominant, masculine-centered and nationalist frameworks of ethnic subjectivity.²⁹ These works recuperate and excavate urban and suburban neighborhoods formerly and presently populated by Filipino/American people while also creating new forms of expansive Filipino/American individual and collective subjectivities during and after the widespread regional dispersal of Filipino/Americans after the International Hotel.

2. *Cultural workers “make space” for Filipino/Americans by expanding the borders of Filipino San Francisco to include places like the East Bay suburbs, the South of Market and Fillmore, Silicon Valley, and the Philippines under Martial Law.*

Deploying blues epistemologies, feminist and queer analytics of space, and other creative strategies, Filipino/American artists Al Robles, Barbara Jane Reyes, Carlos Villa, Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa, the Mail Order Brides, and other collective arts groups broaden the spatial and temporal borders of Filipino San Francisco. Their works narrate histories of Filipino/American migration to, and displacement from, sites beyond Manilatown and the International Hotel in the decades between 1977 and 2015. These artists force their audiences to reckon with the imbricated histories of the suburban development of the East Bay and the militarization of the Philippines during the Cold

²⁹ “Beloved community” a concept expounded by Martin Luther King, Jr., who articulated its goals as such: “I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we see in life. And I think that end of that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community” (1966). Robin D.G. Kelley has expounded on the reproduction of the “beloved community” in black radical political actions and cultural productions, in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2006).

War; the simultaneous redevelopment efforts of the predominantly African American neighborhood of the Fillmore with Manilatown's destruction; the overlapping and contradictory interests of Filipino/American and LGBTQ communities in the South of Market; the interests of preserving Filipino/American culture within the site of the Yerba Buena Center Redevelopment Project; and the connections between the expansion of the technology industry in Silicon Valley with the exploitation of laborers in the Third World. Together, they produce a regional study of how "the channels of power and multiple *identificatory* historical and geographical sites produced by imperialism complicate the linear and singular trajectory of ethnic and national identity" (Isaac 2006, xxvi; emphasis in original); they expand the places we understand as "authentic" locations and subjectivities of Filipino San Francisco.

3. *Cultural workers "make space" for Filipino/Americans by troubling the categories of "Filipino/American art" and "political art" as genres with fixed visual, textual, or embodied vocabularies.*

Culture's central role in struggles for place is one of the enduring legacies of the International Hotel struggle, an important incubator for the Asian American Arts Movement that featured political posters, murals, and other public and interventionist artworks and live performances made "by the people, for the people." The anti-eviction posters made by the International Hotel Tenants Association (IHTA) and Kearny Street Workshop are some of the most recognizable works produced in this tradition.³⁰ In the

³⁰ One of the most well known images made during the I-Hotel struggle was a 1975 poster titled "SuperManong! Peace with a Lease" featuring a detailed illustration of manong tenant leader Wahat Tampao, dressed as a superhero and riding astride an Asian tiger. A caption below SuperManong, in comic book style and font, reads: "Not a day goes by when SuperManong doesn't use the magic energizing power of his fists to save the poor and needy, no matter who the enemy is. The first sign of people in need, something strange begins to happen even though he is a man of peace..." ("Peace with a Lease" poster courtesy of University of California, Santa Barbara, Davidson Library, Department of Special Collections,

pieces of this period, a place-based politics rooted in the materiality of Manilatown was central to the work, to make legitimate the movement's claim that the preservation of the hotel was more than about preserving a built structure, but was about saving an entire way of life. Asian American Movement-era artworks—alongside works produced by artists politically involved with the Black Arts Movement, Chicano muralists movement, and other radical arts movements of the 1960s and 1970s—powerfully articulated Third World consciousness in their bright colors and realist aesthetics; they produced “a shared vision of an alternative future in which Black, Asian, Native, and Latina/o communities could fully develop and express their humanity free of a historically-constructed, global system of oppression.”³¹ As art historian Margo Machida writes of the genres of “activist art” or “community art” in the Asian American community in the 1960s and 1970s:

California Ethnic and Multicultural Archives, Santa Barbara, California, 93106-9010, United States). The image of the tiger leaping head first was created by artist Jack Loo of the Kearny Street Workshop, and became the symbol of the I-Hotel movement; it was “ubiquitous, posted throughout the city, and was used for commemorations in later years” (Habal 2007, fn38, 200).

Made at the height of disputes between the I-Hotel tenants with Walter Shorenstein and The Four Seas Investment Corporation, the Thai-owned company that bought the building from Milton Meyer and Company in 1973, the poster's slogan of “Peace With a Lease” was a succinct articulation of the anti-eviction movement's demands between 1974 and 1976—that Four Seas Corporation lift the eviction notice for I-Hotel tenants; that they repair the building-code violations; and that the company should sign a long-term lease with the IHTA with the option for the association to buy the building (Habal 2007, 82). This followed a period of relative calm between 1969 and 1972, when the United Filipino Association (UFA) and Milton Meyer and Company agreed to a three-year lease for I-Hotel tenants. While the terms of the lease were onerous, this period dubbed “Peace with a Lease” became a moment for the nascent Asian American and Filipino American movements to strengthen their base, not only ideologically but also materially; Estella Habal writes that “at that moment, an assertion of community consciousness could be rooted in an actual place” (52). Commercial storefronts on the first floor of the building were rented by community groups, arts organizations, and revolutionary fronts including the Kearny Street Workshop, the Asian Community Center (ACC), the Chinese Progressive Association, and *Kalayaan* newspaper; this period led to the transformation of “Kearny Street” from “not only the social scene of the manongs but also the site of Asian American mobilization” (53).

³¹ Ferreira 2011, 39. Los Siete (El Comité Para Defender Los Siete de La Raza), a radical Chicano organization active in San Francisco in the 1970s, provided a useful working definition of Third World in their free and collectively-produced newsletter, *Basta Ya!*: “Third World is: African warriors and Spanish peasants, Indian fisherman, and Chinese laborers; is: a recognition that the world ‘ghetto’ which is meant for blacks and the word ‘barrio’ which is meant for Latinos are in actuality one and the same; is: a recognition of our common humanity in the face of the brutal inhumanity which has oppressed us; is: a

In reply to the challenges of this period, and to make manifest the nature of their lived experience and beliefs, the artists [in the community arts movement] employed a visual vocabulary that drew equally upon local sites and people that shaped their imaginative consciousness, and on motifs and references associated with their ethnic and cultural heritage. Commonly taking the form of large-scale public murals or silk-screened posters, prints, and book illustrations, and seeking to convey a staunch sense of intercommunity solidarity, the approach of many of these artists was often overtly political and pragmatic in its intention; that is, their work sought to impart messages that could be readily apprehended by the broadest possible audience. (Machida 2008, 28)

This period of cultural production was revolutionary, a moment of clearing space for people of color within art historical and literary canons and of valorizing and celebrating subjugated knowledges and cultures as beautiful. The artists who have been involved with the Kearny Street Workshop, the Mission Displacement Coalition, Clarion Alley Mural Project, and other arts collectives continue to produce alternative cultural discourses about Filipino/American “value” through literature, artwork, and performance which radically reaffirms the presence of Filipino/Americans, Latino/as, African Americans, LGBTQ and other marginalized peoples as still belonging to San Francisco.

These political arts movements have not been without their problems however: first, the political framing and aesthetic commonalities of work made in this vein still overdetermines the forms and vocabularies through which art is understood as “political art” or “community art”; emerging as it did out of the I-Hotel struggle, Filipino/American art in the San Francisco Bay Area is conflated with the categories of community art or political art, with works deviating from these aesthetics or modes of production being

passionate sense of our dignity as a people and the courage which unity provides us” (“Third World,” *BastaYa!* 1, no. 2, July 1969).

routinely understood as somehow postracial or universalized, fine art.³² Second, in narrowing the definition of what constitutes appropriate forms of Filipino/American art and political art, improperly queer and feminized subjects often are the first whose work is omitted from ethnic literary and art historical canons.³³ This project highlights the cultural work of artists whose modes of production, artistic repertoires and vocabularies do not easily fit within linear narratives of Filipino/American, Asian American, or community-based art. In the multiplicity of their artistic productions is evidence of

³² As one of the first texts in Filipino American Studies to foreground an analysis of contemporary visual cultural productions, Sarita See's *The Decolonized Eye* (2009) has been an important model for engaging with conceptual and abstract art by people of Philippine descent. See cogently elucidates the tension faced by artists of color when deciding to make figurative/representational or abstract/non-representational works: while those who produce representational works that address race and colonialism are considered "aesthetically backward and naïve" by art critics, abstract art is embraced for appearing apolitical; praised for "transcending race"; and interpellated as "modern or postmodern" (xxv). This false binary—of artists "choosing" whether to be "political" or "conceptual," as if they were mutually exclusive—attempts to fix figurative *and* abstract visual cultural productions, minimizing their ability to impact both or either the mainstream art world and communities of color facing structural oppression. In divorcing abstract art from the social conditions of its production or by denying it any ability to comment on racial and spatial injustice, moreover, dominant discourse on the forms that activist art should take "mystifies the social environment just as it does the work of art" (Deutsche 1996, 60). That is to say, these critiques inevitably flatten the spatiotemporal contingencies that affect these artworks, a move that ignores the ways that viewers' interactions with the works, in the specific sites in which they are displayed and/or performed, can profoundly transform its identity, politics, and spatial specificity (Deutsche 1996, 61).

³³ The experiences of queer and female Asian American subjects offers the strongest case for the need to challenge reparative and assimilationist narrations of Asian American identity, with the debates between writers Frank Chin and Maxine Hong Kingston over the *Aiiieeee!* compilation's masculinist nationalist politics serving as a flashpoint that has been analyzed by a host of Asian American Studies theorists including David Eng, Elaine Kim, and Josephine Park. Instead of a fixed narrative of Asian American identity, Lisa Lowe stresses an awareness of the "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity" of Asian American cultures, as part of a political strategy to "destabilize the dominant discursive construction and determination of Asian Americans as a homogenous group" and to "point to the limitations inherent in a politics based [exclusively] on cultural, racial, or ethnic identity" (Lowe 1996, 67-68). Kandice Chuh writes that the history of Filipino in America offers a strong case for understanding the unevenness of Asian immigrant assimilation and incorporation into the United States, and stresses the need for the field to be centered on a "subjectless discourse" that "emphasizes the internal instability of 'Asian American' identity... so that the power relations to which it referred may be articulated anew, as the basis of an Asian American discourse grounded in difference" (2003, 9). In contemporary scholarship in Asian American Studies, the need to diversify the types of representations of Filipino/American and other Asian American histories and subject positions has reached critical consensus; at the level of practice and outside the genre of literary analysis, however, debates over the form and content of "Filipino American" and "activist" cultural representations remain.

alternative ways of seeing, hearing, and embodying Filipino America, opening up new forms of political, social, and cultural affiliations not yet imagined or understood.

Chapter Summaries

Using an ethnic studies framing of the problem of geography, I understand the development and displacement of Filipino/American communities in the Bay Area region as a function of racial capitalism, a force that continues to impact the lives of working class people of color throughout different neighborhoods in the city in and the region in the present.³⁴ Each chapter of the dissertation tracks a different decade in San Francisco's urban and regional history of racial capitalism, beginning from the late 1960s-1970s moment of the International Hotel struggle. I use cultural productions as evidence of Filipino/American presence in San Francisco in the absence of historical archives, and use the following questions to guide my investigations and analysis: What strategies of literary, visual, and performative representation have cultural workers deployed in order to transform space abstracted by the city and private developers into Filipino/American place in the San Francisco Bay Area? What queer, feminist, and anti-capitalist material, cultural, and affective geographies of Filipino America are produced through these creative labors, and how does each cultural work attempt to (re)produce Filipino/American individual subjectivities and community formations without

³⁴ George Lipsitz, arguing for the centralization of race in analyses of the geographies of American capitalism, states that "a white spatial imaginary, based on exclusivity and augmented exchange value, functions as a central mechanism for skewing opportunities and life chances in the United States along racial lines" (2007, 13); he gives as primary historical examples of racial capitalism the concrete practices and policies of Indian removal, restrictive housing covenants and urban restructuring, linking them to the shared "cultural ideals and moral geographies" of white supremacy (12).

reproducing essentialist narratives of fixed racialized and sexualized identities? Finally, how do works that defy or challenge the generic expectations of Filipino/American art help us better comprehend the historical and continuing lived experiences of divergent Filipino/American peoples living in the Bay Area region?

Geographically, the first chapter of the dissertation uncovers how Filipino/American labor migrants were instrumental to the production of San Francisco, the Bay Area region, and the United States more broadly as sites of economic prosperity, with very little benefit to themselves; it traces how communities of manong bachelor workers—recruited to work in California agricultural centers and in San Francisco’s service industries in the 1920s and 1930s—began to be displaced after the 1950s due, in part, to the deindustrialization of the Bay Area and the shift towards recruiting more skilled forms of labor for industries such as the burgeoning technology sector. I then track the linkages between the development and eventual destruction of Manilatown in the 20th century to shifts in postwar modes of production undertaken on the urban, regional, and national scales. Chapters 2-4 and the coda focus on the growth of regional hotspots outside the City proper: the East Bay suburbs, the South of Market neighborhood in San Francisco, and Silicon Valley, respectively. To animate these political, economic, social, and spatial transformations, I perform close readings of works by Filipino/American writers, visual artists, and performers produced before, during and after the 1977 eviction of the I-Hotel’s manongs; these artists have been based in and worked out of San Francisco over the course of five decades between the late 1960s through 2013.

Theoretically and methodologically, the two halves of the dissertation focus on diverse cultural forms (poetry in the first half and site-specific multimedia installations and performances in second half) in order to trace shifts in representational strategies used by artists over this time period partly as 1) responses to the changing geographic borders of Filipino/American life in the region and 2) as reflective of the political orientations and social positions of feminist and queer Filipino/Americans in relation to more heteronormatively positioned Filipino/American individuals and collectivities. Chapters One and Two examine the poetry of Al Robles and Barbara Jane Reyes, respectively, as works that capture significant moments of crises over housing, redevelopment, and expanding forms of gentrification in the Bay Area. Chapters Three and Four, meanwhile, focus on different strategies of claiming space in performance and visual art in downtown San Francisco neighborhoods which are presently at the epicenter of new construction since the first and second dot-com booms. Significantly, these artists all share a commitment to community-based politics of place while largely producing artwork in genres and mediums legible to the mainstream art world as conceptual, speculative, or abstract. The artists' abilities to code-switch between the visual and verbal languages of ethnic community and flattening discourses of multiculturalism championed in the mainstream art world demonstrates the chameleon-like quality necessary for effective political action applicable to struggles over home and place.

Chapter One, "Filipino/American Blues: Al Robles's Manilatown and Fillmore," investigates the printed and performed poetry of the late Al Robles for the ways his poems uniquely document the struggle to save Manilatown's International Hotel and the

predominantly African American Fillmore district in the 1960s and 1970s.³⁵ While Robles has been lauded as the “poet laureate” of Manilatown, his political work with the manongs is often prioritized in academic critique, without a careful consideration of the ways that his poetry complemented—and sometimes exceeded—his community mobilization efforts. This chapter thus attends to this oversight through a formal analysis of his poetry coupled with a larger overview of the social histories of Manilatown and the Fillmore. Robles’s blues poetics, I argue, draws upon and produce a blues epistemology that bridges connections over time and space between Filipino/American and black migrant communities—both targeted for removal from the city by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and private developers—and continues to offer ways of imagining multiracial political alliances that can and should be deployed by those engaged in anti-eviction campaigns today.

Chapter Two, “Picket Fences and Martial Law: Barbara Jane Reyes and the East Bay Suburbs” revisits the writing of Barbara Jane Reyes, a Filipina/American poet raised in Fremont, an East Bay suburb racially integrated in the 1960s that soon after became home to Filipino professional-class immigrants arriving after the passage of the federal Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Reyes’s 2003 poem “Placemarkers” maps a history and geography of suburban Filipino/American communities in the Bay Area that differs markedly in class status and gendered identities from the homosocial manong communities of downtown San Francisco, not in order to posit these communities as

³⁵ The Fillmore and Western Addition districts were home to the city’s largest African American communities, who flocked to these neighborhoods during World War II as many of them were recruited to work for the military shipyards. The Fillmore was home to thriving black businesses including famous jazz clubs like Jimbo’s Bop City. Beginning in the late 1950s, these neighborhoods were diagnosed as “blighted” and slated for redevelopment under an SFRA policy so structurally racist it became popularly known as “Negro Removal.” This neighborhood history will be further elaborated in Chapter One.

inherently antagonistic, but instead as geographic and social sites deeply shaped and scarred by Cold War militarism in the United States and the Philippines. Reyes's poetry deploys a diasporic and feminist Filipino/American politics and aesthetics that, similar to yet distinct from Al Robles's poetry, articulates forms of political solidarity across classed, gendered, geographic and racialized borders.

Chapter Three, "Worlds in Collision: Carlos Villa and the Absence of the International Hotel" moves to an analysis of visual artworks, site-specific installations and live performances staged by the late Carlos Villa in San Francisco between the 1980s and early 2000s. In 1980's *Ritual*, a site-specific performance at the Farm, Villa deploys an imaginative and complex repertoire drawing on Dogon ritual, Filipino/a musical forms, and Abstract Expressionist "action painting" that bridges multiple, overlapping spheres of high art and working class culture in the greater San Francisco region. His *My Uncles* series of doors made in the 1990s similarly deploys modern art conventions, to intervene into the hole of history left behind with the demolition of the International Hotel. Meanwhile, the International Hotel exhibition within the 1994 Filipino American Arts Exposition, curated by Villa and staged at the Center for the Arts in Yerba Buena Gardens, featured works invoking the historic International Hotel struggle. This exhibition's significance lies in its representation of Filipino/American place/lessness in San Francisco in the 1990s, at a time just prior to both the first dot com boom and the 2005 reopening of the rebuilt International Hotel. The show being housed at Yerba Buena Gardens, moreover, illuminates the role that the construction of the Moscone Center shopping, convention, and entertainment complex played in this decade in the continuing displacement of working class communities of color from downtown San Francisco.

Villa's varied individual and collaborative art practice and curatorial strategies, I argue, makes manifest the absence of the manongs, the original International Hotel, and Manilatown itself in order to *make live* new articulations of Filipino/American subjectivity and community in San Francisco. His use of modern art vocabularies does not efface politics; rather, it repurposes abstraction—a mode of organizing the world under racial capitalism—to give life and place to the manongs in the afterlife of the International Hotel.

Finally, Chapter Four of the dissertation, “Embodying Community: Respatializing the South of Market Through Performance” moves to the South of Market (SoMA), the last remaining neighborhood in downtown San Francisco with a significant Filipino/American population. It looks at three moments of site-specific performances—specifically perambulations through SoMA by 1) a collective of anti-eviction activists in 2013, a 2) an assorted group of musicians, artists, and participants in 2013 to commemorate the Philippines Martial Law period, and 3) queer Colombian-Filipino performance artist Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa in 2012—as evidence of the labor that physical occupation of the streets plays in (re)making the South of Market as both a queer and Filipino/American place. With the second technology boom being centered in SoMA and aided by the municipal government, the neighborhood has become ground zero in the “battle for the soul of San Francisco” being waged by the city’s immigrant and queer working-class residents. The chapter ultimately argues that these recent psychogeographic walking performances remap SoMA as a place that serves *primarily* as a site for making non-heteronormative homes and affective communities rather than as an empty place available for capture by the technology industry; they are spectacular

articulations of the everyday labor of SoMA's Filipino/American residents and gay/leather patrons in the public spaces, bathhouses and bars that remain invisible to city planners, private developers, tech industries, and tourists that wish to claim the South of Market for their own.

The generic movement from literature to visual art to live performance over the course of the dissertation reflects an overarching concern I have with articulating the stakes of site-specificity and embodied practice not only for Filipino/American cultural workers but for all Filipino/Americans engaged in anti-eviction and anti-gentrification work. These cultural workers, while all unique in their individualized manifestations of artistic practice, evidence a larger commitment to the politics of place—this shared political imaginary, I conclude, is what defines Filipino/American art as such; their work is both spatially and temporally expansive, extending the genealogy and the geographic borders of Filipino America to include subjects, neighborhoods, suburbs, and regions considered outliers to the Philippine diasporic experience. From the printed and performed poetry of Al Robles and Barbara Jane Reyes to the psychogeographic wanderings of Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa, Filipino/American artists *make material* the grounds of the Filipino Bay Area, and in doing so, also redefine and reimagine the terms of Filipino/American “art,” “politics,” “community,” and “place” in the afterlife of the International Hotel.

CHAPTER 1

Filipino/American Blues: Al Robles's Manilatown and Fillmore

The blues courageously explores the origins, varieties, and consequences of life lived in a brutal and loveless society. It is also the voice of those who are dedicated to the preservation of their humanity. The blues is a vision of a society that is dialectically polyrhythmic, a democracy where both cooperation and individual expression thrive. This philosophy is expressed in, through, and beyond the music.

— Clyde Woods

Henceforth we are creating our own destiny, instead of accepting the world as it is arranged; we come with a vision rearranging our own lives, rearranging the world, in the community—creating a new world through poetry.

— Al Robles

Before the chants of thousands crying “We Won’t Move,” barricading the doors of the International Hotel on the fateful night of August 4, 1977, there was the night watch: the patrolling of the hallways of the I-Hotel after dark from invaders. Instituted to keep an eye out for the state and the corporations trying to shut down this “uninhabitable” residence once and for all, the night watch was lonely and haunting, as captured by Curtis Choy’s 1983 documentary *The Fall of the I-Hotel*. In an enigmatic scene from the film, we follow a tall, bearded, almost-Buddhist monk of a man through the empty hallways, into the darkened basement of the International Hotel, and hear a voice, perhaps his, seeping into—or wailing out of—the walls:

Night watch, International Hotel
where old and young Pilipinos live,
hang, and roam around all day
like *carabaos* in the mud
bagoong imprint of brown bodies on the wall...
manong, i listen to your long, long tales

the kearny street manilatown wind
 cuts thru your thin blanket
 chilled ifugao bones crack the manilatown cue stick
 pilipinos scattered all over
 brown faces piled high
 moving like shadows on trees
 concrete doorways, poolhalls, barbershops
dahil sa 'yo, nais kong mabuhay
 down kearny street
 down deep.¹

Our poet-guide-monk reaches the end of a hallway as we hear the last words, opening the window to the street below. Night watch is over, the daylight is bright, and the people outside are marching and yelling once more to save the International Hotel.

Between day and night, there may appear to be a stark difference—an inward turning at dark to poetry in contrast to the overt activist politics of the day. For the activists, elders, and community members invested in saving the International Hotel from demolition, however, these acts were inseparable, the poetry being the manifestation of the political, the political taking the form of poetry. Whereas many academic and community accounts of the struggle to save the International Hotel from demolition have relied upon first-person narratives by the manongs and activists involved, less attention has been paid to the generative work of cultural producers in helping us imagine oppositional places and modalities of struggle. This chapter makes the case for revisiting the murals of Jim Dong and the Kearny Street Workshop collective, and the live performances, novels and prose poetry by Flip poets such as Jaime Jacinto, Oscar Peñaranda, Virginia Cerenio, and Al Robles; it argues for reading them not as historical documents of a passed moment of political struggle to save the International Hotel, but

¹ *The Fall of the I-Hotel*. Directed by Curtis Choy. United States: Chonk Moonhunter Productions, 1983. VHS, 38-40 mins.

instead calls for encountering them as living archives that continually bring the site of Manilatown back to life decades after the official “end” of the International Hotel struggle. In this chapter, I turn to the work of Filipino/American “Flip” poet Al Robles in particular as an example of the spatially productive capacities of the literary and performative²; Robles’s poetry, I argue, makes a critical intervention into dominant narratives about the productivity of Manilatown and other racialized neighborhoods in San Francisco at the height of redevelopment between the 1960s and the 1970s.

Al Robles’s poetry is exceptional in the ways it labors to transform the value of neighborhoods and peoples seen as wasteful or as excess into thriving communities that have survived during and after decades of assault, disinvestment, and neglect by politicians, the state, and corporations. I contend that Al Robles’s work “rearranges the world” in order to “rearrange lives” outside of the capitalist/imperialist relationship of land as a means of exploitation rather as a means of sustenance and livelihood; he does this in part through deploying an innovative blues epistemology that challenges easy Asian immigrant assimilation narratives in favor of producing a Filipino/American identity that is co-constituted through its proximity to blackness and built upon structures of kinship alternative to the heteronormative, white home. His work remains important today, decades after it was first written, as it both illustrates and challenges the ways in which “the U.S. state reproduces itself through the *differential* racializations of people of color through the lack of access to private property” (Hong 2006, 34; emphasis in

² “Flip poets” are, according to Jean Vengua Gier and Oscar Campomanes, “American-born and/or raised Filipino writers who came of age during Third World Student and International Hotel protests of the 1960s and 1970s” (de Jesus in Huang 2002, 55). Vengua Gier, in writing of Virginia Cerenio as a Flip poet, writes that Flip poetry is marked “by its historical and regional specificity: International Hotel activism and community grassroots organizing anchors their worldview landscape and history” (55).

original). By drawing upon and producing anew a “blues epistemology,” or a way of understanding the world that allows him to differently (re)value histories of Filipino migrants to the United States, Robles not only attempts to negotiate the historical contradictions and contentions between Filipino/Americans with other communities of color and native peoples in the U.S., but also initiates moves towards solidarity between Filipinos in the Philippines and the diaspora. Robles’s poems and stories illuminate a mode of being in the world that profoundly disidentifies with corporate-state interests and the logic of late commodity capitalism; it works not simply to document the lives of the I-Hotel manongs “as they really were” but instead attempts to (re)value their lives and labor at a time when the state and business interests were actively attempting to produce the manongs as unproductive, as drains on land that was seen as more valuable as a parking structure for the rich rather than as housing for the elderly and poor.

Alfred "Al" Robles, the late poet-activist known by many in the San Francisco Bay Area Filipino/American community as "Manong Al" or "Uncle Al," has been dubbed "Manilatown's poet laureate," the one man who truly embodied the radical spirit of Filipino/American struggles for place. Robles was active not only during the fight to save the International Hotel in the 1960s and 1970s, but even afterwards as the Filipino/American community in downtown San Francisco imagined and implemented new political coalitions and material institutions to service the aging manongs displaced by the eviction, and was a fixture of the city’s Filipino/American radical community.³

³ To borrow Al Robles’s definition of *manong*: “máh-nong: a title of respect. The word ‘manong’ has come to mean an older Pilipino man who has gone through the hardships, experiences, and struggles in America” (1977, 5). In Filipino/American Studies scholarship, the manong generation is the name given to the first large wave of Filipino male migrants to the United States between 1900-1946.

Born February 16, 1930 to a large family of twelve in San Francisco's Fillmore District, Robles grew up in this so-called "black ghetto" that was, in actuality, home to a large multiracial community of Filipino/Americans, Japanese Americans, African Americans, and Chicano/as. This upbringing shaped his understanding that "Sometimes my mind is Black / Sometimes my mind is Chicano / Sometimes my mind is Black / and Chicano at the same time / [...] Sometimes my belly embraces all things / Swallowing black, brown, yellow, red / belching up poems."⁴

Even as he was raised in the Fillmore, Al Robles is most often associated with the Manilatown neighborhood, also known as Kearny Street for its main thoroughfare, and for his lifelong commitment to preserving the history of the manong generation. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Robles wrote and performed a prolific amount of poetry, based on oral histories of the manongs that he had collected for different Asian American community preservation actions, such as he is seen doing in Curtis Choy's documentary *The Fall of the I-Hotel* (1983). After the eviction of the manongs from the I-Hotel in 1977, Robles remained committed to their cause: he was a co-founder of and staff member at the Manilatown Senior Center, which provided subsidized meals and as a recreational and educational space for the manongs, and in 1994, co-founded the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, a non-profit organization instrumental to the rebuilding of the new International Hotel housing the Manilatown Heritage Center on its first floor. Completed in 2005, the new International Hotel remains a space where seniors, youth, and other members of the Filipino/American community and other marginalized groups

⁴ From a poem included in Robles's critical-poetic *Amerasia* journal article, "Hanging on to a Carabao's Tail" (1989, 204-5).

can gather to eat, enjoy each other's company, and learn about the ongoing struggles of Filipinos in America. In their fond remembrances of Al Robles, who passed away on May 2, 2009, community members called him a "one-man social service agency for the manong generation"—a true testament to the long and lasting impact he had on the lives of so many in San Francisco's Filipino/American community.⁵

In what follows, I trace Robles's deployment of a blues epistemology and blues aesthetics in poems that not only challenge the terms upon which multiple displacements and migrations of Filipino/Americans and other oppressed peoples in the United States and elsewhere in the world continue to occur; moreover, I speculate on the ways his poetics of place continue to help us imagine new political solidarities with and connections to other communities of color, an imperative that remains necessary in the present moment. This chapter thus engages with the following questions: how does Robles transvalue the subjectivity of the manongs at a time when their labor no longer produces value for the capitalist state? If migrations and displacements mark moments of crisis, in which the loss or "poignant absence" of the ancestor in the rural home-place can never be fully recovered, how do "custodians of memory and culture" such as Al Robles work to "preserve and transmit communal wisdom" in order to transform an urban place (made up of both subjects and the built environment) seemingly divorced from nature into what he called a "tribal" community and home (Dubey 1998, 293-4)?

Taken as a whole, I examine the ways that Al Robles's blues poetics of place uncover the proliferation of sites where different racialized populations coded by the state and capitalist logics as excess, as waste, or as nonvaluable go to build kinship formations

⁵ *Manilatown is in the Heart*. Directed by Curtis Choy. USA: Chonk Moonhunter Productions, 2008. DVD.

alternative to the strictures of white, heteronormative society (Hong 2006, 54). By revisiting selections from the large body of Robles's printed and performed work, I map Robles's production of an alternative cartography of struggle, one that positions Filipino/Americans in a very different ethical and social position vis-à-vis other racialized peoples, the land, and the state than what was circumscribed by the dominant material-discursive landscape of late 1960s and 1970s San Francisco. The poems serve not simply as a form of social explanation, but are an innovative form of blues expression in the face of the violent dispossession, exploitation, and displacement of Filipino/Americans, African Americans, and other communities of color in Manilatown, the Fillmore, and other racialized, low-income neighborhoods in the San Francisco Bay Area (Woods 1998, 56).

Al Robles's Blues Ethics and Aesthetics

In the films, performances, awards ceremonies, and, later, memorial services, for Al Robles, all who spoke shared recollections of Robles's love for jazz music and the blues. Friends and acquaintances recounted fond nights with Robles at Fillmore District clubs such as Jimbo's Bop City and Jack's Sutter Street Tavern, drinking into the early morning hours; even as many of these clubs were closed in the wake of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's "Negro Removal" campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s, Robles continued to frequent the venues that remained well into the 2000s. Robles's appreciation for these historically African American musical forms extended beyond mere spectatorship, as he actively incorporated the blues and jazz into his own cultural work. A musician in his own right, Robles's poetry performances frequently fused the sounds of

jazz and blues music with his verses, which were spoken and sung in an improvisatory rhythm and cadence. This appropriation of jazz and blues was as central to Al Robles's political ethos as to his aesthetic development—in his writing, improvising, and performing a blues poetics, Robles enacted a critical spatial politics that (re)valued the manong generation's labor and lives, and bore witness to the multiple migrations and displacements of Filipino/Americans, native peoples, Third World peoples, and communities of color in the San Francisco Bay Area and on the global scale. His poetry overwhelmingly focused on the simple, everyday cultural exchanges—both antagonistic and cooperative—between Filipino/Americans and other native peoples and minority communities in and through these geographic crossings; they were poems that valued the banal over the extraordinary. Robles's live performances as well as his published poems thus was productive of what Jodi Byrd has called a blues soundscape; his poetry served as a vehicle “through which to reimagine community that transcends the current limitations of a landscape mapped and owned through colonization” (Byrd 2011, 145-6).

In calling Robles's work a form of blues poetry, I borrow in part from a growing body of literary scholarship on texts such as Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*. Jennifer Henton, for example, cites both texts as “blues narratives” for their ability to bring the history of black Americans into the present, histories that have often been violently erased and actively forgotten by the dominant white society. Grace Hong's writing on “blues imaginaries” illuminates how texts such as *Corregidora* and Isaac Julien's 1989 film *Looking for Langston* work to reproduce social formations “through the excavation of erased memory, the labor of creating community, and through the act of imagining or improvising into existence a history and a future” (Hong 2010,

13). In this sense, blues narratives not only recall violent histories, but also *perform* the affective labor necessary to (re)produce and sustain black communities in the present and into the future. At the same time, I wish to remember that even as Robles’s writing has been published in anthologies and in his single-authored collection, *Rappin’ With Ten Thousand Carabaos in the Dark* (1996), his poetry most often was encountered at informal poetry readings, rallies, and other community events—more often than not, these texts were not read but *heard* by an audience, delivered in Robles’s smooth, quiet, voice with its rolling intonations, and frequently accompanied by instrumental jazz bass, drums, and guitar performed by his friends. In this way, his poetry should be encountered not only as a text-based blues literature, but understood as part of a larger “blues geography” or blues epistemology that centers “working-class organic intellectuals at the center of the production of geographical knowledge” (Woods 2007, 60).

For the late geographer Clyde Woods, from whom my understanding of the blues epistemology Robles’s work draws from and deploys with a difference, the blues—which take on the form of music, poetry, and other performance strategies—are a “permanent countermobilization against the constantly re-emerging plantation blocs of the world” (Woods 2007, 58). This plantation bloc, Woods goes on to elucidate in detail in *Development Arrested: Race, Power, and the Blues in the Mississippi Delta* (1998), emerges from the coupling of militarism and economic policies that reproduce the basic features of plantation capitalism in the post-Reconstruction United States.⁶ As Woods

⁶ Clyde Woods defines plantation capitalism and plantation geographies as such: “The historical plantation has been described as both a military form of agriculture and a capitalist institution having extensive land requirements, intensive capital and labor requirements, and internal forms of governance. However, the plantation and state models have numerous permutations that extend beyond agriculture: slavery and sharecropping; enclosures and reserves; industrial estates and mill villages; free-trade and export zones;

argues, the blues epistemology makes possible—for the cultural producers as well as its consumers—a form of travel across both time and space that allows one to resituate their understandings of the naturalized categories of race, place, and power that they have long inhabited without interrogation.

In valuing Robles’s poetic representations of San Francisco neighborhoods and their inhabitants as drawing upon and creating a new blues epistemology, I want to call attention to the ways that his poems theorize San Francisco’s palimpsestic geographies—or the city’s ongoing material and metaphorical connections to Spanish colonization, the genocide of indigenous Americans, the exploitation of immigrant labor, and the horrors of slavery and the failures of Reconstruction—through a process of disarticulation, as an attempt to produce an intersubjective reorientation between Filipino/Americans and other communities of color whose histories have for too long been understood as separate from or antagonistic to their own. Robles’s work is improvisational, and performs in its content and form the ways in which “working class, racially-oppressed peoples—drawing horizontally—have constructed something entirely new out of the crucible of their lived experiences...to create, commune, celebrate and maintain a sense of human dignity and spirit” (Ferreira 2011, 43). His poetry challenges us, in short, both to revisit history and to work in the present towards a radically different future. It both projects and is driven by a “blues worldview” that enables “the construction of new communities, institutions, and

enterprise and empowerment zones; ghettos and gated communities; suburbanization and gentrification; game preserves and tourist resorts; pine plantations and mines; and migratory and prison labor. All of these economic forms are designed to reproduce the basic features of plantation capitalism: resource monopoly; extreme ethnic, class, racial, and gender polarization; an export orientation; and the intense regulation of work, family, speech, and thought.... The present period is defined by the ever-increasing monopolization and mining of an ever-decreasing supply of viable air, sea, land, subterranean, and communal resources” (2007, 56).

social practices” through a “holistic, interdisciplinary, and indigenous approach” to culture, politics, and scholarship (Woods 2007, 59).

While beginning from Woods’s conception of the blues, I expand my analytic by incorporating the blues feminisms of Hazel Carby, Madhu Dubey, and Angela Davis. Their work stages an important intervention, in that it foregrounds the experience of *movement* through migration—rather than the *settling* of sexualized racial subjects in one place—as central to blues narratives and epistemologies. As Dubey argues, the process of migration marks a narrative as blues and/or jazz, instead of maintaining, like Woods, that the authentic blues are located in (or must begin from) a fixed, rural point of origin in the U.S. South (Dubey 1998, 299). Dubey proposes instead an understanding of blue as “from its inception...an oral form that [is] neither a pure form in the South, nor suddenly commercialized by migration”; it is a form that is “productively transformed by its passage into Northern cities during the 1920s” (298). As such, jazz and blues narratives, “like signification itself... are always nomadically wandering. Like the freight-hopping hobo, they are ever on the move, ceaselessly summing novel experience” (Baker 1983, 8); such texts and the characters within negotiate the contradictions between life in the rural South and the urban North, negotiations that have transformative effects on racial subjectivity.⁷

⁷ For blues feminists, it is not only that the content of the cultural productions—the songs, poems, and novels—are productive of a blues epistemology, but that the performers themselves are embodiments of blues histories which haunt dominant national narratives of American multicultural democracy. Hazel Carby elucidates the ways in which female blues singers “embodied the social relations and contradictions of black displacement: of rural migration and urban flux” (1998, 476); as organic intellectuals, blues women produced and negotiated discourses of race, gender, and sexuality in African American communities, discourses that were dramatically transformed by the experiences of migration. The blues, as Angela Davis writes, was a way for new urban migrants to “keep alive a [rural-based] heritage that might otherwise have receded into the collective unconscious” and in doing so, enabled migrant subjects to “transcend geographical boundaries” in order to (re)constitute a sense of community in the city (Davis

Drawing from blues feminism, I am interested in the ways that Robles's blues epistemology, as manifested in his poetry, prose, performances, and other cultural-activist work, both documents a history of multiple, overlapping Filipino migrations—from the Philippines to various sites in the United States, and internal migrations once in the US—as well as challenges fixed conceptions of what constitutes Filipino/American subjectivity. These migrations and displacements, as his poems (perhaps unwittingly) reveal, produced Filipino/American manong subjects that were not only racialized, but also gendered and sexualized. Moreover, Robles's blues poems trouble cultural critics' readings of Filipino American literature as exilic—of Filipino/American writing as productive of a Filipino-in-exile subjectivity, located in the United States, and characterized by loss and the need to reinvent the self and to create (imagined) ties to the Philippines.⁸ While certainly Manong Al's poetry invokes dreamscapes or creates imagined and mythic scenarios, his migrant subjects do not necessarily, or only, long to return to a primal home that is bound by a fixed geography within the Philippine archipelago; rather, his poetry projects forward-looking and expansive desires for the

1998, 155). At the same time, Davis goes on to write, blues feminisms challenged black male dominance, pushing against static notions of "African American community" and in doing so, productively transformed the meanings of community itself (155). As those who sang the blues, blues women inserted their own subjective experiences into both subaltern and dominant communities and discourses, and by their presence on stage were able to directly transform their audiences' perspectives and ways of seeing the world.

⁸ E. San Juan Jr.'s analysis of Filipino/American Literature is emblematic of this school of thought. He writes: "And so this is the existential dilemma [of the Filipino diasporic subject]. For all those forced out of their homeland- by choice or necessity, it does not really make a difference- *the vocation of freedom becomes the act of inventing the history of one's life, which is equivalent to founding and inhabiting that terra incognita* that only becomes known, mapped, names as one creates it partly from memory, partly from dream, partly from hope [...] That is perhaps the permanent stance of the exile, the act of desiring what is neither here nor there" (1998, 192-7; emphasis added).

Filipino/American community in urban San Francisco and the United States more widely.

As fellow Flip poet Oscar Peñaranda writes:

There was no longing for home for [the Flip poets]. [The United States/California/San Francisco] was home [...] Not only was this place physically home, it was also and more profoundly a home for their stories, a home for their descendents, amid a sea of racism and internalized, mostly unquestioned acceptance of white superiority. (2004, 235)

Reading Robles's creative and political output through a blues framework thus allows for an expansive understanding of Robles's life, work, and the very communities of which he was a part of and wrote and performed extensively about. While the plantation bloc central to Woods's analysis of power and racial antagonisms in the United States—and by extension, his locating of the blues—is geographically centered in the U.S. South, I find that this material-discursive spatial formation shares features with the kinds of financial, political, and spatial reorganization occurring in downtown San Francisco during the 1960s-1990s, the time and place which Robles's most active writing, community organizing, and performing directly engaged through and in. If, as Woods claims, the South is the home of the blues for African Americans—the indigenous space for black cultural expression and history born from experiences of slave labor, debt peonage, chain gangs, and sharecropping—then I locate the blues origins of Filipino/American lives and labor in the continental United States in the agricultural centers of the West Coast and the urban centers such as Kearny Street to which the manongs traveled and settled in (temporarily) between seasons and more permanently in their twilight years (Clyde Woods 1998, 108); it is here that Robles's begins to map Filipino/American subjectivity-in-becoming. His poetry is set not so much in *one* particular location “indigenous” to Filipino/Americans (for there is no claim of

indigeneity possible for Asian American subjects in the United States that is not in itself epistemologically and materially violent towards the struggles of American Indian peoples), but rather works in and between locations, traveling over the same routes as the manongs in eras past, present, *and* future. Robles's blues poetics traverse time and space, retracing Filipino/American migratory patterns and flows between the US and Philippines, and up and down the United States's West Coast, to locate the effects of these multiple dislocations on manong subjectivity as well as the kinds of ethnic and racial communities engendered *and* broken down during an era of incredible shifts in political climate and economic policy in the United States and globally. In what follows, I trace the aesthetic strategies and geographic moves made in some of his most well known poems: those which directly reference the manongs and San Francisco's now-obsolete Manilatown district.

Manong Blues: Manilatown poems, Manilatown lives

*I am not ashamed of the manong, nor do I feel
sad by their tragic story in America. The manongs
have been on a long journey and I have been one
of those wanderers who they have met along the way...
They were the brown gypsies, the low-down niggers, the
brown apache savages, the uncivilized nomads who
wandered from place to place in search of their dreams...*

*from herding cows to herding cows
from fruit picker to fruit picker
from alaska to alaska
from manilatown to manilatown...*
— Al Robles, "The Wandering Manong"

In his poems on the International Hotel and the manongs, Robles describes them as always in transit, even in sleep. Their migratory nature of eating, sleeping, working—of their very *being* in the world—reminds us that the embodied presence of Filipinos in the United States reveals the contradictions of American exceptionalist discourse as necessarily disavowing its colonial relationship with the Philippines even as it continues to rely upon multiple forms of racialized labor to build the nation. Through his complex poetics of place, Robles’s work uncovers the national and international circuits of knowledge and power that transformed San Francisco, California, and the United States in the 20th century; his poems reveal how Manilatown and the International Hotel are not isolated or bounded areas, but rather are productive *and* are products of what Dorothy Fujita-Rony has termed the “Transpacific West.”⁹ Robles’s blues poetry reveals the ways in which the manongs’s movements, affiliations, and engagements within urban neighborhoods and rural locations in California were largely circumscribed by the political-economic constraints imposed on them by the state and society, as well as exceeded these circumstances; many of the manong poems highlight the conditions under which Filipino/American men were forced to live in the early 20th century due to residential segregation, anti-miscegenation laws, and restricted work opportunities. The economic-political geography of the Transpacific West structures the conditions in which

⁹ Fujita-Rony 2003, 27. As Dorothy Fujita-Rony writes, port cities such as San Francisco are key nodes in the “Transpacific West,” or areas on the U.S. West Coast that emerged as regional centers where laboring bodies and commodities were traded and sold between the United States and its new political allies and commercial partners in the Pacific (27). The growth of these port cities and regions in Transpacific West was accelerated through the United States government’s successful colonization of the Philippines, Guam, and Hawai’i—in the San Francisco Bay Area, for example, the growth of the region’s transportation system and military installments boomed, opening the labor pool for not only white workers, but Filipino “U.S. nationals” and African Americans, who both built the railroads and the bases *and* joined the U.S. Armed Forces as expendable bodies to be deployed on the frontlines of war in Europe and later, in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (35-36).

this first generation of male Filipino migrants were brought to the United States in the early 20th century; Robles's work productively extends the temporality of the Transpacific West to the midcentury displacement of the manongs from Manilatowns, Little Manilas, and other large Filipino communities throughout the West Coast.

In "The Wandering Manong," excerpted above, Robles points our attention to the ways that California historically emerged as a central location in which American colonial power is (re)enacted and (re)enforced, not only through the recruitment of Filipinos as cheap agricultural workers, but also through its genocide of indigenous Americans, its reliance on black slave labor, and its use of Chinese, Japanese, and Chicano males for building necessary infrastructure and for servicing white American needs. The poem travels between sites along the United States' western coast: from the sugarcane plantations of Hawai'i; to the winter harvests in the Imperial Valley in southern California and the spring and summer crops of the Salinas Valley; and to the northern fishing towns of Portland, Seattle, and Alaska, among other locations. Robles expands the reach of the United States's influence on the *manongs*, too, by reaching across the Pacific to the Philippines, invoking objects used by, landscapes traversed through, and the occupations performed by those men who, in their old age, became residents of places like San Francisco's International Hotel:

the manong's voice
 changes from day to day...
 a wild spirit gone crazy...
 from river to river...
 from waterbuffalo to waterbuffalo
 from bolo to bolo
 from mango to mango...
 from ifugao to t'boli...
 from herding cows to herding cows. (1996, 30-31)

Robles's poem connects the difficult conditions in the Philippines—engendered by the long Spanish and, later, American colonial rule of the nation—to the subsequent mass migration of Filipino men as U.S. nationals to the United States in the early 20th century. The manongs have wandered, the poem suggests and history confirms, out of material necessity and dire circumstances; by complicating the “technological innovativeness, unsettling demographic fluidity, and boundless frontier energy” lauded in discourses of American exceptionalism, the “Wandering Manong” reveals the Filipino/American blues to be the multiple forms and sites of violence experienced by the racialized peoples who were the real motors of American national progress (Baker 1984, 11).

Even as they frequently operate on the scales of the U.S. nation and the West Coast region, Robles's poems also remind us that to analyze Filipino/American lives on the macroeconomic scale fails to account for the other ways in which violence was manifested over and against the Filipino subject at the scales of the home and the body. In “The Wandering Manong” and his other manong poems, Robles jumps scale to illuminate how the manongs “bear witness with/upon their bodies of racism's intimate bond with nationalism, *throughout* history,” both within the space of California and far beyond its borders.¹⁰ The “yellow river full of saliva” that “dams up his hollow chest / like fish bones” and the “fragile bones” of manongs were the collateral damage of years

¹⁰ Tapia 2006, 69; emphasis in original. Robles's work “jumps scale” by moving in and between different sites of Filipino/American belonging and “home” on the scales of the body, neighborhood, city, region, nation, and globe. As Neil Smith defines, scales are the “geographical resolution of contradictory social processes of competition and contradict” that both “contain social activity, and at the same provide an already partitioned geography within which social activity takes place” (1992, 64-66). Places are made different from each other -in order to manage contradictions and difference in capitalism, according to Smith—and the process of “jumping scale” works to highlight the co-constitution of scales, showing them as produced in relation to each other rather than as discrete places where different processes and interactions take place (66).

of performing hard manual labor, done largely in the agricultural centers of the West where Filipinos were recruited to work once they arrived in the United States (Robles 1996, 25); these accounts of bodily decay have been erased from the official historical narrative, yet were material realities faced by manongs in the United States and are signs that continue to mark the bodies of migrant laborers in the United States and the global South today.

From the scale of the body to the scales of the home and community, Filipino/American manongs were highly disciplined and confined, both spatially and discursively, from the moment of their arrival in the United States; Robles's poems plumb the places where manongs were confined to, and locate even in distress small moments of possibility. As Filipino American Studies scholars such as Nerissa Balce, Ruby Tapia, and Lucy Burns have analyzed in their work, American colonial discourses produced the first generation of manong laborers as hypersexual threats to the white racial and social order, and the men were heavily limited to particular places where they were allowed to live, work, travel, and partake in leisure activities; the forms of deviant, sexualized and racialized tropes were similarly applied to the Chinese coolies that preceded the manongs in San Francisco, and to the Mexican *braceros* that followed them. Most well-known of these places, perhaps, were the taxi dance halls: social clubs where Filipino men played pool, drank libations, and bought tickets for a chance to dance with the employed white women, or "blondies," that they were otherwise forbidden to socialize with. Even as the manongs were always on the move—traveling between different sites of agricultural labor throughout the West Coast— wherever a large enough concentration of manongs briefly settled these dance halls appeared; taxi dance halls were

some of the only places where Filipino bachelors could fashion interracial and mixed-gender communities, however ephemeral, that were difficult to sustain in the agricultural sites where they performed backbreaking manual labor.¹¹

As in popular blues songs, pleasure and pain weave through Robles's manong poems, highlighting the stark contradiction between the promise of American freedom and citizenship offered to these Filipino migrants with the reality of violence experienced in their everyday lives. In "Taxi Dance," Robles re-imagines the experience of manongs living and working in rural and semi-rural sites such as Watsonville—an agricultural center located 90 miles south of Santa Cruz, California—from the 1920s through the 1950s:

taxi dance
8 p.m.- 2 a.m.
blondies
seven days a week

"i forgot
my labors
for awhile
at the taxi dance"...

my hands
know better

the fat juicy grapes
left behind...

my hands
know better

the grapes

than

¹¹ As Linda Epaña-Maram writes: "Filipinos went to dance halls because they not only liked to dance but also liked to share experiences and formulate a collective memory of more than just the workplace" (2006, 126).

the lining of your body. (1996, 33-34)

The manongs's hands (withered from picking grapes) and their bodies (only able to dance with white women in darkened taxi dance halls but never allowed to marry them in the open) function as "archival embodiments" that "gesture to the corpus of Filipino/American history and records, choreographed by and onto the Filipino body" (Burns 2008, 25). The embodied practices and sensations of dancing, working, and socializing in "Taxi Dance" transmit alternative forms of knowledge and as such, are part of what Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor calls the "ephemeral repertoire," which, "because it is live, exceeds the archive's ability to capture it" (2003, 20). The manongs's dancing, as a performative modality of survival and resistance to the alienation of their agricultural labor counters their simply becoming cogs in a "global neocolonial, imperialist economy"; their pleasures and pains recounted here force us to read against the American imperial discourses that rendered Filipino/American laborers as "cultural artifact, as sexual object, as threatening alterity, as scientific specimen, as living proof of radical difference."¹²

Robles's blues poetry functions in many way to transform the value of these manongs's labors, showing us how even in their leisure time, these men *affectively labored* to create spaces of survival in order to continue their productive labors during the

¹² Taylor 2003, 67. As Lucy Burns writes: "The 'spectacle' of Filipino dancing body in dancehalls emerges as a vibrant and potentially violating instantiation of the effects of U.S. imperialism. This 'brown menace's' 'splendid dancing' is a corporeal testament to one of the key anxieties of American men (Burns 2008, 24). Following Burns, I argue that Robles's poetry on the manongs in the taxi dance halls and other spaces, as well as his work on other racialized and native communities within San Francisco and beyond its borders, do not seek to replace the historical archive with a new one, but rather, become supplements to the archive—offering brief flashes of memories and embodied experiences that are alternative testimonies to the violence necessary to securing American multicultural "democracy" and economic and social "progress."

day; moreover, his poems implicitly remind us that in their supposedly “non-productive” moments, the manongs continued to produce value through their patronage of gray market businesses such as taxi dance halls where they spent their free hours. In the brief two pages comprising “Taxi Dance,” we find the incommensurable exchange between the low wages earned by the manongs with the brief moments of pleasure they received in dancing with the “blondies” at the hall. In contrast to their inability to own property or their own means of production during the 1920s-1950s, in the taxi dance hall the manongs were able to give their only possessions—their hands and their bodies in addition to their small earnings—to the dancers, whom they sweet-talked by saying “the hand around/your waist/feels good/is nothing/but my own/belonging to nobody/but to you/if you want it” (Robles 1996, 33). Yet even this possession is not fully owned nor the “gift” of the dance freely given, with the ultimate price of blood finally outweighing the ten cent cost of a ticket. As in other blues narratives, the moments of pleasure depicted in “Taxi Dance” serve not to portray “an idealized realm to which unfulfilled dreams of happiness was relegated,” but rather are contrasted with the brutality that often faced the manongs in their attempts to escape, enjoy, or to be free from their productive labors for a time (Davis 1998, 10).

Later in the poem Robles, in the voice of a manong, recalls losing “five dollars in one night,” the same night during which the “pinoy fight / over the woman / they get jealous” and the “so-called gang/ leaders” wait for the girls who “if they don’t like / your face, they will fight with you” (1996, 34). While the quarrel here seems to be between Filipino men, it recalls other incidents of white-on-Filipino violence such as the 1929

Watsonville riots.¹³ Anti-Filipino mob violence in places such as Watsonville were intended not only to inflict bodily harm, but were attempts to (re)claim the agricultural fields in which Filipinos worked as *white* spaces. Ruby Tapia writes of violence at the taxi dance halls as the means by which “the white male erector of boundaries... mark[s] his territory” so that Filipinos could “come to know, perhaps too well, their place *and* their battleground in the U.S. nation” (2006, 68). This line illuminates that for Filipinos to dance with their blondies was to undertake an endeavor at a great cost—it was to always to subject their sexualized bodies as vulnerable to injury and death at the hands of white men acting in defense of their “property,” seen as not only the tools of reproduction (white women) but also to the means of production (white settler land).¹⁴ Certainly, this was a cost of working in the agricultural fields of California during the Great Depression through the World Wars that many Filipino migrants who came to the U.S. for freedom and expanded work opportunities did not anticipate or desire. Robles’s blues poetry does not shy away from representing this harsh reality and instead uncovers the impossible positions that Filipino men were placed in—and the necessary actions they needed to take—in order to survive in a racist American society. His poetry gives us not romanticized portraits of Filipino male migrants and other oppressed men of color; through his blues poetics, Robles presents us with “complicated and morally ambiguous”

¹³ These eruptions of racial and sexual violence against Filipino men were commonplace and unexceptional, with news reports blaming not the white male instigators but the Filipino men who deserved to be beaten because they “wore ‘sheikier clothes,’ danced better, and spent their money more lavishly than their Nordic fellow farmhands” (Chuh 2003, 53). After an incident at a taxi dance hall in Watsonville, where a Filipino man had been arrested after being seen socializing with a white woman, four nights of anti-Filipino rioting ensued; four hundred white men attacked the dance hall and rampaged the town, beating many Filipinos and shooting one to death (53-4).

¹⁴ Duncan Aikman, quoted in “Causes of California’s Race Riots,” *Literary Digest*, 15 February 1930, p. 12.

characters with whom we may not empathize or identify with, but, that we can come to recognize as subjects victimized by structural violence across multiple scales of the body, the home, the city, the region, and the nation (Donia Allen, 2002, 273).

In one of his most explicit poems, “Jurimentado Blues in Reno,” Robles reveals the overwhelming anger consuming the manongs in the face of racist attacks, with the resultant violence presenting the reader with a moral conundrum. Robles asks:

manong samposa
 was it worth
 the anger
 in a bolo
 to grab a white man
 by the neck
 because
 he laughed at you
 did it feel good
 manong
 to jerk him hard
 three times
 until
 you nearly broke his neck. (1996, 38)

Here, we see that a white man’s enjoyment is gained at the expense of an elderly Filipino man who had lost two hundred dollars at a casino in Reno. At first glance, it would appear that Robles does not approve of Manong Samposa’s actions, by the bluntness with

which he describes Samposa's acts. Yet even in this apparently objective questioning of Manong Samposa, Robles's words form a hidden transcript that can be understood if the reader is aware of the physical, emotional, and psychological violence to which manongs and other men of color have been subjected to over the course of U.S. history.¹⁵ The lines "to jerk him hard/ three times," which are the only two on the page to not be broken up by white space, gestures towards the sexually charged power dynamics between white men and men of color—to the dual charges of Filipino men as hypersexual *and* as effeminate, and to the policing of Filipino sexuality and (re)productive labor by white mobs in places such as Watsonville. The anticipation before we find out *what* appendage Samposa "jerks" and wondering if he, in fact, enjoys it, lends an eroticized charge to the encounter that is never fully explained nor accounted for on the page.

As a whole, this poem becomes legible as a "political" piece once read alongside Robles's larger body of work and positioned within the context of his community activism. Even if he does not explicitly do so here, "Manong Samposa" is part of Robles's mapping of a longer genealogy of structural racism that has provoked the rightful anger of Filipinos in America—the building up and explosion of anger by men of color whose work opportunities have dried up, life savings have been taken, and homes

¹⁵ James C. Scott's foundational text *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990) defines the "hidden transcript" of peasants as speech and acts by the oppressed that critique power yet which those in power cannot see or hear, because they are coded in ways illegible to them. Robin Kelley uses Scott's hidden transcripts model in *Race Rebels* (1994), when he writes that "Together the 'hidden transcripts' created in aggrieved communities and expressed through culture, and the daily act of resistance and survival, constitute what Scott calls 'infrapolitics'... [which] describe daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts that often inform organized political movements (8). Importantly, Kelley writes that the political history of oppressed people cannot be understood w/out reference to infrapolitics, for these daily acts have a cumulative effect on power relations (8). These kinds of daily acts of resistance which are not often understood as such, or if anything as pre-political, are precisely the moments I am interested in tracing in the dissertation.

have been repossessed by institutions of white heteropatriarchal power intended to maintain and protect white men's "enjoyment and use of" property they feel is rightfully theirs. Further, like many of Robles's other blues poems, this piece jumps scale to link the ongoing dispossession and displacement of Filipinos in the United States with a "passed" moment of colonization of the Philippines, collapsing the temporal and geographical borders between each place, a move which gives a fuller context to Manong Samposa's moment of seemingly exceptional violence against a white man in Nevada.¹⁶

Robles ends the poem by appearing to evaluate the "worth" of Manong Samposa's actions: "was it better/to go crazy/and get the jurimentado blues"... "or to lose two hundred dollars / in blackjack?" (1996, 39). Yet by leaving the question open-ended, without a response from the manong he directs his question towards, "Jurimentado Blues in Reno" illuminates the impossibility for Samposa to find release or even justice by fighting against racist violence on his own. The impossibility of a definite answer presents us with the harsh reality that even as the manongs attempted to rebel against individual acts of racism—as they did in the I-Hotel anti-eviction protests—it ultimately was, and is, the *institution* of white supremacy itself in the United States that is the source

¹⁶ The poem's title "Jurimentado Blues in Reno" itself is an index of the violence committed by one manong as a symptom of a larger system of power and domination at work over and against *all* of these elderly bachelors. That is to say, we can, and should, read "Jurimentado Blues in Reno" as gesturing to the violence of US colonialism in the Philippines *and* state racism within U.S. borders as it manifests in the lives of the Filipino manongs, rather than read Samposa's actions as a response to a singular event of injustice. By calling Manong Samposa's assaulting of the white man "jurimentado blues," Robles likens the manong subject to the *juramentado*, or to the Muslim/Moro martyrs in the Philippines who fought the Christian *conquistadors* during the long period of Spanish colonization and, later, who rebelled against American troops during the Philippine American War. Much as we use the term "insurgent" or "jihadi" in contemporary discourse to devalue the intentions and actions of "crazy" Filipinos from the southern Philippines and other Muslim nations, so too was the word *juramentado* deployed to describe these men's actions as insensible or occurring without provocation. A critical re-visioning of the histories of Spanish and US intervention in the Philippines, however, reveals the impetus for the rise of juramentado killers—to fight for decolonization, freedom, and sovereignty—acts which Robles does not overtly condone or decry, but, rather, connects to Manong Samposa's outburst of rage in "Jurimentado Blues in Reno."

of oppression for Filipinos and other marginalized communities.¹⁷ The everyday and spectacular forms of structural violence are what the manongs were unable to overthrow before and during struggle to save the International Hotel, and remains a battle that continues to be fought now, in the midst of another wave of urban redevelopment that is rapidly displacing communities of color living in San Francisco.

In his series of poems titled after the elderly men of the I-Hotel whom he spent years interviewing and working with, and in others set in different locations such as Agbayani Village—the rural retreat for Filipino manongs who were active with the United Farm Workers union built on Cesar Chavez’s Forty Acres in Delano—Robles revalues the life and work of the manongs by revealing the price they had to pay in order to live in America, a price that no promised or delivered wage could ever compensate for. The poems for “Manong Camara,” “The Hawaiian Sugarcane Wild Boar Manong,” “Uncle Victor, the Forgotten Manong,” and “Manong Felix,” among others, paint vivid portraits of these men’s loneliness, their dreams, and their physical and psychological pain. In these poems we hear of the failures of U.S. “democracy” to protect their lives—the failure of the state to give their lives meaning in the terms of providing or allowing the manongs to own private property, to have a heteronormative nuclear family, or to maintain bodily integrity and security:

Listening to manong lomanta
will drive you crazy
Everything he says is upside-down
When I say up he says down
When I say down he says up...
Money comes on the first

¹⁷ White supremacy as an institution is comprised of the meting out of uneven distributions of life and death, privilege and poverty—it was this institution, and not the individual white man, that the manongs were ultimately fighting against.

and third of every month
 Everything is gone in a few days...
 Life goes on no matter what... (Robles 1996, 29)

Documenting the “upside-down” world of the manongs, Robles’s poems document the state and capital’s transformation of these men from workers valued for their cheap stoop labor into surplus populations who were valuable only to become disposed of, as California’s economy transitioned from being an agricultural and industrial powerhouse into one dependent on speculative finance capital.¹⁸ Written at the height of the International Hotel struggle in the 1960s and 1970s, these poems about the manongs—echoing the cries of “We Won’t Move” from the I-Hotel activists—are a forceful plea calling for them to remain in the hotel as their last resting home. As these poems illuminate, after a lifetime of transience necessitated by the California economy’s reliance on agricultural labor and products, the manongs had finally settled into single-room occupancy residential hotels like the International Hotel; their calling of the hotel “home,” Robles shows us furthermore, was not based on desire to own private property but was, rather, an emotional appeal to preserve a home-place for the Filipino/American manong community, who were once again being displaced to make room for new developments for downtown San Francisco’s burgeoning financial district. Although their work as agricultural workers, busboys, sailors, cannery workers, and other devalued forms of labor could never be repaid in wages, Robles’s manong poems make the case that preserving the Manilatown community could be a small form of compensation:

i made it to manilatown
 the people here can name every fish back home

¹⁸ This economic transition is more fully discussed in the following chapter, on suburbanization in the San Francisco East Bay.

they sang songs all night
 waiting so long for the international hotel
 i dreamt of a place to gather with them
 surrounded with trees and rivers... (Robles 1996, 31)

Reading these poems and remembering his history of community service, I argue that Robles in all his endeavors labored to conjure and (re)produce a Filipino/American community built upon shared experiences and structures of feeling. This ethnic community was one not based on a shared romanticized, diasporic longing for the Philippines, but rather was forged out of a political solidarity between Filipino/Americans with other people of color also living, working, and dying in the west coast of the United States. In the following section, I read these other types of blues poems by Robles, those that directly took on the city's redevelopment schemes in neighborhoods marked as "blighted" because of their blackness.

From Manilatown to Fillmore: Alternative Genealogies of Belonging

Oh, I grew up in a state of confusion where everything was actually happening—jazz, Manongs, blacks, Chicanos, Chinese, and Japanese. When I say everything was happening, we had every conceivable thing you can imagine. You had the music and the poetry. You had the jazz, the poverty, the children, the rice, the homeless, the prostitutes... in the Fillmore.

— Al Robles

The place I recall most was a Filipino barbershop and a pool hall, located on Geary near Buchanan Street, and in spaces that were side by side, but with a door cut into the wall, so that people could go back and forth... The crowd was mainly Filipino. A lot of the Filipino old timers would hang out there and reminisce. They were natty dressers, good dancers, and very good pool players. But they were also hard working and very family-oriented men.

— Armand Rendon

Even as his blues poetry revealed the conditions of the early 20th century that led to the manongs's initial migration to the U.S., Robles also worked to bring to light the conditions of the contemporary moment that continued to displace the manongs in their twilight years. By the time that Robles began to write his poems on the manongs in the 1960s and 1970s, the capital flows in the Transpacific West had shifted away from U.S.-based production and export of commodities, towards the trade of intangible stocks, bonds, and investments with the newly targeted "Pacific Rim" region. Whereas once male Filipino migrant workers—along with other cheap Asian, Latino/a, and black laborers—were the cogs of modernity, by the 1960s the manongs and other racialized communities were found to be standing in the way of development; they were now surplus, or excess, that needed to be disposed of for the Manhattanization of downtown San Francisco to continue unimpeded. The Filipino neighborhood, Manilatown, was seen as a blight, a wasted and wasteful place that did not contribute to San Francisco's growing economy, which as Raul Homero Villa writes: "under the reigning imperatives of cities as engines of surplus accumulation, the use-value orientations to residential place of the poor and working classes can never hope to be equated with the greater good of the city, since...they are not 'useful for attracting capital'"(1987,135). Such assessments stand in direct contradiction to the reality of places like San Francisco's Manilatown; as Linda España-Maram notes on Los Angeles's Little Manila district, such places were important not just for the communal or affective labor performed within them, but also for their role as informal employment hubs for "productive" forms of labor.¹⁹ Yet, it was during this time that Justin Herman and the SFRA's urban

¹⁹ España-Maram 2006, 40. Besides serving as a grapevine for Filipino bachelors on available jobs, Filipino

redevelopment scheme for the Financial District destroyed over 4,000 low-income units in Manilatown and the surrounding area, which were replaced with parking lots and high-rise buildings including the infamous Transamerica Pyramid and the Bank of America's world headquarters; as Herman was quoted as saying, "This land is too valuable to permit poor people to park on it," (qtd. in Salomon 1998, 95). As a top SFRA priority in the 1970s, the Financial District Redevelopment Project had no need for the Filipinos "parked" on the valuable real estate occupied by the I-Hotel, which was now needed to build a parking lot—of all things—for white collar workers commuting to work in the trading companies, banks, and other corporate entities moving into the area (Salomon 1998, 94-5).

During this same time period, the SFRA also targeted the predominantly African American neighborhoods of the Western Addition and the Fillmore, marking them too as areas needing "slum clearance" as justification for the widening of Geary Parkway, a project that created a major thoroughfare linking residential middle-class neighborhoods in the western part of the city to the Financial District in the east. As early as the late 1940s, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA), a municipal body created in 1948 to "modernize" the city, targeted the Fillmore and the Western Addition as prime areas for "redevelopment." Empowered by the 1945 California Redevelopment Act, the SFRA designated the Western Addition as a "blighted area" in 1948 according to three

ethnic enclaves were also the location of thriving Filipino-owned businesses such as cafes, barbershops, pool halls, hotels, and restaurants which were frequented by more than just the manongs themselves. Backroom gambling halls and brothels in the Barbary Coast, of which the edges of Manilatown was part, were patronized by members of San Francisco's political and economic elite, whose literal backroom dealings directly influenced the direction of the city's redevelopment plans. As such, these grey or black market businesses were in reality quite valuable places even as they were characterized as wasteful or nonproductive sites of "vice." Linda España-Maram's *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila* (2006) provides an important analysis of the vice industry in LA's Chinatown and Little Manila districts.

ostensibly neutral criteria: the economic value of the area, determined by property values; they physical condition of the neighborhood; and the social conditions of the neighborhood.²⁰ But it was only with the passing of urban renewal legislation by Congress in 1949 and 1954—and the distribution of federal monies to the SFRA to “assemble land, clear it of offending uses, and finance redevelopment”—that the Western Addition redevelopment plan fully was underway under the leadership of SFRA head, Justin Herman (Walker 1998, 4). In partnership with private-public entities such as the Bay Area Council, the Blythe-Zellerbach Committee, and the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association (SPUR), the SFRA in the 1950s under Herman grew to a staff of several hundred, worked in close relation to Mayor Christopher’s office, and had control over eight renewal projects and tens of millions in federal subsidies (Hartman 2002, 18). The first house in the Fillmore was demolished in 1953, kicking off the decade-long “Western Addition Project A-1”—an urban renewal project which became known colloquially as “Negro Removal”—and which eventually affected 20,000 residents in the 1950s; in 1963, a second redevelopment plan (A-2) was announced, resulting in the displacement of over 13,000 people from the neighborhood during the 1960s (Hartman 2002, 63-4).

Though the discourse of urban redevelopment was of making neighborhoods safer, cleaner, and therefore more inhabitable, the targets of redevelopment projects were not its ultimately beneficiaries; for the black and brown residents of the Fillmore and Manilatown, many would never return to the neighborhood after they were evicted and

²⁰ SFRA (San Francisco Redevelopment Agency). *Report on the Redevelopment Plan for the Western Addition Approved Project Area A-2*. San Francisco, 1964. pp. 12-14.

their homes and businesses were demolished. This was always the intended plan of the SFRA and the private developers; one city planner went so far as to say: “Nothing short of a clean sweep and a new start can make the [Fillmore] district a genuinely good place in which to live” (qtd. in Walker 1998, 4). Community-based groups such as the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO), the Tenants and Owners in Opposition to Redevelopment (TOOR), the Western Addition District Council, and the Black Panther Party (who had a local office on Fillmore and Eddy Streets) made some gains for the Fillmore neighborhood and its inhabitants—such as the successful 1967 WACO lawsuit against the city to halt demolition—just as in the 1960s and 1970s a broad-based coalition of community members, college students, and other radical groups united to fight for the International Hotel, yet by the 1970s both of these neighborhoods already been largely razed, its tenants evicted, and communities destroyed.²¹

Partly in response to these actions, Al Robles wrote his poetry on the experiences and conditions of these dispossessed and displaced communities of color, native, and Third World peoples in addition to his poems on the Filipino manongs. By highlighting the differential impact structural forces have on Filipino/American manongs, African American men, and other men of color, Robles’s blues poetry stridently indicts the public-private partnerships contributing to these men’s displacements and deaths while, at the same time, celebrates their survival in the face of such violence (Hong 2006, xvi). Poems such as “Fillmore Black Ghetto,” written about the literally and metaphorically disappearing communities of the Fillmore, showcase best Al Robles’s blues aesthetics *as*

²¹ On the 1968 settlement of WACO’s filed injunction against relocation, demolition, and federal funding in Western Addition A-2 pending a valid relocation plan, see Chapter Five of Hartman (2002).

a spatial poetics, grounded in a blues worldview that linked Filipino/American struggles to those of other racialized communities.

“Fillmore Black Ghetto” is significant for its respatializing and rehistoricizing a primarily black neighborhood in San Francisco, expanding both the space and the time of a place under siege. It deploys a critical nostalgia, or a looking backward in time at the Fillmore district, intervening into dominant discourses of its unproductivity and uselessness by (re)valuing it as a home, place of leisure, and place of livelihood for many of the city’s marginalized and minority communities. The nostalgia of Robles’s poem is not based in a melancholic longing for a lost homeland or origin, but rather makes an expansive, forward-looking indictment of the structural racism that produces the Fillmore as a “Black Ghetto.” Svetlana Boym names this affect a “reflective nostalgia,” writing: “Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future. Consideration of the future *makes us take responsibility* for our nostalgic tales.”²² In his looking backwards, Robles pushes his readers and his live audiences to witness the geographic, economic, political, and social hierarchies that produced the Fillmore and Kearny Street neighborhoods as wastelands, impediments to progress, or “ghettoes,” so that they can begin imagine what an otherwise place could be.

²² Boym 2001, xvi; emphasis mine. To place the concept of reflective nostalgia into a blues epistemological framework, I turn to Angela Davis’s work on female blues singers, whom she says “constructed aesthetic bridges linking places and time and permitting a collective *prise de conscience* encompassing both the unity and the heterogeneity of the black experience” (1998, 90); this collective consciousness was “critical of the experiences of exploitation, alienation—and for women, male dominance—in the North” (Davis 1998, 89).

By the time Robles wrote “Fillmore Black Ghetto”—first published in the 1976 anthology of Filipino/American poetry, photography, and prose, *Liwanag*—the neighborhood had been under siege for over two decades by government and corporate interests colluding to discipline and displace its African American residents.²³ Born and raised in the Fillmore in a large family of twelve, Robles’s writing on the neighborhood draws from his personal experiences there; he functions thus as an organic intellectual expressing the Fillmore blues, for “not only [was he] a part of the community that was the subject of [his] song but [he was] also a product of the rural-to-urban movement” (Carby 1998, 476). Like others who called the Fillmore home, Al Robles was deeply informed and inspired by the neighborhood’s cultural contours. Perhaps most significantly for Robles and the Fillmore’s residents were the clubs of the Fillmore including Cousin Jimbo’s Bop City, Jack’s Tavern of Sutter Street, The Long Bar, and the Blue Mirror; at their height, these clubs brought in blues and jazz legends from around the country, such as John Coltrane, Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, and Miles Davis, and fostered the development of local musicians such as Sugar Pie DeSanto, Bobbie Webb, Etta James, Joseph “Flip” Nuñez, Johnny Mathis, and Jerome Richardson. Jazz music and the clubs had lasting impact on Robles’ writing, especially those poems that directly recalled his sense memory of the Fillmore and of Filipino blues and jazz artists participating in the music scene at very different periods of

²³ Important to note is that, while both are titled “Fillmore Black Ghetto,” the poems appearing in *Liwanag* (1975) and *Rappin’ With Ten Thousand Carabaos in the Dark* (1996) are not identical—several stanzas are arranged in different order, and some lines are edited or do not appear at all. This points to an aspect of Robles’s poetry as inherently improvisational—between printed and performed versions of the same poem was great variation, making the experience of listening to his poetry different every time.

his life and the life of the neighborhood.²⁴ His poems on the Fillmore evidence “a mix of personal sentiment and collective memory”—they recall his own highs and lows in these places, as well as the collective feelings of anger, betrayal, or even indifference of the residents who were displaced by the SFRA during the height of the city’s urban renewal schemes (Woods 1998, 83).

As our tour guide through the “Fillmore Black Ghetto,” Robles takes us to various places in the “down below” of the Fillmore “basement” which illuminate the history of the Fillmore as home to *both* Asian and black communities dispossessed by “the holy men and politicians” living the high life (1996, 99). Contained within the Fillmore—an area encompassing less than half a square mile—the poem focuses on men of color, and their partaking of the things they need to survive in the face of a grinding poverty and dispossession that prevents them from engaging in other more productive, or profitable, forms of labor. These excess(ive) populations, as Robles shows us, are not only African American but also Asian:

fillmore black ghetto
 abraham lincoln
 fucked on
 japanese sake
 ginza
 red lights
 runnin’ after
 young geishas
 yoshiwara nightmares
 ridin’
 the torays winds
 chasin’ after
 lady shikibu murasaki

²⁴ Al Robles’s love of jazz music—both listening to, and playing it—is well known among his friends, family, and other community members. Along with other Fillmore-born Filipino/Americans, like the late fellow I-Hotel activist and union organizer Bill Sorro, Robles was known to frequent Cousin Jimbo’s Bop City, Black Hall, Jackson’s Milk, and the 500 Club well through the 2000s (FANHS 2011, 119).

in the ‘tale of the genji’ dreams. (1976, 158)

Throughout the poem, Robles alludes to the neighborhood’s palimpsestic social and material geography—of its location containing, simultaneously, both the Nihonmachi/Japantown and the black Fillmore. While not directly claiming or naming the space as Nihonmachi, Robles delineates its social and geographic contours by referring to the racially-marked unhealthy foods consumed (chop suey, pork chops); mind-altering substances (sake, cocaine) imbibed; and clandestine activities committed (the “dark safari hunt” for prostitutes on Eddy Street and “runnin’ after / young geishas” near Shirasagi Bar) in places frequented after the last curtain has dropped on the performers at clubs like Jack’s and Bop City. Significantly, the black-Asian landscape portrayed by Robles is not the multicultural, racism-free paradise remembered by many of its residents, but is rather a dysfunctional place governed by drugs, sex, money, and booze, with those partaking being not only African American, but also Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino/American men.

As Robles returns to again and again throughout the poem, we find that music, drugs, women, and food are what are available for consumption in the Fillmore; sights, tastes, smells, and sounds of the four overlap in a dizzying litany until the poem’s climax. In their enjoyment and use of prostitutes, drugs, “junk food” and music, the men of Robles’s Fillmore can be understood as *queered* subjects who live “outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production” and by extension, outside the logic of capital accumulation (Halberstam 2005, 10). As Judith Halberstam writes, these queered subjects are not necessarily LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) but are those who “live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity)

during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned,” and include “sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed” (10). Yet while Halberstam’s list of subjects who inhabit queer time and space are largely unmarked by race, Robles’s poetry reminds us of the historical material and discursive conditions that produced the Fillmore as a racialized spatial and social location, much like other ethnic “ghettoes” and enclaves in San Francisco such as Manilatown.

By going “outside” to the bars, clubs, and alleys of the Fillmore, what Robles fails or refuses to show is the “inside,” or the domestic spaces imagined by white liberal discourse as purely private or somehow not subject to state intervention.²⁵ In the “Fillmore Black Ghetto,” there are no interior/domestic spaces or happy homes, no women in the poem who are not prostitutes, working men who are not pimps or drug dealers, nor children that are not starving in the street. Those depicted with free use of their time (for want or opportunity of anything else to do) are gendered as male based on the activities they have partaken in. Moreover, it is in their going “outside” for pleasure, rather than retreating to the home, that not only sexualizes the men in the Fillmore as queer, but specifically racializes them as *black men* because they are fundamentally without property—unable to sell their labor, and without a dwelling nor family with which to possess as their own (Hong 2006, 59). What marks the Fillmore’s inhabitants,

²⁵ For work on the construction of white American domesticity during the late 19th century through the deployment of racialized discourses of the “savage” and “foreign,” see Amy Kaplan’s “Manifest Domesticity” (*American Literature*, Vol. 70, No. 3, Sept. 1998, pp. 581-606). On the long history of anti-miscegenation laws in the United States, see Siobhan B. Somerville’s “Queer Loving” (*GLQ* 11:3, 2005, pp. 335-370). On the construction of the “white spatial imaginary” through restrictive housing policies and discourses of (im)morality, see George Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape” (*Landscape Journal* 26(1), 2007, pp. 10-23).

and the neighborhood itself, thus, as “black” is not one’s skin color nor a possession of an innate, biological essence of blackness, but because of the people’s and the neighborhood’s *discursive and material distance from white, heteronormative domesticity*. Much as Filipino/American bachelors in the early 20th century were characterized as sexual threats to white women and simultaneously effete for their homosocial living arrangements, and therefore greatly policed by the state and white civil society, so too, was the discourse and practice of queering the black American community necessary for first containing and then evicting them from San Francisco.

As scholars such as Roderick Ferguson, Chandan Reddy and Grace Hong have argued, the very concept of “home” in the 20th century United States was produced through discourses and practices which constructed African Americans as its negative, due to their “improper domesticity,” with sociologist Gunnar Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma* (1944) being a primary example. In this text, Myrdal casts African Americans as inherently pathological in part because of “the instability of the Negro family” (qtd. in Ferguson 2000, 426). He notes the preponderance of common law marriage, out-of-wedlock births, households headed by single women, and unattached women as indicators of “African American disorganization” and “distance from heterosexual and nuclear intimate arrangements,” differences which flew in the face of cultural and legal norms which valorized (white) heterosexual monogamy and patriarchal domesticity (427). Yet what Myrdal failed to note in his study are the ways in which these “disorganized” social relations emerged in no small part from the racial and sexual violence bodily inflicted upon African Americans over the course of three hundred years of chattel slavery—including practices of lynching, rape, and the separation of family

units—and of the absolute lack of a protected “private” sphere for slaves which, as Grace Hong notes, was a condition that continued well after the era of legalized slavery (Hong 2006, 25). These writings by Myrdal and others in the 1940s and 1950s, along with new studies produced by social scientists in the 1960s through the 1980s, were used to “mask the expulsion of millions of African Americans from historic urban communities, the mass incarceration of African Americans, and mass disenfranchisement with categories such as renewal, gentrification, revitalization, new urbanism, and ‘smart growth’” (Woods 2005, 1010).

Such discourse precisely informed the justification of Western Addition A-2 Project in the 1964 report by the SFRA, and of the previous SFRA reports on the earlier A-1 Project. These reports found that, when taken together, the area’s large number of children in single-parent households; its higher incidence of single individuals than families; its higher rates of unemployment and welfare cases; its high number of renters in ratio to property owners; and its larger nonwhite, lower income, and elderly population were the primary causes of the Western Addition’s “overloaded” and “excessive” living conditions (SFRA 1964, 14-18). The 1964 report listed no institutional or structural causes for the poor living conditions of Western Addition residents, seemingly then linking the neighborhood’s ills to its residents’ “culture of poverty”; as such, this report, while not directly stating the culture of poverty thesis, leads its readers to infer as much through “objective” social scientific observations such as the following:

In April 1962, a special survey of residents in Western Addition A-2 revealed that practically all large families (predominantly nonwhite) were living in quarters where the ratio of persons per room exceeded one, sometimes being substantially in excess of this ratio... This indicates that

the larger families live in the most crowded quarters and that these large families are predominantly nonwhite. (SFRA 1964, 14)

Utilizing this logic, the SFRA worked to “rehabilitate areas that are salvable making them sound and healthy neighborhoods” while “clear[ing] and redevelop[ing] areas that are nonsalvable slums,” by a wholesale eviction and displacement of its residents (SFRA 1964, 6). This went hand in hand with the Redevelopment Agency’s other, more primary, “community development objectives”—the “discovery and *exploitation* of the City’s best economic potentials, thereby assuring continued prosperity for all the citizenry”—as can be evidenced by the aftermath of Western Addition Projects A-1 and A-2 (SFRA 1964, 7; emphasis added). Despite the court agreement between WACO and the SFRA, which promised low-income housing units to be built for displaced residents, it was only business centers such as the Japanese Cultural Center and Fillmore Center that were quickly rebuilt, resulting in vacant lots for decades following and the near complete exodus of people of color from the Fillmore, most of whom were never able to return. Robles’s stanzas on the “piss streets” of the “Fillmore Black Ghetto” —“brown hands/ unfolding/ black flesh/ dyin’ pimps/ laid out cold/ on piss streets” —reflect the realities of the neighborhood in the late 1970s which were echoed by who remained in the district (by choice or for lack thereof):

...Riding the 22 Fillmore bus through the neighborhood was like that. Dark and empty. With all of these skeletons where buildings once stood... Dismal and desolate, all the way up Fillmore Street. And the only spots of people were at bus zones. (Nakajo qtd. in Pepin and Watts 2006, 175)

While giving no definite or single solution to end the drug addiction and violence he sees in the Fillmore, in this poem Robles does observe—fleetinglly—the milieu of social unrest and the escalation of violent conflicts between Asian and black militant

organizations with the police. The only indication of what time of year it is in the “Fillmore Black Ghetto” is one line—a “molotov cocktail summer”—when “cool jaimo” leads “a hundred black dragons / with a steel fist,” in reference to the Japanese American gang-turned-radical-organization, the Black Dragon Society.²⁶ Robles also notes the rising influence of the Nation of Islam (NOI), which had a mosque in the Western Addition, and of the continual presence of its leader in the 1970s, Minister Nathaniel Muhammad, on the Fillmore streets:

muslim center
 ellis & webster
 brother nathaniel
 rapping heavy
 “whatcha name?
 you ain’t got no name
 the white man gave you
 the white man

was crawlin’ around on his
 hands and knees, yea, brother
 while the black man was walkin’
 around upright.” (1976, 155-6)

While seemingly a purely descriptive portrayal of mundane street life in the district, the inclusion of this central rhetorical tenet of the NOI is a crucial reversal of the social and

²⁶ Robles 1976, 158. A March 31, 1942 *San Francisco News Article* article on the Black Dragon Society, titled “FBI Raids Jap Terrorists,” argues that this “most nationalistic and terroristic of all Japanese secret bodies” was formed to “inform the Japanese people of their national heritage and rights to dominate the world.” Printed just one month after the signing of Executive Order 9066, such sensationalistic news reports were used to justify the mass internment of Japanese Americans. Similar tactics would be taken to quash militant black and brown movements of the 1960s, but with an increase in violent tactics of infiltration and assassination of movement leaders such as the Black Panther Party’s Fred Hampton.

Robles’s inclusion of the Black Dragon Society in this poem perhaps also points to a shared militant solidarity between Japanese Americans and African Americans in trying to save the Fillmore; further research on this topic would be welcome. For more information on Nisei street gangs during the 1960s and their transition into radical nationalist formations alongside African American radical groups, see “Them Bad Cats,” a three-part series published in *Gidra* in 1973. The prior recommendation was found in Daniel Widener’s important piece on black-Asian anti-gentrification coalitions in Los Angeles, “‘Perhaps the Japanese Are to Be Thanked?’ Asia, Asian Americans, and the Construction of Black California” (*Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 2003, pp. 135-181).

spatial position Robles writes of at the end of the poem. In including Brother Nathaniel's exhortation to the Fillmore's black residents—to remember that African culture and civilization had a deep history, and that black people in America need to reclaim that power—Robles too voices a critique of the SFRA and others in favor of “ghetto clearance” by drawing on alternative wisdoms in order to “preserve, reconstruct and revitalize African Americans and other individuals and communities” living in this place (Woods 1998, 166).

Even as his poem would seem to revel in the gang violence, poverty, and sexual exploitation of prostituted women ever-present in the Fillmore, what is clear by poem's end are the orchestrated failures of the state and social services and institutions to alleviating the poverty of the ghetto, and in fact to the very corruption of those institutions themselves, their collusion in (re)creating the preconditions by which people of color must engage in illegal activities in order to survive. That is to say, “Fillmore Black Ghetto” voices a critique of the SFRA and others in favor of “ghetto clearance,” in part by Robles's drawing on alternative wisdoms in order to “preserve, reconstruct and revitalize African Americans and other individuals and communities” living in this place (Woods 1998, 166). This knowledge—the blues epistemology—that Robles deploys in his poetry, is fully realized in the last four stanzas of “Fillmore Black Ghetto,” where Robles directly implicates the multiple structures of power operating over and against the communities of color living not only in the Fillmore, but in Manilatown, the city of San Francisco, the state of California, and in the rest of the United States.

In these stanzas, Robles deftly breaks down the imaginary, yet structurally reinforced, social and spatial separation between the displaced and exploited peoples in

the Fillmore “basement” and with those “up on cathedral hill” (Robles 1996, 98). After a blues refrain common to songs about a lost love, repurposed to illustrate the hunger and poverty of the women who become “ten-dollar tricks” for a “cadillac slim/ midnight pimp” (“baby, baby, baby/ I ain’t got nothin’ to eat/ wake up this mornin’/ feelin’ so sad / cryin’ so bad”), Robles travels “up on cathedral hill / seven million dollars / st. mary’s cathedral” (98). In naming St. Mary’s Cathedral, Robles calls attention to the building of this place as a “landmark church” in the 1970s with city Redevelopment Agency funds while promised low-income housing units were never delivered upon²⁷; he defames church authorities as “poverty pimps,” working in collusion with city agencies to benefit themselves at the expense of the poor. From the top of the hill, Robles travels back “down below” to the “jivin’ whores/ hustlers / drivin’ pimps” and ends the poem with a explicit indictment of the structures of power that have produced the Fillmore as a ghetto full of sexually deviant black and brown bodies, in need of redevelopment efforts to clear out this so-called urban blight:

soulsville
 baby
 what it is
 starvin’
 black children
 jingle jangle
 thru dark alleys
 young bloods
 poor blacks
 reachin’ & crawlin’
 screamin’ & hollerin’
 at the white lies & promises

²⁷ As part of WACO’s court injunction to stop displacement of residents, the SFRA signed a consent decree signed requiring them to provide 1,500 to 1,800 units to replace the destroyed units, but this housing was never built (Hartman 1984, 60-75).

of holy men and politicians. (1996, 99)

In showing us the bonds of dependency between the people in the material and metaphorical “basement” of the Fillmore with the men “on high,” Robles denounces the dominant local, national, and international regimes that produce black residents of the Fillmore as evictable populations.²⁸ But even more radically, Robles’s blues poetry enacts a spatial reversal, but elevating the Fillmore “basement” to what Clyde Woods has called the “upper rooms.” His poems on the Fillmore illustrate a “multiethnic working-class vision of a flawed United States haunted by its own practices of ethnic oppression and forced poverty” that at the same time “offer an unapologetic celebration of life, resistance, spiritual affirmation, community, social and humanity, and the highest level, the ‘upper rooms’ of African American culture and philosophy” (Woods 1998, 20).

By the end of “Fillmore Black Ghetto,” Robles has come full circle, disrupting the accepted social positioning of white and black men using the terms of religious morality or “uprightness” (Robles 1996, 95). In ending with an image of corrupted white figures within an ostensibly holy place, and the agony produced in the neighborhoods below because of their decisions, he illuminates the farce of redevelopment discourses that produced African Americans as sexually deviant, domestically disorganized, and profane,

²⁸ One of the most damning pieces of evidence against black residents of the Western Addition was that they had converted attics and basements into places to live (SFRA 1964, 2); it is the last description of the housing conditions in the 1964 SFRA Report’s introduction before they conclude: “The last decade in this long story of decline finds blight consolidated and seemingly permanent in the area, accompanied by its environmental associate, social degradation” (2). Quite literally, then, the Fillmore is deemed an unsalvable slum because of such improper uses of private space.

while casting (white) municipal agencies as their saviors²⁹; as he shows throughout the poem, it is not the “ghetto” that needs to be cleared or made clean, but the very institutions themselves. Though Brother Nathaniel of the Nation of Islam reminds his followers in “Fillmore Black Ghetto” that it was the white man “on his knees” at the beginning of time, the reality Robles documents is of the black women and children of the Fillmore groveling while others remained intentionally blind to this disaster.

As in African American blues, Robles’s poetry documents the “changing social conditions and contradictions of black displacement: of rural migration and urban flux” (Carby 1998, 476). In “Fillmore Black Ghetto,” Robles articulates a plight common to African American urban communities born out of the American post-Reconstruction moment: the impact of the mid- and late-20th “Negro Removal” campaigns in major cities where black communities and forms of life were flourishing after the Great Migration, in places such as Chicago, New York, and West Coast port cities like San Francisco. “Fillmore Black Ghetto” challenges the reader or listener to denaturalize their conceptions of what makes a neighborhood a “black” place; the poem forces one to encounter the ways in which the confluence of popular, academic, and bureaucratic discourses and practices worked together to actively *produce* neighborhoods such as Fillmore as “blighted” ghettos or ethnic enclaves in need of slum clearance, a move that compels us to disabuse ourselves of the assumption that these areas remain poor because of an inherent “culture of poverty” or that these districts were targeted for demolition due sheer accident of geography. Moreover, “Fillmore Black Ghetto,” for all its negative

²⁹ As African American poet and essayist Sterling Brown wrote, “The blues are often repetitious, inconsecutive, with sudden changes from tragedy to farce” (Brown 1952, 291-292).

affect, itself exceeds the terms of black death mapped out on the page; it cannot help but imagine otherwise, towards alternative forms of black life that cannot be pathologized, erased, or destroyed by the diagnosis of a culture of poverty or of blight.

While the overall tone of “Fillmore Black Ghetto” is quite bleak, Robles still offers a moment of possibility in this poem that he further explores in later poems such as “All The Things He Was” the performing, enjoyment and experience of blues and jazz music itself. Even as the space of the black home was discursively depicted by the SFRA and social scientific accounts as disorganized, and the streets of the Fillmore were “piss cold,” in the music halls some semblance of pleasure and hope remains, interrupting the litanies of pain which take up most of the text:

armando rendon’s / brown magic / finger tips / flaming / the congo soul

melrose junction / hampton hawes / got it down / no other sound / “all the things you are”

denny’s / barrel house bar / boogie woogie / all night long. (155-159)

In these stanzas, which are interspersed throughout the poem as non-repetitive refrains, the beauty of musical performance is contrasted with the brutality of daily life. For brief moments in the poem—as perhaps, in real life—the reader/listener is transported to another sonic world, one that both reflects back *and* blunts the pains of living in the Fillmore and other blighted places.

Despite its ephemerality—its transient and fleeing nature—the melodies and riffs emanating from Cousin Jimbo’s Bop City, Jack’s Tavern of Sutter Street, and the Blue Mirror still offered a temporary release for the Fillmore’s musicians and patrons alike, emotions and experiences which could not—and cannot still—be contained by the city’s

discourses and designations of the district as a “social[ly] and economic[ally] maladjusted” place and of its residents as doing nothing to “enrich the cultural life of the community.”³⁰ By the very continuation of the music in the clubs, and of the presence of the local performers and patrons who remained in the district until the wrecking balls arrived, a contingent form of resistance was mounted to the city’s plans. In her work on dancehall music and juke joints as sites of pleasure and resistance, Sonjah Stanley-Niaah writes: “The existence of enjoyment assaults and mocks the oppressive everyday and those who construct and maintain it... Where plantation, township, and ghetto folks are left to self-destruct in a quagmire of oppression, they mock that oppression by surviving in its face. Thus the very spaces created for consumption and production of cultural forms and access to pleasure constitute sites of political power for that practice and the people that create them.”³¹ Robles’s poems, along with the actual interactions had between Filipino/Americans and other people of color in the physical spaces of which he wrote, were sites where power could be negotiated; they perform a “direct confrontation with the daily reality of lives, and the history of degradation, a painful history,” while imaging different forms of sociality and community that cannot be captured by the state discourse,

³⁰ SFRA 1964, 7-10. Robin Kelley writes of black Americans in the Jim Crow South that “the search for the sonic, visceral pleasures of music and fellowship, for the sensual pleasures of food, drink, and dancing was not just about escaping the vicissitudes of southern life. They went with people who had a shared knowledge of cultural forms, people with whom they felt they felt kinship, people with whom they shared stories about the day or the latest joke, people who shared a vernacular whose grammar and vocabulary struggled to articulate the beauty and burden of their lives” (1996, 84-85).

³¹ Stanley-Niaah 2007, 207. To clarify, I do not think the political resistance Stanley-Niaah discusses is possible in such a clear cut way as she imagines—that “enjoyment can reduce the potential to violence against the self and community because it channels energies in a pleasurable way” (2007, 207). I find it to be an assumption that ignores the ways that pleasure, too, has been commodified and used as a force for gendered labor exploitation.

nor even in the space of a poem.³² Al Robles's poems thus add to the chorus calling for the (re)creation of the neighborhoods made up of, and run by, the communities of color who built it from the ground up:

Jim Moore: I wish I could go back, just to listen to those sounds...
You could just sit there and forget about your problems.

Sugar Pie De Santo: Yeah, your troubles would just melt away.
The music brought us together, and everybody was happy and
smiling. People weren't jumping up trying to fight.

Jim Moore: Oh man, people have no idea. They have absolutely no idea
what it was like. And what it did for you... The Fillmore was something
else. (Pepin and Watts 2006, 178)

In contrast to the “dirty streets” and “unkempt spaces” which city planners, corporate developers, and even contemporary historians of color documented in their reports declaring the Fillmore and Manilatown as “blighted,” Robles's blues poetics conjure something, or somewhere, else—places where “the streets sparkled like stars,” a neighborhood where “dreams come true.”³³ His work serves as a poetic affirmation of the knowledge held by other Filipino/American, Japanese American, Latino/a, and black residents of the “ghettoes” such as the Fillmore and Manilatown, such as by Armando Rendon, a biracial Guatemalan-Filipino/American raised in the Fillmore until his family was evicted in 1951-1952:

³² Henderson 1982, 30. It is important to remember these subjects, places, and performances of music which Robles wrote of were not outside the realm of power, nor were they totally uninhibited or unregulated; at the same time, the taxi dance halls, the jazz clubs, the International Hotel, importantly, “perform sociality and facilitate corporeal relation” and as such are always “also about the negotiation of power” (Burns 2008, 27).

³³ Robles 1996, 88-89. As poet and friend Alan Chong Lau recalls, this was Al Robles's skill—of captivating the listener and of “taking them into his own world” (*Manilatown is in the Heart*, dir. Curtis Choy).

The Fillmore during the '40s and '50s was fabulous. A great place to raise kids. The neighborhood was very mixed, and we didn't have any racially motivated outbreaks. (qtd. in Pepin and Watts 2006, 37)

Robles's blues poems work to remember this era and these places as something more than what the dominant discourse had already marked it as—a “Little Dead End,” a slum—or what it was to become in the coming decades, through its invocation of the music, the people, and their places of pleasure (Pepin and Watts 2006, 166). It calls up local knowledge by people of color, and as such presents a counter-memory to the devaluation of place continually enacted by city planners, SFRA agency heads like Justin Herman, and politicians like San Francisco Mayors George Christopher and Joseph Alioto.³⁴

Blues Legacies

[The poetry] wasn't only celebrating. It wasn't just talking about social change... It was beautiful, and at the same time we wanted to get it fixed. Change the structure [...] I see the feeling and the poetry of it, but I don't feel the poetry of it now. The question is, How do we find our own community?
— Al Robles

Through poems such as “The Wandering Manong,” “Fillmore Black Ghetto” and “Jurimentado Blues in Reno,” Al Robles's cultural productions—as part and parcel of his direct service in the community—were constitutive of an affective architecture, or an

³⁴ The contradictory nature of these recollections is part and parcel of the “blues matrix,” described by Houston Baker as such: “As a force, the blues matrix defines it self as a network mediating poverty and abundance in much the same manner that it reconciles durative and kinetic. Many instances of the blues performance contain lyrical inscriptions of both lack and commercial possibility. The performance that sings of abysmal poverty and deprivation may be recompensed by sumptuous food and stimulating beverage at a country picnic, amorous favors from an attentive listener, enhancing Afro-American communality, or Yankee dollars from representatives of record companies traveling in search of blues as com modifiable entertainment. The performance, therefore, mediates one of the most prevalent of all antimonies in cultural investigation- creativity and commerce” (1983, 8-9).

infrastructure that supported the formation of Filipino/American communities tied not solely by blood or direct descent, but by alternative structures of feeling. His work is based in a blues epistemology that stresses resistance to structural violence rooted in racism, heteropatriarchy, and imperialist hierarchies of power and domination; moreover, the affective architectures in his work and in the manongs's daily lives supported new forms of Filipino/American life based in shared desires for sovereignty and decolonization not only for Filipinos in the U.S., but for other native, Third World, and communities of color throughout the world.

Throughout the International Hotel struggle of the 1970s, and in the subsequent decades of organizing to rebuild the residence along with the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, Robles continued to stress the importance of the place—as something more than a claim for private property or for a physical home for elderly Filipino men, but as a home-place that could sustain ephemeral forms of kinship and community. In Robles's own words: "It wasn't only a hotel: it was a gathering place that brought them together. It was celebration; it was ritual. *It was bringing back a life*" (Robles qtd. in Sobredo 1998, 282; emphasis added). In recalling the ghosts of the manongs in his Manilatown poems, Robles both celebrates their survival in the United States against structural violence as well as indicts the public-private partnerships that betrayed the very communities of color whose labors materially and discursively built the wealth of the city, region, state, and nation. His blues poetry was not melancholic or merely lamenting the disappearing state of Filipino San Francisco, but was an active part of what Robles called his praxis of "rearranging the world...to rearrange lives." His blues poems, grounded in a future-oriented and spatially expansive aesthetic and ethic of challenging static notions of

Filipino/American subjectivity and place, was one mode through which Robles labored—his poetry operated by "confronting the blues, acknowledging the blues, counting the blues, naming the blues" in order to "expel the blues from one's life" (Davis 1998, 135).

Despite its limitations—as phallogocentric, non-sophisticated, or overly sociological as critics have charged—Al Robles's cultural productions remain important for the ways they (re)produce forms of being in the world that help us imagine other political and personal possibilities than what is imagined or experienced in a bleak present. They produce Manilatown and other ethnic spaces not as self-contained but as what Renya Ramirez has called a "hub"—a geographic space and activity that enables people to maintain relationships and develop political coalitions (2007, 59). It is not enough to remember that African Americans, white allies, and other Asian immigrant communities were among the first supporters of the International Hotel movement, putting their bodies in harm's way to protect the building and its residents when much of the middle-class Filipino/Americans in the Bay Area did not (Sobredo 1998, 282). What Robles's poetry also illuminates are the reasons *why* "they" would work in solidarity with "us," and why it remains imperative to work in solidarity with them—because our lives are so entangled, that to fail to work with the other is to work against the self. Robles's poetry worked to illuminate the conditions faced by variegated ethnic communities which were particular to each, while at the same time linking these experiences, places, and sensations together to produce a larger web of kinship, affiliation, and shared investments between these communities in fighting the different forms of heteropatriarchy, global neoliberal capitalism, and imperialist warfare in order to "burn up all that white shit / that's keeping your people down" (Robles 1996, 113).

Al Robles's poetics of place are based in a blues epistemology that is, at its core, a decolonial epistemology. By his "rearranging of the world" through his blues poetry, Robles refuses the settler colonial logic that would assume any space could be a "terra incognita" or empty land—in his writings about Manilatown, the Mission, Fillmore, Pine Ridge, and other places, Robles draws our attention to multiple, overlapping processes of slavery and Reconstruction, indigenous genocide, colonialism, and other forms of labor and land exploitation which have produced these neighborhoods as "home" for so many people of color who, in the 1960s onwards, were again pushed out and displaced. In his poems, Robles does not write the history of one man or people's life, but the *histories* of many lives marked by multiple displacements. In content *and* form, Robles's poems labor towards a collective freedom based not on a re-appropriation or primary claim to land, but on a shared understanding of the structural conditions that have forced the multiple dislocations and displacements of Filipino/Americans and other communities of color in the United States, from the heyday of Manilatown and the International Hotel through its ongoing, ever-unfolding afterlife.

CHAPTER 2
Picket Fences and Martial Law:
Barbara Jane Reyes and the East Bay Suburbs

Fillmore Street, San Francisco, CA: Jazz and life on the edges are daily improvisations when the streets are cold. Family is the folks who sit at your table, sell you the morning paper, wander this neighborhood and collect your stories for safekeeping. Poet Elder, you are conduit and vessel; your voice, a protest—who says history is only about dead white people! You have transcribed history; it's about us.

— Barbara Jane Reyes, “Placemarkers”

Addressing her Filipino/American predecessors in the 2003 poem

“Placemarkers,” Barbara Jane Reyes dedicates this three-page poem, from her first published collection *Gravities of Center*, to “Al Robles, and for the Elders whose stories he told” (28). Born in Manila but raised and still based in the San Francisco Bay Area, Reyes introduces the poem by paying her *utang* or debt to the first generation of male migrants from the Philippines, honoring their manual labor in the fields of California and their decades of fighting against the urban renewal policies that would eventually disappear the Manilatown neighborhood from the heart of San Francisco. Here, she names one man in particular as a creative inspiration and mentor: the late “Poet Elder” and “poet-laureate of Manilatown,” Al Robles.¹ In doing so, Reyes situates herself as a

¹ In her eulogy for Al Robles, Reyes wrote: “Over the past couple of decades, I would find him somewhere in San Francisco streets, with plastic bags full of stuff, or sitting in some hole in the wall place, eating fish and rice with his hands. He would invite me to sit, and he would tell so much story. He remembered so much about the city, despite its constantly changing landscape, despite the changing color of its people. He taught me to pay acute attention to this city at ground level, and to its people, the elderly Pinoy selling the morning paper or playing chess alongside Market Street just outside the Powell Street station, the homeless Vietnam veteran in the Mission District, the natty homeless man like a wild Black Jesus” (Reyes, Barbara Jane. “San Francisco Poet Al Robles (1930-2009).” *Harriet*. August 2009.

genealogical descendent of these men, claiming a place within a longer history of Filipino migration to the United States and seeking affiliation with the primarily male cohort of “Flip poets” in San Francisco. Al Robles, as primary example of the Flip poets, worked intimately with the manongs, archiving their life stories of laboring in the fields of Stockton and Delano and of spending their twilight years in the International Hotel, the last bastion of Manilatown and site of an intense decade-long anti-eviction battle that culminated tragically on August 4, 1977 (Habal 2007, 6). Robles’s written and performed poetry distilled the manongs’s stories in verse, with poems like “The Wandering Manong” that call the International Hotel back from the dead: “i made it to manilatown / the people here can name every fish back home/ they sang songs all night / waiting so long for the international hotel / i dreamt of a place to gather with them/ surrounded with trees and rivers” (Robles 1996, 31). Aligning herself with his creative labors and political praxis, Reyes too strives to “commit to memory the aftershave, the black fedora, the red silk tie patterned with black hearts” of the manongs (2003, 29); she does this while recognizing her social distance from them and from the Flip poets, identifying herself as a Filipina of “a different generation of suburban comfort in newly painted track homes” (29).

Reyes’s “Placemarkers” serves as both an elegy to generations past and as a claiming of her place within the history and place(s) of Filipino America. Her poem traces an alternative social history and cultural geography of Filipino migration to the San Francisco Bay Area, and I read it closely in this chapter in order to reconsider the spaces

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2009/08/san-francisco-poet-al-robles-1930-2009>).

where Filipino/American lives can be produced and sustained in the afterlife of Manilatown and the International Hotel. By tracking the sites of memory that Reyes visits, sees, and touches in the early 2000s—and the people she encounters on her travels there—I mine the contested suburban geographies of the Filipino Bay Area, places which have gone largely unrecognized as sites of anti-Filipino violence and instead are understood as sites of Filipino inclusion into a multicultural, liberal nation. Turning to suburbia allows me to uncover what Dianne Chisholm has called a “queer constellation” of places that “excavate the ruins of the recent metropolitan past, aiming to recover and redeem history’s trash in startling revelatory assemblages” (Chisholm 2005, 54); these are places which, I argue in this chapter, make up the larger material, affective, and cultural architectures of the Filipino Bay Area. Reyes’s “Placemarkers,” like Robles’s poems, moves between scales. In turning to these sites, the poem dredges up moments of American imperial incursions into the Philippines during the 19th and 20th centuries, all of which have factored into the production of the geographically dispersed formations of Filipino/American life in excess of Manilatown’s ghostly borders. It functions to bridge the gap between the manong generation and the post-1965 generation of Filipino immigrants and settlers in the United States through geographic disordering and affective reconnection, complicating the notion that intimacy can be generated only through heteronormative kinship relations.

This chapter also engages with debates over what form the appropriate speaking subject *of* and *for* Filipino San Francisco should take, in its attention to Reyes herself, as a college-educated, suburban-raised Filipina immigrant living and working in Oakland, California. I am interested in the ways that Reyes’s biography intersects with the poetic

narrative in “Placemarkers” which, together, materialize the contradictions and difficulties of establishing a fixed Filipino/American subjectivity in relationship to other Filipino/Americans in San Francisco, as well as to other working-class Latino/a and black communities in the Bay Area region. With the razing of Manilatown and the death of the manong generation, the material and metaphorical ground of Filipino San Francisco has seemingly been erased; in its wake, new and disparate formations of Filipino/American culture and community have challenged proscribed notions of its authentic sites. Reyes’s writing and biography forces us to extend the history and memory of Filipino San Francisco beyond the borders of the metropolis, to include suburban and even rural areas in the Bay Area region, and to turn our gaze (back) towards the Philippines: the representations of life, death, and violence in Barbara Jane Reyes’s “Placemarkers,” I contend, sutures two social classes of Filipino immigrants to the United States, separated over time and space, through its illumination of the vulnerabilities to violence shared by the manongs and post-1965 immigrants from the Philippines. The poem thus performs a utopian politics in its expansion of the sights—and sites—of Filipino America.

The Problematic of “Authenticity” in Filipino America

Born in Manila but raised in the sprawling East Bay suburb of Fremont, Barbara Jane Pulmano Reyes’s body of work has circulated in a way nearly unprecedented for other contemporary Filipino/American poets. Reyes’s educational credentials evidence the success of the 1960s and 1970s struggles for Ethnic Studies to be instituted in the university: she holds a bachelors degree in Asian American Studies from San Francisco State University and a master’s degree in creative writing from the University of

California-Berkeley.² From this exceptional training in Asian American literature and history, Reyes has gone on to write prolifically and has been met with wide acclaim. Her poetry appears in numerous anthologies, including those not specifically marketed as “Filipino American poetry” collections, and her books have received local, state, and national awards—in 2005, her first published full-length book of poetry, *Poeta*, received the James M. Laughlin Award from the Academy of American Poets, while her 2010 book *Diwata* won the Global Filipino Literary Award for Poetry and was a finalist for the California Book Award.³ Reyes has also been awarded prestigious writing fellowships, most significantly the 2006 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellowship.

Reyes’s involvement in local, regional, and national arts communities is not limited to her interventions in poetic form. Reyes is active in Bay Area Pilipino American Writers (BAYPAW) and Philippine American Writers and Artists, Inc. (PAWA), major regional and national associations, respectively, for Filipino/American writers, poets, and other creative professionals. She teaches courses in Filipino American poetry and literature at several Bay Area universities—most recently at the private institutions of Mills College and the University of San Francisco—and is regularly invited to facilitate poetry workshops, give guest lectures, and perform at poetry readings around the nation, from Los Angeles to New York to Miami. While Reyes’s cultural capital accrues value

² UC Berkeley and San Francisco State College were the birthplaces of two of the first Ethnic Studies programs in the nation, after unprecedented student-led demonstrations, sit-ins, and strikes. At UC Berkeley, the Filipino Student Association was formed in 1969, and affiliated itself with the Black Student Union, Chicano Student Union, as well as nationwide movements and organizations such as the anti-Vietnam War movement, the Black Civil Rights Movement, and the California farmworkers’ struggle (del Sol in Louie and Omatsu 2006, 141).

³ A sampling of titles in which Reyes has published reveal the breadth and depth of her creative and critical output: *Not Home, But Here: Writing from the Philippine Diaspora* (2003); *Red Light: Superheroes, Saints, and Sluts* (2005); *Bay Poetics* (2006); and *Poets on Teaching: A Sourcebook* (2010). She has recently been included in the Latino poetics anthology *Beyond the Field*, forthcoming.

through these local, time-bound performances, her writing circulates across space and time—a prolific blogger and writer across social media platforms, Reyes engages wide audiences across local, state, and national borders. Reyes’s online presence through interviews; personal and professional blog posts about her own poetry and the poetry of others; and her online engagement in broader discussions of the state of Filipino American poetry places Reyes in virtual contact and collaboration with artists and connoisseurs around the world, even those unable to access her work at their local bookstore or to travel to see her deliver a reading or lecture. Even more significantly, Reyes has used her internet savvy to circumvent some of the restrictions of the traditional publishing industry; she founded and facilitates Doveglion, an online press for new Filipino poetry in English and named after a text by modernist Filipino migrant poet Jose Garcia Villa.

The many channels through which Reyes and her writing circulates reflect her ability to move beyond the limitations imposed on so-called “ethnic writers.” While the burden of representation faced by writers and other cultural producers of color is one that has been discussed in great length elsewhere, what I find most interesting about the narrative trajectory of Reyes’s life are the ways that her personal and professional biography—her education and suburban upbringing, her relative financial success and the critical acclaim of her work—comes to stand in for a serious consideration of her work as both aesthetically sophisticated *and* politically exigent by some critics.⁴ It is an inverse problem than the one faced by Al Robles in the first chapter of this dissertation. Whereas

⁴ On the burdens of representation faced by Asian American artists, see: Evelina M. Galang’s *Screaming Monkeys: Critiques of Asian American Images*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2003.

the aesthetic of Robles's work has been overlooked by academics' and activists' emphasis on the poetry's "politicized" content, within other spaces produced and policed as sites of working class, urban-based Filipino/American "community" Reyes's poetry is deemed as too abstract and inaccessible, its content not reflective of the "true" experience of Filipino/as "indigenous" to the San Francisco Bay Area. Reyes's poetry is imagined as belonging to the sphere of the avant-garde, and, as such, made impossible to claim as produced by and for an imagined, originary Filipino/American Bay Area population.⁵ If *some* Filipino/Americans still have the blues, Barbara Jane Reyes is not one of them; the biological kin of Al Robles and the manong generation, and not the middle-class migrant *poeta*, lays proper claim to Filipino/American blues geographies and genealogies in the Bay Area.

This charge of ethnic inauthenticity is one that Reyes has continued to negotiate in the years following the publication of *Gravities of Center*, and throughout her subsequently published poems, blog posts, and prose writing, we encounter a simultaneous ambivalence and annoyance with having to answer to these burdens of representation. Of the subjective borders put up by gatekeepers of "authentic" Filipino

⁵ Reyes has spoken with me privately, and blogged publically on multiple occasions in response to such critiques of her work. In 2013, she wrote: "I'm tired of the party lines. I'm tired of the authenticity police.[...] When I was a young emerging author, it used to really disappoint me, and it used to really hurt my feelings when other Filipino Americans would not vibe with my work. These days, lots of Filipino Americans still do not vibe with my work, nor do they deem it authentically Filipino American. These days, in addition to placing less and less value in 'authentically Filipino American,' I am grateful for the readers who have come to my work, wherever they're from and however they've come to the work; resonance is how community comes to form. [...] What I am not down with, what I do not propagate is Filipino American authenticity. It is a fiction, a weaponized fiction, a threat held over others who have not bought into a given agenda. [...] Have I written a credo? Maybe I've written a credo." (Reyes, Barbara Jane. "Tired of the party lines. Tired of the authenticity police." *Barbara Jane Reyes: poeta y diwata* [blog]. <http://www.barbarajanereyes.com/2013/05/16/tired-of-the-party-lines-tired-of-the-authenticity-police/>)

American literature, Reyes writes:

[...] Yes, the politics of reading literary works by “our own,” especially those Filipino American authors who are in some circles talked about, labeled as “Difficult.” “Experimental.” “Postmodern.” I can’t let these labels deter me, and I have to teach my students the same — not to be deterred by such labeling. It’s a prejudice within our own community, one that is anti-intellectual, which makes me sad, these lines drawn right down the middle of the page. Reminds me of that rosary used to divide the world map into Spanish and Portuguese colonial territories. Subjective demarcation line, based upon what? ⁶

The problematic faced by Reyes is not unique to her, and is one faced by cultural producers working across artistic genres. As Filipino American Studies scholar Sarita See writes of the field of visual arts, Filipino/American artists working with abstract repertoires are often favored by mainstream arts critics and consumers; abstract works are praised as modern or postmodern—code for these artists/works having “transcended race”—while more representational artworks are considered aesthetically backward or naïve (2009, xxv). This critical tendency, See goes on to argue, fails to account for the ways in which such cultural productions engage with the legacies of Spanish and US colonialism in the Philippines and Filipino/American racial formation (xxv). We see this replicated in the suspicion directed at Reyes that often comes from Filipino/American cultural producers and community organizers working outside of the rarefied realms in which she circulates; the unease over Reyes’s relatively higher cultural capital most frequently is displaced onto questioning the “appropriateness” of her more experimental, less “grounded” forms of representation of Filipino Americans, especially when it comes to representing the International Hotel and its history. Resistant to the critiques meant to

⁶ Reyes, Barbara Jane. “Revisiting *Dog eaters* and Other Possible Revelations in Filipino Literature.” *Barbara Jane Reyes: poeta y diwata* (blog). <http://www.barbarajanereyes.com/2013/01/11/revisiting-dog-eaters-and-other-possible-revelations-in-filipino-literature>

silence her, Reyes actively wrestles in her writing with the contradictions and ambivalences she feels as a suburban-raised, middle-class Filipino/American living in the Bay Area; “Placemarkers” is one of Reyes’s earliest attempts to do so, and most directly takes on the legacies of Manilatown, the Flip poets, and her own geographic and social position in relation to these powerful sites and figures of Filipino America.

To understand the investments driving the gatekeeping of Filipino San Francisco’s metaphorical and material borders, it is important to note the clear class differences, migration trajectories, and settlement patterns between the manongs with the “second wave” of Filipino immigrants arriving after 1965. As documented in the introduction and chapter one, the manongs were often migratory upon their arrival to the United States in the early 20th century; they traveled up and down the U.S. West Coast, up to Alaska, and over to Hawai’i in search of menial labor in the fields, canneries, and hotels run by white Americans, in the decades between the Philippine-American War through the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act which ostensibly granted the Philippines full sovereignty from the United States.⁷ In contrast, middle-class status and professional backgrounds often characterize post-1965 Filipino/American immigrants and citizens; unlike the manongs, this wave of immigrants were able to settle in suburbia, as Filipino American Studies scholars Rick Bonus and Benito Vergara have shown in their ethnographies of Filipinos in San Diego and Daly City, California, respectively.

⁷ Allan Isaac’s *American Tropics* (2006) addresses the problematics of space and time posed by the status of Filipinos in the early part of the 20th century: “In the U.S. courts, Filipinos on the continent have been characterized as either aliens in a state of the Union (space) or natives of a former U.S. territory (time). The designation provided a legal logic by which Filipinos during the territorial period would always be out of sync with national time and space. Enfolded borders create a condition for territorial inhabitants in which articulation or disarticulation from national space and time remains dangerously imminent and unilateral according to the imperium’s economic and political needs” (38-39).

More than the geographic separation is the social distance between the manongs with the second wave—the conservative political leanings of middle-class suburban Filipinos also distinguishes them from the manongs who battled for their homes in the International Hotel.⁸ This immigration history has fueled the narrative that Filipino immigrants in suburbia have largely assimilated into mainstream American conservative values and culture, discursively placing them within a larger racial formation of Asian Americans as “model minorities” in the United States (Park 2008, 135). Like other Asian immigrants arriving after 1965, Filipino/Americans like Barbara Jane Reyes have been discursively enfolded into what Dylan Rodriguez has called the “logic of genocide” (2006, 158); they have come to occupy a relational racial identity predicated on the continued abjection of black and indigenous Americans. Claire Jean Kim (1999) has written of the Asian American “model minority” subject as an agent of racial triangulation, an intermediary figure mediating between whiteness and blackness yet perpetually foreign and apart from both. Such discourses suggest that Filipino/Americans have benefited economically and socially at the expense of other communities of color, and certainly Barbara Jane Reyes’s personal trajectory would seem, superficially, to bear this out.⁹

⁸ Benito Vergara writes in *Pinoy Capital: The Filipino Nation in Daly City* (2009): “Daly City represents a certain class ideal that is both a product and a component of Filipino middle-class imagining [...]” Hot-button issues like affirmative action (especially in California), voting registration campaigns, the struggle for veteran’s equity, increased militarization in the Philippines, or even the continued demolition of Filipino enclaves via ‘gentrification’ like that of San Francisco’s South of Market (SoMa) area, had failed to ignite a movement outside activist realms... Anecdotal accounts from many of my interviewees suggest that some former Daly City residents were enjoying a measure of prosperity, cashing in on the wild Bay Area housing market, selling their Daly City homes, and moving to larger residences in the East Bay and further down the Peninsula” (3, 12).

⁹ Vergara surmises: “Despite the accusations of a lack of ethnic solidarity, it is clear that the presence of Filipinos, whether relatives or strangers, constitutes the great draw for potential Daly City Filipino residents... But as my interviewees with Filipino Daly City residents make clear, expectations of ethnic solidarity are shattered upon arrival in the United States. Solidarity is anticipated, even obligatory, but the

It is in looking more closely at the history of suburban development, however, that this narrative of Filipino/Americans as model minorities can be disrupted; for it is racial violence, more so than liberal progress, that builds the material and discursive foundations of U.S. suburbs. That is to say, I argue that in order to reframe this problematic of ethnic authenticity faced by Reyes and other middle-class Filipino/Americans, it is necessary to uncover the imperial and domestic forces behind the production of the suburbs and other sites of Filipino America. Like other scholars of race and place, I turn to suburbia as local sites where national and transnational economic processes and political shifts are played out. In *Relocations*, queer theorist Karen Tongson argues that it is “the suburbs of the twentieth century [that best] symbolized the United States’ *imperial transition* from a production economy to one of consumption,” and she uses the Inland Empire of Southern California as a primary location to investigate these processes (Tongson 2011, 12; emphasis added). Tongson’s text argues that Southern California’s notorious suburban sprawl did not just appear out of thin air after World War II, but rather, emerged as the most visible built form in a palimpsestic geography made out of “layers of settlement, occupation, and development bleeding into and out of one another until everything becomes nearly indiscernible” (119). She reveals the ways that British, Spanish, and white American settlers have left their traces throughout the region’s culture and landscape, connecting the construction of the majestic Spanish-colonial style Mission Inn in downtown Riverside to the orange plants featured in the album art of pop group No Doubt as born from these overlapping settler regimes.

constant pressures of immigrant life squeeze out ethnic solidarity as a priority. Immigrants feel the tension between these conflicting obligations- whether toward the state, the family, the nation, or their ethnic confreres" (2009, 79).

To excavate the region's "layers of imperial erasure and emergence in history, sound, and memory," Tongson turns to popular music, literature, and places; she sees in these disparate locations embodied practices of "remote intimacies" which, if captured and exploded like Benjamin's monad, have the capacity to explode the "history of forgetting" settler colonialism and imperialism in the U.S. into moments of ethical reckoning with its ghosts (93). Following Tongson, I am interested in what a closer reading of Reyes's "Placemarkers" can reveal about the San Francisco Bay Area's "history of forgetting," and about the banality of violence underlying the production of East Bay suburbs like Fremont, places which have supposedly been more hospitable to Filipino/American life after the 1960s than ethnic enclaves like Manilatown were for the manong generation. I ask: How can visiting Barbara Jane Reyes's "Placemarkers" reframe the ways we define and protect the sites proper to the Filipino Bay Area region?

From San Francisco to Stockton: Locating Manongs in Suburbia

Reyes's first published book, *Gravities of Center*, published in 2003 and written during her tenure as an MFA student at San Francisco State University, situates Reyes as a subject far from urban Manilatown, a product of the post-1965 immigration wave from the Philippines and raised in the newly-integrated suburbs of the East Bay. Unlike the formal and thematic cohesiveness of the two published book-length collections following it (*Poeta en San Francisco* and *Diwata*), *Gravities of Center* serves as a testing ground for Reyes to play with the poetic form; ranging from brief tankas to long prose poems,

the poetry within *Gravities* thematically shifts from first-person declarations of love and hate to elusive sojourns written in the third person. In this text, what becomes apparent is that a unified form or narrative is not what holds it together; instead, the text is comprised of Reyes's negotiations with her subjectivity as a Filipina/American woman co-constituted in relation to other peoples, cities, and suburbs in the Bay Area. The poet's gendered, raced, and sexualized body—Reyes being a heterosexual Filipina/American woman—becomes the collection's grounding force, with the poem "Placemarkers" becoming its center of gravity; it is the piece that firmly situates Reyes's subjectivity as the condition of possibility for these scattered wor(l)ds to cohere into a poetry collection.

Like Al Robles and the Flip poets, Reyes is attentive to the textures of everyday life in the Bay Area in her poems, and in "Placemarkers," she travels to disparate rural and urban sites of Filipino California; the poem documents her search for the material and affective traces of the manongs, and her discomfort in their homes *and* in her own. The geographies sketched in the short vignettes making up this piece—Kearny and Jackson Street in the former Manilatown; Rizal Social Club, El Dorado, and Lafayette in Stockton; Saint Patrick's Church in the South of Market (SoMA) District; Fillmore Street in the Fillmore/Western Addition; Dryden Road in Fremont; and Clement Street in San Francisco's Richmond District—register the large-scale dispersal of the Filipino community from rural outposts and downtown city centers to the postwar suburbs of Alameda and Santa Clara Counties. Each stanza conjures a recollection from a singular moment spent in each locale, guiding the reader across disparate spaces and times of Filipino America. Extending Robles's wanderings to the East Bay suburbs of her youth, Reyes eventually uncovers sites of Filipino America newly created as part of a

transnational arsenal of Cold War- and Martial Law- democracy.

On the surface level, the poem's introductory invocation to jazz and the Flip poets immediately evokes connections to Al Robles's poems like "Fillmore Black Ghetto" that operated on the scale of the city. It is unsurprising, perhaps, that the first stop on Reyes's itinerary is Robles's province of the International Hotel site, which in 2001 was still vacant, an empty lot full of rubble where once the building stood. Here, Reyes recalls:

Kearny and Jackson, San Francisco, CA, Summer 2001: There's a gaping hole in the ground in the middle of this overcrowded city; I've never felt I earned the right to write about this gaping hole which you gave a voice and face while all I could do was watch. I never thought it was mine, the weeds and chunks of concrete and waste here. I can't move from this spot; the breeze entangles my long hair into this chain link fence now woven with my fingers. Ghosts I never knew, tricksters and lovers, you should have just asked me to stay. I would've stayed. (2003, 28)

But Reyes does not stay within this space for long, and quite quickly moves outside of the city altogether; she journeys to Stockton in the next vignette to locate an environment of memory where she can better physically inhabit the places where the manongs once lived, even if they are alive no longer:

Rizal Social Club, El Dorado and Lafayette, Stockton, CA,
Autumn 2002:
My hands flat upon these wall's cold leaden chips of white paint, yellowed. Time could have forgotten, but now I can't take my palms and forehead away from this coolness in Central Valley Sunday, where elders in their finest shield their eyes, worked backbreaking fields until they were unable, gathered here circa 1920, circa 1930, til it all closed down. Down the street now, McDonald's; right behind us, a freeway. Here I wish to keep my palms and bittersweetly baptized forehead on this wall [...] I want to see these slickly pomaded, sharp dressed spirits that I feel as I run my palms along the crevices of walls; my fingers and love lines gathering ancient dirt and peeling paint [...] I have come here to be filled with you, you were here, all of you were here. (28)

While in Stockton, Reyes encounters "brothers and sisters" who "want to touch [her]

hands for the dirt [she] has collected,” far more significant are her feeling(s) of the dirt, the wall, the rocks piled up in this place (28). In these two stanzas, Reyes does not gaze upon these sites from a critical distance, but instead orients herself in close proximity to their objects and buildings in an act of physical touch. Touch, as Sara Ahmed writes in “Orientations: Toward a Queer Phenomenology,” produces a type of intersubjective connection that is not possible through sight alone, for

In being touched, the object does not stand apart; it is felt by the skin and even on the skin. In other words, we perceive the object as an object, as something that has integrity and is in space, only by haunting that very space, by cohabiting space, such that the boundary between the coinhabitants of space does not hold. The skin connects as well as contains. . . Bodies are hence shaped by contact with objects and others, with “what” is near enough to be reached. (2006, 551-552)

It is through this embodied performance of communion that Reyes shapes herself as a Filipina/American heir to the manong generation, with the stanza taking on ritualistic undertones to demonstrate and demarcate her belonging to a diasporic community despite her sexual, classed, and geographic difference from these elderly and deceased men.

Placing her forehead and her palms on the wall of the Rizal Social Club, Reyes is “bittersweetly baptized” (28); the repeated mentions of her palms and its lovelines pressed against the crevices of the wall—crevices like those found in the weathered faces and the palms of the dying and deceased farmworkers that used to dance in this place—echo the actions of *mano po*, or the blessings given by Filipino elders to the young upon greeting or farewell. *Mano po* is the spoken request uttered by the younger to receive this blessing, and is also the name of the act of blessing itself. The younger bows their head, takes the hand of the elder, and presses the back of the elder’s palm to their forehead as a gesture of deference and cementing good will (god’s will) between the two. In Stockton,

Reyes has no elders to give her their blessing as one of their kin, turning instead to the buildings that once contained their lives; all that remains are the ruins of structures that once housed them, “yellowed” with age, the walls “cold” and “leaden” as the bodies of the manongs now are in their graves (28). This abandoned building in Stockton quite literally stands in the shadows of global capitalism—it is sandwiched between a McDonald’s franchise and the freeways linking the exurb to the city—with the “gaping hole” left behind being the very presence of the manongs and other Filipino American workers in this rural place they gave their lives to build. Reyes fills in this hole with her embodied memories of this place, her performance of *mano po* reanimating the club with her presence, extending the relationship between them intergenerationally and across space and time.

Even as Stockton has for decades been a depressed city with limited opportunities for Filipino/Americans and other people of color, it remains a place that is sustained by the daily rhythms of Filipino/American life; both Filipino/American architectures and people remain behind in Stockton, even if they are “yellowed” with age and no longer vibrant as they once were.¹⁰ In the rubble lot that was once the International Hotel, however, the invisibility of built and affective Filipino/American architectures wholly

¹⁰ “While many American suburbs, bastion of tranquility, have been rocked by the mushrooming subprime mortgage crisis, one town has been particularly hit. Stockton, California, formally a bucolic Californian farming town is at the epicenter of the crisis that is poised to cripple the U.S. economy[...]In a city of 279,513 residents with a median income of \$46,000 a year, many of the families are carrying mortgages on homes in the \$400,000-\$6,0000 range, estimates Ornelas. The number of troubled families is significant enough to effect employment opportunities and revenues derived from property taxes in the area. There is hardly a street in the newer parts of town – built in response to the spike in the demand for housing - without at least one for sale sign or worse, a foreclosure sign on the front lawn. Many lawns are going untended and gardens are dying from neglect. For many, their American dream has been shattered. To foreclose on their property will ruin their credit, hampering their ability to reconstruct their lives” (Rohr, Mimi. “Stockton, The Epicenter of the Subprime Mortgage Crisis in the U.S.” *Gamma*. 2008. <http://gamma.fnphoto.com/stories/Texts/2385-text.html>)

prevents Reyes from haptic communication with the “embodied memory” of Filipino labor, anti-Filipino violence, and collective struggle.¹¹ Reyes’s spatial and temporal distance between herself and Manilatown’s urban-dwelling manongs confounds her desire for a grounded link to this generation of working-class Filipino immigrants to the Bay Area; continuing her journey in search of Filipino/American place, Reyes returns to her hometown of Fremont in the following stanza, where other kinds of domestic(ated) memories and histories await her.

Like other migrants from the Philippines who arrived to the United States after 1965, Reyes’s family benefited from the loosening of immigration restrictions and the opening of formerly segregated suburbs. The passage of the Housing Rights Act of 1968 (the Civil Rights Act of 1968) that federally mandated housing desegregation provided opportunities for homeownership like never before, and Asian Americans availed themselves of this ability, as much as was possible without neighborhood blowback. Secondly, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act removed racial quotas to immigration, replacing them instead with seven preferential immigration categories; as Asian American Studies scholars such as Yen Le Espiritu and Lisa Lowe have documented, the new system had the unintended effect of bringing in large numbers of immigrants from Asia whose immigration was enabled by the two categories preferring professionals and educated classes, and the seventh category of “family reunification.”¹²

¹¹ As Diana Taylor writes in *The Archive and the Repertoire*: “The body in embodied cultural memory is specific, pivotal, and subject to change. Why this insistence on the body? ... The bodies participating in the transmission of knowledge and memory are themselves a product of certain taxonomic, disciplinary, and mnemonic systems. Gender impacts how these bodies participate, as does ethnicity” (2003, 87).

¹² As Benito Vergara writes, Filipinos initially arrived under 3rd preference (professional of exceptional ability) and 6th preference (workers, skilled and unskilled in occupations with short labor supply in the

Privileges previously barred to Filipino/American migrants were consolidated in part through their ability to establish nuclear family units and residences in newly-built suburban and exurban enclaves, and these domestic and domesticating privileges greatly shifted the demographics of Filipinos in the United States away from the bachelor societies of the manongs. They gave middle-class Filipinos access not only to property, but a closer proximity to whiteness.¹³

Reyes's family relocated to the United States when she was twelve and were beneficiaries of these policies; such were her family and others like it absorbed into a dominant discourse of Asian Americans as model minorities who achieved success through hard endeavor, with no assistance from these radical shifts in public policy. Their family is imagined as missing the markers of authentic Filipino/American subjectivity—placelessness, joblessness—which marked the manong figure in his twilight years; they have lost the burdens of ethnicity by gaining private property and nuclear family. Even if the class status of Filipino/Americans in the city of San Francisco matched those living in suburbs like the Fremont of Reyes's childhood, the difference in homeowner status has proven to be a wedge between these geographically dispersed community formations. As

United States) categories under the 1965 INA; in 1975, Filipinos constituted 18.5% of all 3rd preference-category immigrants, but soon the family-reunification preference soon outpaced the professionals. From 1966-1975, the proportions of the two kinds of preference immigrants were about equal. a decade later (1976-88), however, the occupational-preference immigrants accounted for only 20% of the total, while family-reunification preference immigrants rose to an overwhelming 80% (2009, 11).

¹³ In his seminal essay on the “possessive investment in whiteness,” George Lipsitz writes: “Slavery and ‘Jim Crow’ segregation institutionalized possessive identification with whiteness visibly and openly, but an elaborate interaction of largely *covert* public and private decisions during and after the days of slavery and segregation also produced a powerful legacy with enduring effects on the racialization of experience, opportunities and rewards in the United States[...] through the covert but no less systematic racism inscribed within U.S. social democracy” (1995, 371). Lipsitz goes on to state that “the most damaging long-term effects” to aggrieved racial communities “may well have come from the impact of the racial discrimination codified by the policies of the [Federal Housing Authority]” (372).

Robert O. Self writes in his history of Oakland, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*:

Post-war suburbanization had the effect of creating a proto-class, the members of which might have had dissimilar political loyalties but could be united on the single issue of property taxation. Postwar suburbanization helped to instantiate, in place, a tax-conscious voting bloc. (2003, 17)

To speak of Filipino/American class conflicts between suburban-dwellers and those still living in the urban core of San Francisco, thus, is to call attention to the contradictions and the antagonisms produced out of the educational, occupational, and geographic distance between these groups; it is an antagonism plumbed by Reyes in her memories of her Fremont home.

Reyes's recollections of home reflect the aforementioned structural conditions which overdetermine its location and built form, and, at first glance, replicate the myth of Asian American subject as model minority:

Dryden Road, Fremont, CA: Down the street from new Hong Kong money, a pho house, a parking lot filled with expensive SUV's and souped up rice rockets, I am of a different generation of suburban comfort in newly painted track homes. There was once an apricot orchard here; there once was a red farmhouse edged with white, a solitary oak tree and a hanging tire. Now my parents' house contains slick Japanese cars in a two-car garage. Jasmine vines and sunset colored hibiscus overrun the outer walls and trellises of their renovated home. Fragrance always drifts in through the open skylights. Manong, I feel you have been here before the dirt in my parents' backyard was so fertile. The lemon tree is large as brushfire; its boughs hang low, heavy with fruit. [...] (29)

In this passage, Reyes meditates on the values and dreams of her parents through an enumeration of the private property and the commodities they have accumulated; value is attached to material trinkets (“newly painted track homes” and “slick Japanese cars”) rather than to relationships, the full alienation of middle-class Filipino/Americans from

their birth families and friends distilled in these empty signifiers of home. As she found in the vacant International Hotel lot, Reyes's return home to Fremont too is devoid of contact with manongs or even other middle-class Filipino/Americans. In emptying out the suburban home of labor-based modes of ethnic kinship, and replacing them with dry descriptions of her family home and the commodities that fill it, Reyes pierces the illusion of suburban tranquility, exposing its treacherous foundations. Fremont's history of development, once investigated, unravels the transnational histories of state-sponsored racial violence that underlie the production of all domestic spaces across the scales of the suburban home to that of the homeland/nation. While the suburbs were a haven for some Asian American immigrants like Reyes's family, their building and maintenance came at a great human cost, hidden by multiculturalist discourses of American benevolence and the state's equitable incorporation of racially marked subjects. In Fremont we find a case study of the ways that overt and covert violence against people of color in the United States and in the global South has been a disciplinary mechanism crucial to the construction and maintenance of both the model minority subject and to the Cold War-era suburbs that the second wave of Filipino immigrants to the U.S. call home.

In "Placemarkers"'s Fremont verse, Reyes dismantles the model minority myth by juxtaposing the sacrifice made by earlier Filipino immigrants and communities of color with the privileges accrued by later arrivals from Asia; the economic success of families like hers in suburbia being made possible because of the state's planned failure for other kinds of lives to take root. On the regional scale, Fremont's settler colonial origins as a farming community for white property owners at the expense of the labor and lives of people of color is subtly recalled in Reyes's remembrance that "there was once a red

farmhouse edged with white, a solitary oak tree and a hanging tire” (29). The white fence enclosing the red farmhouse serves as a material and ideological barrier keeping separate white settlers from the brown migrant laborers working the “apricot orchards” and vegetable farms of the East Bay.¹⁴ The tire swing hanging from a “solitary oak tree,” while seemingly innocuous becomes a sinister signifier in an otherwise stark landscape. Swinging silently in the breeze, the black tire in another era could have easily been a man’s lynched body, a casualty of the spectacular enforcement of the borders between heteronormative white masculinity and queer, or deviant, blackness (29). Another tree in the yard resembles “brushfire,” conjuring a visceral reminder of burning bodies and farmlands as sites of racial terror in the early 20th century (29). Reyes, here, reminds us that even as forms of extralegal violence such as lynching have abated since the World War II construction of the suburbs, the banal policing of black and brown bodies in urban centers and suburban enclaves remains; black unfreedom, as much now as then, remains a structural precondition for the maintenance of American domesticity, from the scales of the body to the nation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Immediately after World War II, residents of the East Bay suburb of San Leandro erected a “figurative white wall along the city’s border with Oakland,” advised by leading consulting firm M.C. Friel and Associates to place as much residential property under restrictive covenants as possible (Self 2003, 104). The city’s campaign of racial exclusion continued even after the Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) against covenant enforcement by reconfiguring covenant agreements into “neighborhood protective associations,” pseudo-corporations of homeowners that could “legally select acceptable homebuyers through ‘corporation contract agreements’ as long as ‘race and creed’ were not taken into account”; this impenetrable racial barrier was justified by homeowners as a “protection of their investment” (Self 2003, 105).

¹⁵ Dylan Rodriguez ends his provocative critique of the racial formation of “Filipino American” by arguing for a shift in understanding the conditions of possibility that allow for the emergence of *all* racialized subjects as one rooted in the structural antagonism of antiblackness. He writes that in order for there to be any serious political kinship between blacks, Pinoys, and native peoples that should be a collective “identification with the horror of a collective vulnerability to sudden mortality and bodily subjection to higher forces (whether ‘god,’ ‘nature,’ the U.S. state, or officially sanctioned white supremacist violence”

Just as quickly as she takes us back in time, Reyes jolts us to the “now” of her parents’ renovated house, where “jasmine vines and sunset colored hibiscus overrun the outer walls and trellis” (29). Decorative and otherwise useless, the ornamental flowers in abundance produce her house as a site of leisure rather than work, or at least uphold the veneer of the single-family home as a private, interior space. The excessively ornamental façade of the Reyes family home mirrors the discourses of the nation-as-home, its apparently peaceful incorporation of Asian immigrants as citizens and homeowners serving as a decorative cover for the racial and spatial violence enacted against black and Latino/a communities in cities and suburbs in California and throughout the United States.

Beginning in the late 1940s but taking off in the late 1950s and 1960s, suburbs throughout the United States, especially in California, expanded exponentially as developers and contractors benefited from government assistance (such as Federal Housing Authority and VA loans) in their construction of millions of private single-family residences.¹⁶ In the 1960s, the Bay Area became the site of some of the largest and most planned of these newly built suburbs, most prominently the Westlake development in Daly City.¹⁷ One of products of this boom, Fremont occupies a unique place in the

in order to “generate a different kind of praxis, across the localized global sites of U.S. white supremacy” (2009, 213-214).

¹⁶ As Dolores Hayden documents in *Building Suburbia*, “Backed by the FHA and the VA, banks gave loans for the construction of ten million new homes between 1946 and 1953, creating a gigantic private housing industry” (2003, 132).

¹⁷ In Daly City, the developer Henry Doelger purchased 1,350 acres and built 9,000 homes between 1934 and 1940. The Suburban Realty Company built a few thousand more units and the Serramonte Shopping Center. In 1957, the Zita Corporation decamped in Daly City, building 79 units a month in St. Francis Heights (Vergara 2009, 28-29). No census data was collected on the Filipino American population specifically before 1980 or Asian Americans more broadly before 1970. Yet Benito Vergara has found that

history of the Bay Area's Cold War suburban development; it was designed as a crucial incubator of the "postwar industrial garden" envisioned by developers, corporations, and city planners, and was Alameda County's "most elaborately planned city."¹⁸ Incorporated in 1956 by combining five existing communities—Centerville, Irvington, Mission San Jose, Niles, and Warm Springs—and named after "The Great Pathfinder" John Charles Frémont, Fremont was planned as a "controlled growth" community; spanning ninety-six square miles, Fremont immediately became California's third-largest "city" after Los Angeles and San Diego, although only 20,000 people then lived in this sprawling area (Self 2003, 124). Sixty percent of this new suburb was comprised of buildable land, and was primarily made up by farmlands and orchards, along with vacant lots and rolling hills ripe for development. Unlike suburban developments being built in the South Bay such as Westlake, the City's General Plan for Fremont originally envisioned the suburb as housing both private residential developments and industrial factories; in 1965, General Motors opened a plant in Fremont, a six-thousand employee operation that made it the largest automobile production facility in Northern California (Self 2003, 119).

For the black and Latino/a workers formerly employed at GM's Oakland-based

while in 1970 the population of Daly City was 87% white, by 2000 Filipinos comprised 32% of the city population and outnumbered self-identified "whites" by almost 6,000 people (2009, 25).

¹⁸ Self 2003, 119. On the "postwar industrial garden," Robert O. Self writes: "The garden embodied the optimism of growth liberalism. Cities and suburbs alike were to bloom and prosper, with workers and their families lifted into the middle class by high wages, the easy accessibility of homeownership, and a new state activism at both federal and local levels. The postwar economy, centered on the single-family home and its consumption needs, would draw urban and suburban worlds into a productive, mutually beneficial relationship. More than a metaphor, the garden came to represent a concert's political and spatial formation: class harmony in pastoral cities where factory homes existed in unobtrusive balance; homeowner democracy in both city and suburb, literally '*home rule*' in the words of one suburbanite; and an endless horizon of upward social mobility with a plentiful supply of good jobs and inexpensive new homes" (Self 2003, 8).

plant, the company's move to Fremont was disastrous; thousands lost their jobs, and those retained were unable to move to Fremont due to redlining, high rents and housing prices, and the de facto enforcement of now-banned racial covenants.¹⁹ Even as the city's population increased from 43,000 in the 1960s to over 100,000 in 1970, the city never became a place for black and brown homeowners, with Latino/a and black workers only seen when streaming in and out of the plant between shifts (Self 2003, 127). Likewise, the former orchards and farmlands worked by migrant farmers of color such as the manongs and, later, braceros, were leveled and replaced by tract homes with "Japanese cars in two-car garage[s]," making their presence in the area unwanted and their labor obsolete (Reyes 2003, 29). It was wealthy, professionalized Asian immigrants alone who were able to break the color line in Fremont in the 1970s and 1980s, eventually making it one of the largest centers of Asian/American life in the Bay Area. The public high school of Mission San Jose remains one of the best in the state, a feeder school for elite public and private universities so coveted that families from as far away as Korea and Hong Kong doctor residency requirements so that their children can attend the school.²⁰ The

¹⁹ "We're creating a beautiful city where most of our workers cannot afford to live," Jack Brooks told the *Fremont News Register* in 1967 (Self 2003, 127). By 1970, only four hundred African Americans lived in Fremont out of a population of over one hundred thousand, unsurprising for a city whose median housing price was the highest in the county (127). "With a median income somewhere in the middle among Alameda County suburbs in 1960, by 1970 the median and average incomes in Fremont were higher than in any other East Bay City save the professional suburban enclave of Castro Valley. Housing prices, too, were higher. By 1970 families paid more for homes in Fremont than in another other East Bay city" (128).

²⁰ In a feature on the "welcoming global village" of Fremont in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, we find an interesting juxtaposition of the affluence of Asian immigrants and the prestige of Mission San Jose High School with the fears of Latino and black bodies invading this bucolic space: "Advertisements for Mission San Jose High School have appeared in publications in Hong Kong and Taiwan, parents have reported to Kew. It follows that some people go to great lengths to enroll their children. In the most notorious cases, it's rumored that parents have rented rooms to establish residency or even exchanged guardianship [...] Given this zealotry, it was hardly surprising when the school district's decision to redraw boundaries caused a furor several years ago. The new map, intended to ease overcrowding as well as racial and economic unevenness would send some children slated to attend Mission San Jose High School to Irvington High

“pho houses” and “rice rockets” of Reyes’s poem attest to the suburb’s reputation as a multicultural melting pot only accessible to those with “Hong Kong money” who can afford to buy property in this affluent industrial garden.

In “Placemarkers” Reyes punctures the beauty of this postwar suburban garden by making strange the decorative jasmine flowers in her family yard—they overrun the fence, their fragrance penetrates every opening of the house. These exotic flowers are an excessive presence that, like all non-white immigrants to the U.S., pollutes the orderliness of the individual and *national* home.²¹ Other flora in the yard is also laden—the fruit tree’s “boughs hang low, heavy with fruit,” left unpicked without the assistance of the manongs, who once worked in Fremont “before the dirt in my parents’ backyard was so fertile” (Reyes 2003, 29). In the Fremont of the present, what was once useful—the lives and labor of the manongs, the Latino/a braceros and the black GM workers—has been erased from the scene, replaced instead by picturesque property owned by upper middle-

School instead.[...]In response, a group of Mission San Jose parents petitioned to secede from the Fremont School District. But superintendent Sheila Jordan charged that a new district would ‘carve out an enclave of privilege’ and ‘create a significant ethnic imbalance.’ Ultimately, the secession plan was rejected, and the new boundaries went into effect.[...]A plan to construct affordable housing on property owned by Sisters of the Holy Family sparked a similar outcry. ‘If you spent a half-million or a million dollars for your property and down the street someone is building affordable housing -- that might have caused some of the tension. . . . Race and class had a lot to do with it,’ said Sanchez, a major force behind the project. ‘When you say affordable housing, what’s your image? Black, poor, welfare recipients. Crime. That’s what people had in mind’” (Marech, Rona. “Of Race and Place/ Little Asia/ Fremont community largely made up of immigrants with means.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. March 17, 2002. <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/OF-RACE-AND-PLACE-Little-Asia-Fremont-2834791.php#ixzz2TyEUxeii>).

²¹ Neighboring Cupertino, part of the larger Fremont Unified School District, was subject of a controversial *Wall Street Journal* article on patterns of new “white flight” in Silicon Valley. Two Cupertino high schools, with similar racial demographics to Mission San Jose High School in Fremont, were subject of the article, that stated: “Whites aren’t quitting the schools because the schools are failing academically. Quite the contrary: Many white parents say they’re leaving because the schools are too academically driven and too narrowly invested in subjects such as math and science at the expense of liberal arts and extracurriculars like sports and other personal interests. The two schools, put another way that parents rarely articulate so bluntly, are too Asian” (Hwang, Suein. “The New White Flight.” *The Wall Street Journal*. November 19, 2005. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB113236377590902105.html>)

class Asian nationals and Asian/Americans. Such forms of Asian/American consumption-based domestic economies—isolated to and within the private home—serves a decorative function in the national imaginary of America as a multicultural melting pot. These suburban forms of “community” are devoid of the resistance to U.S. empire characterized by other moments and places of Asian/American collectivity; middle-class Asian Americans remain excessive to the (white) national home but are relatively banal, their presence and flourishing in suburbia buttressing the nation-state’s discourse of itself as a benevolent and inclusionary superpower welcoming to all.

The last two sentences of Reyes’s writing on Fremont bring the transnational histories of violence in the East Bay suburb to the fore. While the vastly different social, economic and geographic distance of the manongs from post-1965 Filipino immigrants seemingly forecloses the possibility of the formation of any cross-generational racial solidarity between them, the next lines in “Placemarkers” bring their similarities into relief. That is to say, even as Filipinos like Reyes’s family have been able to be financially productive and sexually reproductive (“fertile”) in ways the manongs could never be, the conditions for their presence in the United States have similar origins in the violence of U.S. empire despite their appearance as models of domestic tranquility and order.²² Reyes writes:

²² Unlike the new suburban dwellers, the manongs’s own “fertility” or fecundity—their ability to contribute to the machinations of capitalism—ended not only with their advanced age but also with the shift in the post-war economy from a production- to a consumption-based one. In San Francisco, disinvestment and policies of “urban renewal” initiated in the 1950s and 1960s left homeless the manongs and other communities of color in downtown neighborhoods—the aging manongs of Manilatown and African Americans of the Fillmore were no longer the desired population to work in the shrinking agricultural industry and industrial/factory jobs, and both stood in the way of constructing a larger Financial District and the Geary freeway, respectively, which would bring workers into the central business district. By 2001, the “time” of her recollection to Dryden Road recounted in this verse, the manongs had no place in the new suburban social and political economy of the Bay Area and the nation.

I came here when degreed professionals were in Cold War demand, when Martial Law tore our home apart. I never thought you would claim me as your little sister (2003, 29).

These two lines are central to the negotiations with the histories and geographies of Filipino America enacted in the pages of *Gravities of Center*, for they complicate the rote narrative of middle-class ease and assimilation that often characterizes the post-1965 immigrant generation. In this moment of recalling Martial Law, “Placemarkers” finally brings our attention to the role that American imperialism played in the Philippines beyond the Philippine-American War, moments greatly influencing the class composition of post-1965 Filipino immigrants and determining the routes of their migration and settlement. In referencing Martial Law in the Philippines as one cause for the migration of Filipinos to the U.S., Reyes reminds us that shifting economic and political relations on the global scale were as significant to transforming Filipino America in the middle of the 20th century as were the changes happening concurrently with American domestic immigration policies, capitalist modes of production in the region, and housing policies within the city.

Martial Law Geographies in East Bay Suburbs

While the references to her family’s property—the home, the cars—in “Placemarkers”’s Fremont stanza illuminates the privileges of whiteness accrued by post-1965 Filipino immigrants, Reyes’s last line (“I came here when degreed professionals were in Cold War demand”) bridges the local and global factors contributing to the concurrent influx of Filipino professionals into the American suburbs and the razing of inner-city ethnic enclaves or “ghettoes” like Manilatown. By referencing the Cold War

political climate in the United States and the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, Reyes expands the scale of the push- and pull- factors that brought educated and middle-class Filipinos to the United States beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s; she reminds us that the overt and covert forms of violence occurring in the Philippines under Martial Law, and not only the promise of material wealth, were major incentives for Filipinos to flee from their homes in Manila and the provinces towards American cities and suburbs like Fremont.

Fremont and other East Bay suburbs' role as Cold War geographies functioned in two major ways: first, these suburbs were constructed with capital investment from military and medical technological firms. Since the 1950s, federal military contracts fed private firms such as Lockheed, Boeing, Douglas Aircraft, and Convair to base their operations in the San Francisco Bay Area; these are corporations whose products have been used to wage war throughout Southeast Asia and now during the U.S.-led "War on Terror" in the Middle East and even back in the Philippines (Self 2003, 107). These corporations, along with the Silicon Valley tech industries beginning in the 1980s and the auto and warfare manufacturing plants built before them, have secured Fremont's place as an expensive bedroom community for tech workers and other white collar professionals; being the site for major corporations such as Boston Scientific, Western Digital, and Seagate Magnetics further adds to the area's property value and to their financial capital. This landscape is one literally shaped through the technologies of warfare, a point that I will return to in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Secondly, East Bay suburbs like Fremont were logical receiving areas for professionalized Filipino immigrants displaced by Martial Law, serving an ideological

function to support the transnational *and* domestic inclusion of Filipinos as model minorities into a nation in the midst of discursively transitioning itself into a “postracial,” “multicultural,” or “colorblind” society.²³ In the decades following World War II, as the city of San Francisco was transforming its economy from one dependent on war industries—by shutting down and relocating the factories and ports lining its waterfront—into a transnational banking and finance capital oriented towards dealings with the “Asia Pacific Rim,” the federal government continued its own neo-imperialist designs on the Philippines. Neferti Tadiar writes that the “dream of [U.S.] empire” begun in the late 19th century with the Philippine-American War transformed by the mid-twentieth century into “the dream of the (First) Free (Enterprise) World (against the socialist challenge of the Second World)” (2004, 28). Since its “national independence” from the United States in 1946, the Philippines has continued to fulfill multiple functions for the United States; it remains a

source of agricultural products (sugar, hemp, coconut, log, minerals); a market for US goods; a source of cheap imported agricultural labor (for agricultural industries in California and Hawaii); a territory for the largest US military bases outside of the North American continent (a launching pad for US intervention in Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War; a stronghold of Cold War 'security'); a site of overseas investment of industrial and financial capital, as well as a site of military surplus capital and

²³ After the passage of the 1965 Civil Rights Acts and later immigrant and refugee acts, the U.S. begins to circulate discourses of itself as “colorblind” “as evidence of U.S. exceptionalism on one hand, and proof on the other that the U.S. historical destiny was an is a just and righteous destiny, despite its flaws. Those flaws, of course, are framed as easily remedied through the inclusion and incorporation of racial difference into the larger structures of power, though the process may be slow and marked by fits and starts” (Byrd 2011, 203). Jodi Byrd goes on to write that “postracial liberalisms manage the disruptive consciousness of the United States’ origins as colonial and imperial by cathecting the United States as exemplar within the historical development of worldwide governmentality that leads from natural and primitive man to civilized democracy that is then exported as commonwealth, freedom and happiness to the world through capitalism, militarism, populism, or a combination of all three” (203). The incorporation of Filipinos into Cold War suburbs in California, I believe, is an important flashpoint marking the rise of a postracial liberal discourse in the U.S.

technology (a site of constant counter-insurgent military activity); and a dumping ground of excess goods and toxic waste. (Tadiar 2004, 27)

Beginning in the late 1960s, as suburbs and cities throughout the United States were restructuring themselves towards post-war service- and consumption-oriented economies, the Philippines too undertook modernization schemes under the name of Marcos's New Society programs. This New Society was bankrolled with loans from the IMF/World Bank—the country was one of the first test sites for World Bank structural adjustment programs (SAPs)—and enforced with the military muscle of the United States; Olongapo and Subic Bay remained functional U.S. military bases until mass protests finally led to their closure in 1999.²⁴ While the violence levied against the urban poor in both nations during this period was severe—large-scale demolition of squatters' camps in Manila matched urban renewal projects in Manilatown, most notably—the advantages of life for Filipino immigrants in the United States was vastly preferable to living under Martial Law. Unlike the reign of disappearance and torture that was an open secret of the Marcos regime of the 1970s and 1980s, unprecedented employment and housing opportunities in the U.S. were made available to model Asian immigrants over and against “rebellious” black communities in the inner cities.²⁵

²⁴ As Rolando Tolentino writes, “By declaring martial law in 1972, Marcos wanted to both prolong and strengthen his control of the nation. Relying heavily on foreign borrowing and multinational capital to finance his dictatorship, he mobilized the majority of national bodies—the youthful citizenry—and placed them in the service of multinational capital in the homeland and the debt servicing industry in foreign lands. Marcos created economic and export-processing zones free from unions and strikes to service the subcontractual jobs of multinational companies. He also created the government infrastructures that further embedded the OCW [overseas contract worker] in Philippine culture” (2009, 78). As part of the introduction of neoliberal reforms to the Philippines, it became one of the first nations in the World to adopt the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in 1973, to finance the Chico River Dam hydroelectric plant project in the Cordillera mountain region of Northern Luzon.

²⁵ As Wei Li documents in *Ethnoburb: The New Ethnic Community in Urban America* (2009): “During the Cold War era, U.S. economic and military involvement in foreign countries dramatically changed the

In opening its doors to educated, professionalized immigrants and their families, the United States perpetuated its appearance as a benevolent superpower in the Cold War era, even as it contributed to—and in the case of the Philippines, directly backed through military support—the very violence in the nations from where these immigrants came. The regime of “Martial Law [that] tore [her] home apart,” if contained solely within the geographical confines of the Philippines, renders Filipino migrants in debt to the United States for their freedom, even as the United States itself played a key role in maintaining the power of the Marcos dictatorship over the Filipino people (Reyes 2003, 29). The relative comfort and privilege of the Filipino suburban immigrant and their family thus needs to be understood as having a price: as part of a larger Cold War arsenal, the Filipino/American immigrant success story is yet another that buttresses American exceptionalist narratives of rescuing oppressed peoples from despotic Southeast Asian regimes²⁶; this narrative of U.S.-as-savior was especially convoluted in the case of the

situation in both the United States and the immigration source-countries [...] After World War II, in order to maintain U.S. supremacy in the international arena and to prevent the USSR from expanding its influence into Asia, the United States carried out economic and military aid plans in many Asian countries. These plans were similar to the Marshall Plan in Europe but were smaller in scale. The United States encouraged these countries to develop export-oriented economies. Export-led growth strategies linked local economies to the United States and helped to generate U.S. economic restructuring, as labor-intensive sectors of the U.S. economy were shifted to low-wage countries. Economic growth in these countries caused rapid urbanization and surplus labor that could not be absorbed by their own economies. The United States also invested in education systems in many developing countries, by providing faculty and exchange programs. Such programs not only exported American democratic values and ideology, but also generated a ‘brain drain’ from sending countries” (36).

²⁶ The United States’ fraught relationship to the Marcos regime is too lengthy to account for here. It is important to note that even as the United States government publically turned away from Marcos by the end of his rule (with the rise of the People Power Revolution of 1986), the U.S. maintained military support of the Marcos regime, especially as the Philippines supported U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War (Burns 2013, 121). Mimi Thi Nguyen writes the during the Cold War the United States “defend[ed] its intercessions throughout Asia as necessary policing actions to secure peoples and places where anti-colonial struggles and decolonization movements rendered them deficient in proper governance, defined as constitutional structures of civilized arrangements, and disqualified them from the rights of sovereignty, and hence susceptible to occupation and control by alien powers” (2012, 41). With the Philippines being a former colony of the United States, the logic of military intervention during the Cold War was routed

Philippines, for the U.S. supported Marcos for his joining them in squelching “communist threat” in Vietnam and in the Philippines, while at the same time welcoming to the U.S. Filipino immigrants displaced by the violent urban and provincial restructuring of Marcos’s “New Society” (Burns 2013, 122). The presence of professional-class Filipinos in suburbia, arrived during the Martial Law period, remained useful for the U.S. to continue its deployment of the “model minority” trope over and against domestic populations of black and Latino/a people, as much as it became an additional justification for ongoing military interventions in the global South. As Karen Tongson argues, “the picture of normativity captured in the suburbs—of a white, nuclear family surrounded by their possessions, especially their comfortable home—became not only an American standard, but was also exported globally as a touchstone for ‘freedom’ and ‘prosperity’ in the so-called developing world” (2011, 12). I would expand Tongson’s formulation here to include model minoritized Filipino/Americans, comfortable in their “expensive SUV’s and souped up rice rockets,” their bodies and their presence in suburbia covering over the multiple forms of violence on the domestic and transnational scales supporting their affluent lifestyles (Reyes 2003, 29).

In the final summation, Reyes’s childhood home filled with jasmine flowers and the two-car garage is not simply or only a sign of Asian/American middle-class access and excess—it, instead, symbolizes the false promise of security and safety made by the United States to Filipino immigrants, a lie that masks the state’s reliance on anti-black violence, imperialist and militarized interventions, and inner-city evictions for

differently, as supporting a democratically-elected president (Marcos) in quashing a communist insurgency; to justify this, the United States necessarily needed to disavow its own history of imperialism in the Philippines, in order to position itself as an impartial aid to the restoration of democracy.

maintaining that peace.²⁷ In exchange for their needed professional labor—as doctors, attorneys, and other white-collar workers—Filipino migrants were granted the ability to settle in the suburbs, a gift that allowed for the state to demonstrate its benevolence towards non-white peoples. This gift was repaid by the anti-communist leanings of some of these middle-class Filipinos, who, in addition to their classed interests supportive of property ownership, found themselves at ideological odds against the manongs and student activists. Others, who fled from persecution under Marcos and who were fervently against the dictatorship, feared deportation if caught engaging in “subversive activities” while in the United States and also chose not to speak out (Ojeda-Kimbrough 2006, 70). Radical mass organizations such as Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) deployed the language of Third World collectivism and anti-capitalist critiques of corporate greed and private property in their appeals to save the International Hotel; this estranged them further from their *kababayan* in the suburbs, who associated this language with the Communist Party of the Philippines, targeted and violated by the Marcos regime as insurgents.²⁸ With this history of failed solidarity in mind, it is perhaps easier to understand the general suspicion harbored towards suburban-raised

²⁷ Mimi Nguyen writes of U.S. imperialist wars in nations such as Vietnam and Iraq that “looping through these wars we also find the narration of a continuous history of liberal empire through the gift of freedom, central to the militarization of humanitarianisms in the last half-century” (2012, 139). Common to these domestic civil wars is the U.S. identifying “terrorist complicity” and/or insurgency, which must be ferreted out with the assistance of superior American military forces. We see such tactics continuing in the Philippines in the ongoing U.S.-led “War on Terror,” waged during the presidencies of both George W. Bush and Barack Obama; tracing this historical genealogy is beyond the scope of this project, but Josen M. Diaz’s dissertation makes important linkages between the Marcos dictatorship and the U.S. War on Terror.

²⁸ The radical Filipino organization, Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP), “did not address... the community’s historical links to the old manongs and to the literally dying Manilatown community. A gap existed between the manongs and the new immigrants, and the KDP was not able to articulate a political perspective that bridged it... [T]he relationship with the farm workers, as well as with the other manongs in the neighborhood around the I-Hotel, was never developed politically” (Habal 2007, 122).

Filipina/Americans like Barbara Jane Reyes—if one believes that she cannot move beyond the prevalent conservatism of suburbia born out of a combination of Martial Law violence and the expansion of homeownership to new Filipino immigrants to the United States. As is evidenced by her search for the manongs in “Placemarkers,” however, Reyes desires other affiliations beyond the East Bay suburbs, looking for intimacy and communion with the manongs, jazz lovers, and workers in disappearing or disappeared places of Filipino America.

Producing Solidarity Through Difference

Estella Habal, in her history of the mass movement to save the I-Hotel, documents the failures of solidarity between new Filipino immigrants to Daly City and other suburbs with the manong generation; while college-age youth at San Francisco State College and UC Berkeley were able to connect intergenerationally with the manongs, they did not successfully mobilize their parents in suburbia to look beyond their own class interests or to disabuse themselves of conservative political ideologies, ultimately stifling the formation of a broader-based Filipino/American collective against eviction (Habal 2007, 121). Middle-class Filipino immigrants in suburbia disidentified with the inner-city, elderly manongs whom they regarded as uneducated and backwards in their customs; the manongs’s failure to assimilate into mainstream American culture was seen as their personal deficit, rather than as a situation arising conditionally from the structural barriers to citizenship and permanent residency that they faced.²⁹ In the afterlife of these failed

²⁹ Habal writes that “The new immigrants arriving on U.S. shores after the liberalization of immigration laws in 1965 were different economically and politically from the previous immigrants...[M]any of them had no knowledge of a previous Filipino community, nor did they look for one when they arrived in the

moments of Filipino solidarity, “Placemarkers” serves as a vehicle for Reyes to articulate a politics of connection in lieu of estrangement and disavowal of the manongs’ lives and legacy. Poems like “Placemarkers” are powerful for their illumination of the shared conditions of vulnerability to white supremacist and imperialist violence faced by differently positioned generations of Filipino immigrants of different class backgrounds, and between Filipinos with other communities of colors who also make the Bay Area home.

By the end of “Placemarkers,” Reyes bridges the intergenerational, inter-regional divide between suburban and the urban Filipino/American subjects by returning to—and reorienting—her own gendered, racialized, and sexualized body. She moves from describing her parents’ home to positioning herself—not materially, but metaphorically—in relation to the Flip poets and to Al Robles in particular:

I never thought you would claim me as your little sister [...] I have always wanted to write you poems; I just wanted you to remember my name, and when you did, I felt I had finally arrived. (2003, 29-30)

Being so separated by both geography and generationally from the manong immigrants, Reyes’s acceptance by Flip poets like Al Robles, Oscar Peñaranda, and Jaime Jacinto are, for her, important validations that her poetry is not only deemed “good,” but also that *she* as a Filipina/American subject is loved in an intimate way. Reyes imagines herself a daughter of Manilatown in order to become part of an expanded Filipino San Francisco in

United States. They had little to do with Manilatown or any elderly bachelor community living in a rundown area of town. For new immigrants and minorities, residential segregation was no longer so severe. The new immigrants thus were not motivated by the need to find refuge and cultural familiarity. Instead, they moved to the South of Market area or the Mission District with their families and, later, to the outer neighborhoods of San Francisco, where rents were cheaper. These newer arrivals were also concentrated in Daly City, Union City, Hercules, and South San Francisco—areas where they could buy houses relatively cheaply as they became more affluent” (2007, 121).

part made up of the descendents of its original manong inhabitants, even as she remains an outsider not fully socially immersed in its day-to-day rhythms.

In her desire for “want[ing] you to remember my name,” Reyes elevates the poem from a voyeuristic mapping of the Filipino Bay Area to a subjective expression of what Anne-Marie Fortier calls a “homing desire,” or

a longing to belong [that] suggests that 'home' is constituted by the *desire* for a 'home', rather than surfacing from an already constituted home, 'there' or 'here'. In this sense, home is produced through the movement of desire. (2003, 129)

As Fortier writes, homing desires are constituted through both movement and attachment, or “motions of attachment”: “‘home’ is also re-membered by attaching it, even momentarily, to a place where we strive to *make* home and to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way” (Fortier 2003, 131). In revisiting places like the International Hotel and St. Patrick’s Church in San Francisco; the Lafayette in Stockton; and Dryden Road in Fremont, Reyes is able to see, smell, and touch the places where manongs once lived, played, and labored. In some cases, she is even able to touch the manongs or their descendents in the flesh, to bless herself against their built structures and natural landscapes; through this visceral contact, she shares in the embodied memories of the manongs inaccessible simply through reading other’s written accounts of this generation. In materially and metaphorically occupying space with the manongs, and at the end of the poem with Manong Al Robles himself, Reyes can affectively attach herself, at least momentarily, to different “homes” located throughout the Filipino Bay Area.

Wanting be called “sister” by the elderly and dying manong generation as well as by seminal male Flip poets such as Al Robles and Oscar Campomanes, Reyes’s quiet pleas for acceptance reflect a more general desire that second-generation Filipino/Americans—ranging in age now from high school and college youth through adult and middle-aged Filipino/Americans such as Reyes—have sought connection with “ancestors” both in the Philippines and the United States. This fraught desire for acceptance and co-fraternity is one that Dylan Rodriguez has critiqued as resulting in problematic displays such as PCNs, or Pilipino Cultural Nights, that appropriate the struggles of Filipino laborers and activists while disavowing the ways their relative class privilege makes true filiation an impossibility.³⁰ In his most damning point of contention, Rodriguez argues that the co-optation of black, indigenous and working-class Filipino experiences in cultural expressions of racial identity makes second generation Filipino Americans complicit in the project of white supremacy.

Although cases such as those Rodriguez enumerates in *Suspended Apocalypse* certainly evidence this “genocidal logic,” I find too simplistic his claim that all desires for a Filipino/American communal identity spanning ethnic, racial, and generational divides is ultimately one premised on white supremacist ideals of the liberal individual. Unlike second- and third-generation Filipino Americans critiqued by Rodriguez—those who

³⁰ “While the PCN’s circulation is relatively contained to college and university campuses across the United States, its transparent affinity to structuring rhetorics, historical narratives, and modernist rationalities composing Filipino Americanist discourse situates it as a primary and productive—rather than ancillary or reflective—form of Filipino American community building [...] [T]he labors of ignorance and performances of Orientalist desire therein—from the profound refusals to engage (and to thus actively disavow) the TWLF action and the state violence it confronted, to the blithe reconstructions of a Philippine indigeneity at odds with the context and content of its cultural appropriations—were foundational, not accidental or incidental, to this geography of Filipino Americanism” (Rodriguez 2009, 15-21).

were born and raised in the Bay Area who take the connection to the manongs almost as a given, or as a naturalized relationship based on actual blood ties and/or physical proximity—Reyes as both poet and as narrative voice of “Placemakers” is hesitant in claiming this filiation, and does not appeal to the logic of the state in naming communities “Filipino American” based on population numbers or on the concentration of sites of leisure, commerce, and middle-class property ownership. Reyes’s politicized spatial imaginary—articulated early in her career in “Placemakers” and elaborated in more depth in later poems, blog posts, and writings elsewhere—is evidence of something, and somewhere, else.

Even as she revels in Manong Al’s claiming of her as “little sister,” Reyes does not only or always see herself as the manongs’s natural kin. Reyes does not assume that her privileged form of affective kinship with the Flip poets and the manong generation has been easily gained; recognizes that hers remains a tenuous form of solidarity; and acknowledges that these brief moments of association can be easily broken.³¹ In “Placemakers,” Reyes does not co-opt the manongs’s experience as her own, flattening differences by assuming a shared class position or history of labor exploitation and

³¹ Reyes’s blog posts most clearly illuminate her ongoing ambivalence about being lumped in with “Filipino poets of the Bay Area” designation, and of her ongoing wrestling with her desire to be accepted as a “Filipina/American” poet. One such exemplary excerpt from a blog post: “As an author, I have so much opportunity to speak. I am given significant platforms upon which to stand and speak. As a Pinay author, I am viewed as ‘representing’ an entire body of Pinays, a task and responsibility about which I am ambivalent. I could never get it ‘right,’ as there is no one way for it to be ‘right.’ I think people understand this, but expect to be represented nonetheless. [...] Another thing too, is the poetic we, something I’ve been thinking a lot about, given my above ambivalence, and the true nature of my Filipino/a American community as I understand it, its emphasis on collectivity, for better or for worse. What does it mean to move, think, and be one body” (Reyes, Barbara Jane. “Process: The Next Big Thing.” *Barbara Jane Reyes: Poeta y Diwata*. December 24, 2012. <http://www.barbarajanereyes.com/2012/12/24/process-the-next-big-thing/>)

political struggle; instead, she forges genealogical connection to the manongs through an articulation of the ways power operates over and against all Filipino/Americans *through* its production of difference. The queer constellations of Filipino America charted in “Placemarkers” reveals the ways that U.S. imperialism over the long duree of the 20th and early 21st centuries has structured the conditions of possibility of all forms of Filipino migration to, and life opportunities in, California’s San Francisco Bay Area; these imperial geographies, however, have been constructed unevenly, resulting in prosperous post-war industrial gardens built alongside the disinvestment and destruction of the former urban core, and resulting in variegated Filipino/American populations often seen as antagonistic to the other. Reyes’s expansive spatial imaginary thus makes home in multiple sites of livelihood, labor, and struggle for and by Filipino/American communities produced during overlapping moments in the consolidation and expansion of U.S. empire in the Pacific and within its national borders. In calling attention to the co-constitutive, transnational production of regional urban and suburban spaces, Reyes exposes the Filipino/American subject’s vulnerability to violence on multiple spatial scales, an act of suture that attempts to build bridges between herself and the manongs, and between herself and the gatekeepers of Manilatown who have, intentionally and unintentionally, shut her out.

Reyes ends her recently published chapbook, 2012’s *For the City that Nearly Broke Me* with “My California,” a poem “stolen” from a fellow writer, Lee Herrick: a transnational Korean adoptee, raised in the East Bay and now a professor of creative writing in Fresno. Herrick’s “My California” is an ode to the state that illuminates its multiracial history and the racism endemic to it, in order to imagine a utopian place free

of such racial violence. Reyes's "My California," in contrast, is an affirmation of brown, black, native, and yellow presence in California that does not dream of an elsewhere, or another time or another utopian space, giving us the present in all its ugliness and beauty:

In my California, we wild, wild west. We Gold Rush fabulous. We
Watsonville carabao. We Morro Bay rock. We Walnut Grove boogie. We
broccoli be-bope. We Tule Lake. We Manzanar. We poeme en espanol.
We stand at the end of el Camino Real [...]

In my California, we know how to party. We Black Panther Party.
We 2Pac and Dre. We Dime a Day, we Dollar a Dance. We
Fillmore jazz. We Summer of Love. We Barbary Coast. We I-
Hotel. We Chinatown. We North Beach [...]

We mighty Sacramento River. Rooted deep sequoia giants, we
lovin' the wind, we kissin' the sky. (34)

Although she does not explicitly cite him here, Al Robles's imprint is all over "My California." In its repetitive affirmation of the subjective "we" and its invocation of both geographic locations, as well as the food, music, people, and natural formations that make up these locations, Reyes has written a 21st century version of Robles's "Ako Ay Pilipino."³² In throwing together multiple racialized communities across the span of two

³² Robles's "A Thousand Pilipino Songs: Ako Ay Pilipino" is an epic poem, structured as a long sentence, separated only by dashes, with phrases, images, words and memories that bleed together. Here, Robles maps a Filipino American subjectivity that is bound across time and space to others who came before and will come after, who share and know of these experiences through their bodies, through the lyrics of the music, through their consumption of these meals, and the dancing with women: "ako ay pilipino—from across the 7000 islands & seas i am the blood-earth patis flowing through the mountain soil-veins of my people—ako ay pilipino—i am pilipino—the thousand-year-old savage-green moss-forest ifugao bagoong—the sharp baguio wind piercing naked igorot bodies—isda from the mindanao sea—ako ay pilipino—i am the slated pink salmon from alaska barreled in thick seasoned wood—...I am Pilipino living out in the mission & manilatown & chinatown & japantown & in central city & Stockton—...manila cafe—san miguel—one thousand drunken nights watching worn white silk whores trampling their bodies on a ten-cent lacquer counter—ako ay pilipino—i am pilipino—young & old—waiting for a new day to rise—to raise my bolo—to slash down—to hack the chain that binds my pilipino brothers and sisters..." (1996, 11-13). "A Thousand Pilipino Songs: Ako Ay Pilipino," in its structure and form, brings together multiple spatial and temporal sites of Filipino/American experience, that, like other blues texts, "imagine connections between past and present that cannot be factually validated or empirically articulated" and which "blur the line between past and present" (Hong 2010, 21).

hundred years of California history, Reyes reminds us of the ways in which all present-day Californians have their genesis in white settler conquest—in the San Francisco Bay Area, of the taking of this land by the Spanish and again by gold rush robber barons; of the importation of coolie labor and migrant Filipino and Mexican labor; of the disinvestment in black communities and the internment of Japanese people. This being thrown together is, finally, Reyes’s call for a tenuous “we,” for the formation of solidarities between differently located—socially and materially—communities of color, a political aim she shares with her late mentor, Al Robles.³³

Reyes has been critiqued, behind closed doors and in online and real-world venues, as being “too academic”; her voice as too refined from years of study in the academy; her presence in places like Manilatown as inauthentic because of her suburban upbringing. She faces a problem shared by many Filipino/American artists who have achieved some mainstream success, in that her work is condemned as disavowing Filipino/American identity, as having strayed too far from the streets and from the work of real Pinoy poetry. The obstacles facing Reyes and the reception of her work is summarized well by Sarita See’s line of questioning in *The Decolonized Eye*, when she asks us to consider:

³³ Judith Butler, in “Violence, Mourning, Politics,” provocatively asks: “Is there a way we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? Is this not another way of imagining community, one in which we are alike only in having this condition separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference? This way of imagining community affirms relationality not only as a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, but also as an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence. According to this latter view, it would become incumbent on us to consider the place of violence for any such relation, for violence is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie, the primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves as for one another” (2004, 27). This politics of relationality, Butler argues, calls for the formation of a “tenuous we” as a theorization of “collective responsibility” (2004, 44).

How have Filipino American artists negotiated the predicament between the violence of hypervisibility and the violence of invisibility? Between being praised for producing abstract art that transcends identity and achieves universalism and being condemned for art that is ‘too abstract’ and disavows identity? (128)

The great irony of the mistrust of artists like Reyes, of course, is that the very education that Reyes had access to—for example, her training in Asian American Studies at SFSU—that gave her the critical and conceptual tools to write her “avant-garde” poems, was precisely the kind of education that elders such as Robles fought their whole lives for. For Robles and the manongs, telling the history of the manongs and other people of color in the university to the next generation of Filipino/American was as important to their political struggle as preserving the International Hotel was.

In the absence of Al Robles, those vying to become the official gatekeepers of Manilatown have forgotten that this was his greatest legacy—uncovering the shared history of U.S. imperialism affects *all* migrants from the Philippines, as well as other communities of color. His personal and political imperative was to tell the stories of the Filipino manongs in the role of witness, and was not to fight over claiming “territory” as the sole voice of a monolithic community. Reyes’s poems, although they do not take on familiar forms that have become understood as the standard of community-based Filipino/American poetry, take up this mantle; her work transcribes the histories of Filipino/Americans in the Bay Area now that the manongs and their storytellers have passed on. The class composition, migration history, and geographic locations of Filipino America has changed in the afterlife of Manilatown, but as Reyes traces throughout her collections *Gravities of Center*, *Poeta*, *Diwata*, and, most recently, in *For the City That Nearly Broke Me*, imperial, racial and spatial violence undergirds the production of all

the material, cultural, and affective architectures of the San Francisco Bay Area. One can identify these shared structural conditions, and build new alliances from that awareness, if one can reorient their sight—and the sites—of the Filipino Bay Area.

CHAPTER 3
Worlds in Collision:
Carlos Villa and the Absence of the International Hotel

*Oh, you had to just get it just right, you know, and you had to turn
the lights down in this room, and all of a sudden this mirror
and you was this incredible universe.*
– Carlos Villa

“They lived, as it were, in two worlds—in a world they left behind, and in a dream before their eyes” (Robles 2006). These words, taken from a line in Al Robles’s poem “The Wandering Manong,” wrap around the windows of the first floor of 848 Jackson Street, site of the International Hotel Manilatown Heritage Center, rebuilt and reopened in 2005. It is December 3, 2010, and people have come for the closing night event of Jerome Reyes’s first solo show, *Until Today: Spectres for the International Hotel*. Inside the I-Hotel that evening a cast of amateur and veteran actors are performing a staged reading of vignettes from Japanese American author Karen Tei Yamashita’s novel, *I Hotel* (2010). A crowd fills the room, the dim spotlights casting a dramatic glow over the proceedings. Except for the live actors in the reading, what marked Reyes’s show largely eschewed figurative representation—the bodies of manongs and the student-activists most active in the 1960s and 1970s I-Hotel anti-eviction movement appear nowhere but in the show’s “appendix”: in the posters and pictures lining the back side of a temporary wall built by Reyes to conceal the ramp leading to the restrooms from the main gallery space. The exhibit’s centerpiece was *Routes and Seasons (After Carlos Villa’s Quilt of Hope)*, a three-part installation in the middle of the room, and was

comprised of a rug made of two thousand and five feathers, a roughly hewn wooden table, and a man's fedora hat. Entirely fabricated by Reyes, the feather rug and fedora quietly gesture to the large-scale feather works and black door series by the artist Carlos Villa, a mentor to Reyes since he was a student at San Francisco's Balboa High School; these small details were largely overlooked by viewers, but are crucial to understanding the overall significance of the work.

Inside the room, people have already picked through the small rectangular buttons placed on the wooden table, diminishing the large pile until disappearance; the buttons resemble tiny handwritten political posters and contain either fragments of slogans from the Asian American Movement strikes ("Serve People"; "Won't Move"; "United Will") or evocative and speculative text ("What If"; "If Only"; "Forever Now"). A video projection featuring Dr. Estella Habal (present on eviction night and now a professor of history at San Jose State University) shows her hands cutting slices of cantaloupe with a switchblade owned by Reyes; the video loops and is projected on the floor, the stark sounds of chopping muffled by the crowd's murmurs and the performances going on in the space. The entire space feels cool and open despite the darkness, the new wooden floor—installed with funding secured by Reyes—making a permanent cosmetic change to the center that also impacts the affect generated by and in the space. It is a joyous evening—under-rehearsed and performed loosely, the reading draws laughter and claps from the crowd—a fitting closing to a show that both honored the manongs's lives and memorialized their deaths and the loss of the International Hotel.

For those three months of 2010, the "two worlds" of Robles's poem came to life inside the walls of the Manilatown Center, as it functioned both as a community

gathering space and as a contemporary art gallery. Choosing this unorthodox space for his inaugural solo show, Reyes worked to produce a “site-responsive” exhibit where visitors would “lose [their] sense of chronological location when we’re actually inside” (qtd. in Yoshi Tani 2010, 10). In calling attention to the palimpsestic Filipino/American geographies of 848 Jackson Street through his multimedia exhibit, Reyes also collapsed two other worlds: that of the mainstream art community and that of downtown San Francisco’s Filipino/American community. The show was successful by the measures of both the art world and the activist community associated with the International Hotel; its aesthetic, Reyes boasts, was described as flawless and beautiful by art critics, while the support of the Manilatown Center staff and board validated Reyes for executing a participatory, community-centered production. In his estimation, Reyes imagines that his show fulfilled the demands of multiple, differing imagined constituencies; it appealed to both a deracinated, universalized consumer of “art” and a particularized, racialized subject desiring of “community representation” by one of its own.

Reyes attributed the success of *Until Today* on his ability to code-switch, a skill gained through his personal access to both worlds: to his training as an MFA student at Stanford University, and to his upbringing in the Filipino/American communities of the Bay Area, from residential Daly City to the faculty and student bodies at San Francisco State University. While his biography and professional involvement with the Manilatown Heritage Center certainly provides one clue to the successful reception of the show, another obscured connection provides the other: Reyes’s mentorship under the late Carlos Villa. Villa’s artistic practice and personal connections in the San Francisco art world are imprinted all over Reyes’s work, from the piece bearing Villa’s name to the combination

of community engagement and conceptual art that defined *Until Today*. As any student of Villa's would attest, his last decades were marked by a dual commitment to the maintaining the integrity of his individual artistic practice and to a collective uplifting of the art and performance of people of color *as* fine art through his teaching, publications, and collaboratively-executed projects. To place Reyes's *Until Today* exhibit within a broader historical trajectory thus requires revisiting Carlos Villa's life and innovative, aesthetically and generically promiscuous cultural production as modes of social and political intervention in the wake of the large-scale eviction and dispersal of inner-city Filipino/American communities in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Carlos Villa's long career as an artist, educator, and activist in San Francisco is the focus of this chapter, a reconsideration of the ways visual culture can be used as an instrument of spatial and social justice for Filipino/American communities. I read closely three moments in Carlos Villa's long career—his ritualistic performances and indigenous-themed artworks of the 1970s and 1980s; the minimalist black door series of the 1990s and 2000s; and the 1994 Filipino American Arts Exposition, which Villa curated and produced collaborative work for. Each of these three bodies of work allows me to trace two main lines of inquiry. First, their visual content illuminates the material conditions of Filipino/American life in San Francisco during the decades of their production. Significant is that all of these pieces were produced during a near-thirty year long span of time in which the International Hotel was but a pile of rubble behind a chain link fence. In their ghosting or disappearance of the manong figure, and in their being exhibited and performed outside of the physical site of the International Hotel, Villa's works perform an open-ended narration of history that does not see the I-Hotel as past (or

passed on) but as always in-becoming. These works—employing, alternatively, *rasquachismo* and minimalism, individual creation and collaborative process—all labor to transform the I-Hotel from a discrete, time-bound site into an imaginative visual space that can hold, but can never fully contain, the totality and multiplicity of Filipino/American experiences in San Francisco. By absenting the iconic figures of Filipino San Francisco from the frame, Villa’s artworks do not evacuate historicity or suffocate political urgency, but rather push viewers to do the labor of *filling in* the holes of history left in the wake of the International Hotel’s demolition and subsequent resurrection.

Secondly, revisiting both Villa’s solo studio practice and his socially-engaged collaborations makes an important case for reevaluating the ways we understand “Filipino American art” as a genre of social protest art.¹ Over the course of half a century, Villa navigated a series of contradictions in the content and form of his work: between the limits of fine art and community/activist art; between the simultaneous presence and absence of the Filipino/American manong figure in the city and in his art; between difficult moments of the destruction and rebuilding of the International Hotel; and between both the politics of a global Philippine diaspora and of the local spaces of home in San Francisco. While Villa’s artworks and performance pieces circulate outside of the genre of “activist art” in the San Francisco Bay Area, his strategy of representing Filipino/American presence in absentia and his praxis of community-engaged “street

¹ This chapter attempts to dismantle these binaries, in part by demonstrating the productivity of Villa’s diversions from a fixed “visual vocabulary” and towards process-oriented works which were deeply engaged with “intercommunity solidarity” even if not easily apprehended by the broadest possible audience.

scholarship” offers us an alternative framework for defining “Filipino American art”—not through a set of fixed aesthetic conventions or based upon the static ethnic identity of its maker or its desired audience, but as the outcome of the dialectic tension between individual practice and community-based collaboration. That is to say, I propose that Villa’s lifelong process of searching to articulate one’s own unique perspective not behold to others, held in productive tension with a collaborative, community-engaged ethos can offer a justification for redefining “Filipino/American art” not as a fixed genre or aesthetic but as a *method* or an approach to making all of one’s labor an art of interested engagement.

Carlo Villa’s Worlds in Collision

Carlos P. Villa (1936-2013) was one of the first generation of children born and raised in San Francisco to Filipino parents; like his “cousin” and artistic collaborator Al Robles, Villa’s nuclear family—living in the multiracial, working-class Tenderloin neighborhood—was an exception to the largely bachelor manong population of San Francisco in the mid-20th century. Villa’s artistic pedigree was similarly exceptional: Villa received his bachelor degree in painting at the California School of Fine Arts in the late 1950s, studying under artists including Elmer Bischoff, Richard Diebenkorn and Manuel Neri, defectors of the San Francisco School of Abstract Expressionism who became key figures in the Bay Area Figurative movement (Jones 1990, 6). As a student at CSFA, Villa was present at a key juncture in modern art, a time when eminent San Francisco Abstract Expressionists such as Diebenkorn, Bischoff, David Park, and Hassel Smith were returning to figurative painting after feeling they had exhausted the radical

possibilities of abstraction: “Then, one day, I felt I was all done,” said Diebenkorn recalling 1955, “I felt I could move on to something else. I got kind of a thrill out of doing that. I said, ‘I can leave this all behind’” (qtd. in Jones 1990, 32). Significantly, both the Abstract Expressionists and Bay Area Figurative Movement artists, despite their formal differences, largely strove to achieve a universal visual language, or “visual Esperanto,” in the words of Elmer Bischoff (Landauer 1996, 13); art historian and curator Susan Landauer writes that for this population of postwar artists, “figurative and abstract painting thus mirrored the same reality: a world in crisis, ferment, and transition. Both expressed an ideology that gave primacy to the interior realm of personal emotion and individual revelation” (1996, 13). Out of this individualist expression of one’s interiority and creativity was a modernist desire “to create a world and to create people in that world which [*sic*] were more timeless... were not dated in time” (Bischoff qtd. in Jones 1990, 36).

Steeped in this heady environment, Villa absorbed one of Abstract Expressionism’s key tenets—that of the drive towards a form of expression emanating purely from an individualized consciousness—even as he was critical of what he saw as an blind following of “stone idols,” or an idealization of the aesthetic of Abstract Expressionism by fellow CSFA students “without really thinking about what the hell they were looking at.”² Villa’s initially adopted this a postwar logic of visual mastery, believing he could “reconstruct the world” through abstraction, although he eventually

² “Interview with Carlos Villa.” *Rehistoricizing the Time Around Abstract Expressionism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1950s-1960s*. 2011. <http://rehistoricizing.org/interview-with-carlos-villa/>

rejected the universalist visions of modernity of his Abstract Expressionist and Figurative teachers and colleagues:

If you're an artist what you want to do, you want to break up the things in front of you and put them together in your own way. And that's what Abstract Expressionism was about. It was about the idea of thinking of your canvas, thinking of your materials, as being something that needed to be reconstructed. As a metaphor, people in America were reconstructing. People in Europe were reconstructing. So this was an art of reconstructing. (Villa 2011)

Living in New York City and as part of the Park Place Group between 1964 and 1966, Villa's minimalist pieces found him acclaim in the city avant-garde circles. After his first solo show at New York's Poindexter Gallery in 1967, Villa found himself increasingly dissatisfied with his art practice.³ Soon thereafter, in 1969, Villa chose to return to San Francisco permanently to reconnect with his roots—both to ground his practice in the local San Francisco community of studio-based and street artists, and to examine his subjectivity as a Filipino/American man raised by the first generation of Filipino manongs and their wives in the U.S. (Chang et. al 2008, 446). Told that there was “no Filipino art history” by an instructor at the California School of Fine Arts, Villa's career upon his return to San Francisco was devoted to excavating the roots of

³ Of his disillusionment with the mainstream art world, Villa says: “Art had always answered every question that I'd ever asked it, and it always came out in the work... After the one person show, I just started thinking. I just said, god, it had not answered one question. And that one question was, how did I fit Filipino in that. How did I fit ‘Filipino’ [into] being an artist. I could talk about being an artist in every way, and having gained an MFA [at Mills College], and having gained the friendship of many artists there in the New York scene- Bryce Martin, Jorge N. ... there were a whole lot of people that were my friend[s]. That could inform me about art, that could discuss art, that could live art. But then at the same time, there was that question, where does Filipino come in. So then I just started asking those kinds of questions... I just decided maybe it's time for a change... this kind of question couldn't get answered in New York" (Villa 2011).

tribal and urban Filipino histories and aesthetics in the Philippines and in the diaspora.⁴

He writes of his trajectory in the art world as a journey through an alien landscape, his progress as spatially expansive as it was critical of Eurocentric temporality:

Before the 1970s, my own art orientation was like being on a narrow winding road toward a small house in the distance, with a tiny sign that had "self" written on it... There were roadside stands with signs proclaiming "Expressionism," "Impressionism," and so on... What my art history teachers and my Jansen book didn't describe was the landscape that the narrow road was on. We of parallel ethnic American cultures are a great and vital part of this landscape and the apparatus or the narrow road is only part of it.⁵

From his early work made primarily with aluminum, wood, steel, fiberglass, and acrylic paints, Villa's practice beginning in the 1970s included more visceral materials: blood, shells, spit, teeth, sperm, feathers. He studied African art, art from Melanesia, New Guinea, Australian aboriginal art, looking to "realize the truth" about his personal origins as a Filipino in the United States in the absence of information about Filipino cultural practice and artistic traditions (French 1985, np). The turn to these materials thus was, for Villa, central to his process of transforming himself from a abstract painter who had a critical and aesthetic distance from his work, into an interdisciplinary, mixed-media artist and performer that was physically and sensually moved by his practice:

I went to Chinatown and bought some beef blood and then started painting with it in a room with windows that wouldn't open because they were painted shut. It was a hot day and I was gagging. And my stomach was churning and I knew it was right... So when I smelled the blood and began getting nauseated by it, I just said, "God, this is what art is supposed to do to you." (qtd. in French 1985, np)

⁴ California School of Fine Arts was renamed the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) in 1961. I refer to the school by its current name or acronym any time I reference events occurring after this date.

⁵ Carlos Villa, "Expanding American Art History to Reflect Multiethnic Diversity," Introduction to the San Francisco Art Institute Summer Conference, San Francisco, August 17-23, 1992.

In turning to these other sources of cultural tradition and materials, Villa found himself being able to “locate himself in a community, as an artist, and personally”; he remembered this moment as “a revolution in small terms” (qtd. in French 1985, np). These experiments were profoundly transformative in re-orienting the young Carlos Villa’s developing artistic practice; while he did not ever completely leave the fine art circles that he traveled in, he also began to move outwards, entering other spaces where different possibilities for artistic, cultural, and political collaboration could flourish and be less bound by strict conventions of fine art. The imagery of landscape and space he employed throughout his writing, speaking, and work during this period signaled for him other ways of living and being in the world that were not dominated by Eurocentric, modernist cultural practices and norms. In his unpublished manifesto, *(60 Forms of) ATANG / Payback and Tribute (In Filipino)*, Villa described the shift in his aesthetic during this time period thus:

13. There is a piece I did where I took an Itek print of a photograph of myself and I drew patterns on it. Long before I was aware of the words and theories as "recuperative strategy," or "reinvention," I was in the process of becoming. Before that, I was told who I was. From then until now, through practices of art, I became who I am. Somewhere between the enlarged image of an Asian face and the act of drawing, was space. At that time, there existed a void, devoid of knowledge of true national history or a specific and truer art history. "With New Eyes..." fills that "void" or "blank" in my mind with a layer of images and voices, and makes a substantial ground for surer footing on a still-colonized American art landscape.⁶

Villa’s interest in multicultural and ethnic art was not limited to his individual studio practice; a lifelong educator, he was an instructor throughout the Bay Area and in

⁶ Carlos Villa, *(60 Forms of) ATANG / Payback and Tribute (In Filipino)*, n.d. Courtesy of the San Francisco Art Institute archives.

Sacramento, but found his permanent home at the San Francisco Art Institute (formerly CSFA), where he taught painting between 1969-1973 and from 1979 until his death in 2013. During nearly half a century of teaching, Villa mentored hundreds of art students, including a large number of Filipino/American artists and other students of color (Chang et. al 2008, 446). His signature course “Worlds in Collision: Filipino American Art History,” which he taught at the University of San Francisco, was the first of its kind in the United States. Very active in the larger San Francisco arts and education communities, Villa mentored and collaborated with many influential Bay Area artists, curators, and arts administrators that continue to practice in the region today, including Jenifer K. Wofford and Eliza Barrios of the Mail Order Brides; visual artists Michael Arcega, Rigo 23 and Dewey Crumpler; and Laurie Lazar, curator of The Luggage Store Gallery. Between 1976 and 1991, Villa orchestrated a series of four symposia entitled *Worlds in Collision: Dialogues on Multicultural Art Issues* that brought together scholars and artists to deliberate the state of multicultural art in the Bay Area, the United States, and globally (Roth in Villa et. al 1999, xii); the resulting dialogues and exhibits were among the first of their kind, and revealed Villa’s mission to advocate for other artists of color to set the agenda for their own practices in an ever-diversifying global art market. “Other Sources: An American Essay” (1976), “Sources of a Distinct Majority” (1989), and “Worlds in Collision” (1989-1991) are important snapshots of a seminal moment in the birth, rise and decline of “multicultural art” as a genre of work that was worthy of being elevated to the status of fine art rather than dismissed as simply craft or propaganda. Through this project and other modes of what he dubbed “street scholarship,” Villa had a quiet hand in shaping the conversations around “multicultural

art” happening in many overlapping, concentric art communities in the Bay Area region, communities that at times imagined themselves as entirely separate or without common political objectives or even baseline aesthetic similarities.

While he worked in both areas, inserting Villa into either the canon of Abstract Expressionism and to the category of activist or community-based art poses difficult questions for these fields. In addition, Villa’s large body of ritualistic, expressionist, and abstract installations and performances, made between the 1960s and early 2000s, are provocative for the ways in which their spatio-temporal narrations of the manong generation refuse easy assimilation into the historical record of the International Hotel movement. In *Ritual*, his 1980 performance piece, Villa incorporates trance-like movements, found objects and bodily waste to produce an “action painting” that disidentifies with the Abstract Expressionist monopoly over that term; it formally complicates the divide between fine art and community-based cultural productions, and in using his own body as tool, Villa metaphorically reinserts Filipino presence back into San Francisco at a moment of eviction as a primary strategy of spatial management.

Rasquache and Ritual: Villa in the 1970s and 1980s

Raised in the Tenderloin, Carlos Villa grew up in a multiracial, multicultural environment that intimately constituted his racial and gendered subjectivity as relative to those of the neighborhood’s working-class African American and Latino/a male residents. Villa’s affective attachments to other communities of color found their way into his mid-career and late period visual languages, evidenced in his appropriations of *rasquache* into his work. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto’s groundbreaking articulation of

rasquachismo defines it as a “vernacular system of taste” based on the “sensibility of the downtrodden” working-class Chicano communities who have recovered meaning in “the[ir] layers of everyday life practices” [qtd. in Mesa-Bains 1999, 157]; *rasquache* practices elevate forms of Chicano culture seen as un-American or unsavory by the white majority of the US, as a form of survival and in order to create beauty in one’s life. As Amalia Mesa-Bains, one of Villa’s closest friends and artistic collaborators, concurs: *rasquache* “is a combination of resistant and resilient attitudes” that allow one to survive “with a sense of dignity”; at the heart of *rasquachismo* is “the capacity to hold life together with bits of string, old coffee cans, and broken mirrors in a dazzling gesture of aesthetic bravado” (1999, 158). For Villa, *rasquache* came into his practice by his bringing in “older, traditional, non-European traditions into what I was doing, so as to amalgamate these traditions along with a modernist tradition to do an art about what that experience was—except in a very abstract way.”⁷ His take on *rasquache* both draws from

⁷ qtd. in Gonzalves 2011, 8. In a 1995 interview with Paul Karlstrom for the Smithsonian Oral History Archives, Villa recounts the transvaluation of the useless into the beautiful typical of *rasquachismo* as deeply informing his practice, and in his fascination with incorporating found objects and bodily matter (hair, bones, spit, blood) into his artwork: “But definitely as I was saying before, *rasquache*, the idea of making something out of what was a throwaway from another culture. Like jazz, you know, like, ‘Okay, then, we don’t need those old instruments any more. We’ll just throw them away or we’ll put them into pawnshops.’ You know, ‘I heard Bach, but this isn’t Bach, but this is my version of Bach.’ ‘I love these drums. Let’s play these drums behind that, whatever you’re trying to play.’ [...] And so you get a whole set of other values [with *rasquache*]. So I would imagine these kinds of things, if you want to identify with that, can kind of come in with your art. And I see it happening more and more now. The idea of *rasquache*. The idea of ‘Here are my values.’ You know, in concern with the pearl. I don’t want the most rarest, most wonderful pearl in the world. I want ten dozen pearls... It’s about making the best out of being poor.”

In this excerpt, Villa speaks of the ingenuity people of color have in practicing *rasquachismo* in their everyday lives and through cultural forms ranging from visual art to live music and performance. What he alludes to at the end of this segment—“in concern with the pearl”—refers to the ways in which black people are seen to be “flashy” or “wasteful” by mainstream society for their extravagance based on their love of costume jewelry or other commodities of little monetary value. The desire that people of color have for these apparently value-less goods is often understood by dominant society as a miscalculation or misallocation of its worth. As scholars and artists such as Villa have illuminated, however, this is a fundamental incomprehension of the value of *rasquache* cultural practice. In an economy of material scarcity, to have an abundance of lower-cost, poorly fabricated commodities is an attainable goal for the poor person of color; rather than hold out for designer or luxury goods, and by attaching themselves to the

and departs from modes of visual representation familiar to students of Abstract Expressionism—he elevates minoritized and indigenized elements and objects as materials for producing high art, and simultaneously draws from a modernist ethos of abstraction-as-intervention into the monotony of life under global capitalism.⁸

Villa’s first experiments in rasquache art melded indigenized and Filipino Catholic representations and materials to formally push the boundaries of avant-garde American art—*Jackson Pollock Painting* (1970), for example, is comprised of thickly layered feathers and acrylic over a 7’x7’ canvas in undulating, chaotic patterns resembling underground wormholes or unspooled human intestines. It is with *Ritual*, an hour-long, site-specific performance piece held at The Farm on April 26, 1980, that Villa’s rasquache practice of transvaluing Filipino/American life and the genre of Filipino American art is fully realized. In deploying an imagined and imaginative indigenous aesthetic drawn from multiple pan-Oceanic sources, *Ritual* becomes a performance of embodied rasquache, a pulling together of disparate elements that narrates an alternative Filipino/American modernity that contests an imperialist teleology of appropriate development and modern progress.

Beginning with an elaborate opening ceremony involving the drawing of a dust circle around the edges of the canvas to ground the space, Villa then used his fully-nude

“ten dozen [cheap] pearls,” poor people of color transvalue both the commodities *and* the meaning of their own lives from wasteful to precious.

⁸ As Susan Landauer writes: “despite its ostensible neutrality, abstraction did carry significant political connotations. The tendency among commentators of the time to equate modernism- especially in its more experimental forms- with democracy is well known by now. In addition to its association w/ freedom, modernism became identified with an internationalism that matched the global outlook and cosmopolitan vision of the period... The universalism of Abstract Expressionism—its ambition to speak a content generic to all cultures, to speak a 'visual Esperanto,' as Elmer Bischoff succinctly put it—was inextricably linked to the globalism of the period, and was shared by many more traditional painters" (1996,13).

body as both paintbrush and canvas, dipping himself in lavender and grey paint and pressing himself repeatedly onto a large sheet previously imprinted with blackened profiles of his face. Moving in a trance-like state throughout this repetitive re-entering and exiting the barn to paint himself on the outdoor canvas, Villa ends the performance by donning and dancing in an otherworldly coat and mask, made again of feathers and acrylic on canvas with bone dolls sewn into its folds. Intentionally staging this performance at The Farm, a space ideologically built on the principle of *and* materially built through the manual labor of “autonomous, spontaneous” collective action, *Ritual* draws on The Farm’s collectivized spirit, momentarily transforming it into a place for Filipino/American community in San Francisco.⁹

By offering his body up to The Farm’s audience as a living memory of Filipino presence in San Francisco, Villa intervenes into multiple Filipino/American temporalities and spatialities. Moving silently throughout the performance, the rhythmic drum and *kulintang* music played behind him, Villa’s *Ritual* reworks and challenges imperialist modes of representing the brown, native body that were central to the construction of both Manifest Destiny and the canon of western art history itself. As Filipino American Studies scholars such as Martin Manalansan, Benito Vergara, and Sarita See have noted,

⁹ The Farm was an “spontaneous...autonomous, collective” community center in San Francisco located on 1499 Potrero Avenue at the corner of Army Street/Cesar Chavez Blvd underneath the Highway 101 interchange, and was in operation from 1974-1987. In addition to a two-story community building with a library and art gallery on the top floor, with a theatre and open multi-use space below for children and adults, the complex also contained a working farm with a vegetable garden and small animals. While the farm primarily served as an all-ages educational, arts, performance and community center, it also became known as a punk venue in the 1980s; seminal punk bands such as Bad Brains, The Descendents, and 7 Seconds performed at The Farm as part of the space’s fundraising efforts. The Farm was described by Joan Holden as “life in the middle of concrete” and “an eruption of nature in the middle of the concrete jungle, proving that life could still live there” The life of The Farm ended in 1987, when the tenants lost their protracted legal battle against their landlords, and were evicted on November 5th of that year. (Carlsson, Chris. “The Farm: Historical Essay.” *FoundSF*. nd. http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=The_Farm)

early 20th century cultural representations, ranging from political cartoons to the live display of native peoples in the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, have used the figure of the naked Filipino body as justification for American imperialism in the Philippines. Serving both to educate and entertain a white American public, these spectacles measured Filipino savagery as evidence for the necessity of the "benevolent assimilation" of the archipelago by an enlightened, democratic U.S. government. By banally performing their improper domesticity, and "historically configured as the object of Western anthropological study, Filipinos cannot 'have' culture. Filipinos instead 'are' culture, displayed as dehumanized objects in past World's Fairs and present-day natural history museums in the United States" (See 2009, xxxiii). In choosing to display himself as the native, naked performing body, Villa's recalls this violent history and transforms the abject Filipino as object-to-be-gazed-at into a maker of contemporary art, or its invisible hand.

If the Filipino native has been produced as savage, and Filipino culture read as primitive, works like *Ritual* to call attention to this Othered influence on western art history *and* on American society writ large. In wearing a cloak cut in the style of a Catholic vestment, yet painted in swirling bright colors and made of canvas, feathers, and found bones, Villa adorns himself in the miscegenated history of the Philippine Islands; these cloaks recall that even prior to the landing of U.S. warships, the Philippines was already the colony of a western European nation, its people disciplined by the Spanish sword and the Roman Catholic cross. The Filipino culture paraded in spectacles like 1904 World's Fair was not untainted, but was already deeply scarred by, contact with the West; the "Visayan beauties" and "Philippine Constabulary" shown alongside the "Igorot dog-

eaters” in St. Louis’s Philippine Reservation were not the sole product of American democracy but were evidence of Philippine people’s accommodation as a mode of survival under a despotic Spanish Catholic regime (Rydell 1984, 167). The modernity to which the United States aspired to necessitated its entry into overseas colonial conquest, rather than the other way around; the Philippines did not need the United States to become modern, did not depend on the United States to save it from its Spanish masters. In recalling this history—of native Filipino struggle against Spanish Catholic rule—Villa decenters the narrative of the United States as the sole condition for Filipino modernity, tracing a much longer genealogy of Filipino struggles for state sovereignty and for recognition of collective and individual ethnoracial subjectivity.

The cloaks and capes, in addition to their references to Catholicism, were for Villa a working through of traditions and connections made between the Philippines and other nations and territories in the Pacific. Researching various primitive, Oceanic, and aboriginal art traditions, Villa finds himself taken in by Hawai’ian cloaks and indigenous shamanic robes. He says that his series of feathered cloaks, including the cloak worn in *Ritual*, “represented almost a surrogate father, a tradition I felt myself an extension of. I wanted to think of artists being the extension of Shaman. I think of myself as an artist, and as an artist what I want to do is heal... And I think that’s what painting is all about. It’s about healing” (qtd. in French 1985, np). The connections Villa made between Southeast Asian and Pacific Island nations and territories in his the cloaks, moreover, map alternate routes of fruitful and fantastic cultural exchange, connections independent of Spanish and American colonial influence. While never fully outside of imperial power relations, these imagined and actualized bridges between native peoples of the Pacific

gesture towards other possibilities for horizontal kinship, not based in hierarchy, death, or domination but instead in reciprocity and mutually beneficial transformation.

Even more than in his donning of the cloak, it is in Carlos Villa's nudity and his use of his own body that he most leaves his mark on the canvas laid before him *and* on the timelines of 20th century American (art) history. For even as Filipinos did not need America to save them, the conditions of their first entry to the United States as cheap labor has been the condition of possibility for all other Filipino/Americans after them. This ongoing presence of Filipinos in the San Francisco Bay Area is manifested through the repetition of face prints and body prints on canvas and paper. As in other mixed media paintings of this period, such as *(Untitled) Witnessing* (1970), *State of the State* (1975) and *Mom* (1978), Villa leaves material traces of himself—blood, skin, bones, semen, and/or hair—as evidence of being (t)here. Villa, as a second generation Filipino/American born to one of the first Filipino families in downtown San Francisco, uses his body to historicize and document the ongoing, yet absented, Filipino/American presence in the city; in the wake of Manilatown's destruction, it is the bodies and not the buildings which comprise its architecture.

In their content, form, and through the laborious process required to construct them, pieces such as *Ritual* and *(Untitled) Witnessing* effectively blur the borders between rasquache and avant-garde, between community and fine art. Villa's body and face prints, bodily fluids, and hair—applied to surfaces first expertly marked with abstracted patterns using acrylic, watercolor, or pen—resulted in artworks and performances that merged his art institute training with his very essence; this move literally inserts Villa into the chronology of 20th century modern art, making the brown

subject central to its whitewashed history.¹⁰ Rather than being exterior to western art history, thus, the black and native body becomes its condition of possibility, even as those who inhabit these racialized subjectivities have been discursively produced as without talent or capacity to produce fine art themselves.

If, by 1980, the Filipino male subject was without value in the United States—their manual labor obsolete and their creative talents overlooked—Villa’s body and fluids become the very things that must necessarily be transvalued through his *rasquache* art and performance practice. According to Catrióna Rueda Esquibel, to fully embody the ethos of *rasquache* is to revel in those aspects of working-class culture “that are most devalued by the bourgeois aesthetics of American hegemonic culture” (qtd. in Davis and Tadiar, 201). Villa’s corporeality produces the raw materials of his *rasquachismo* countercultural practice—his bodily detritus is what is transformed from denigrated, valueless matter into the substance for a fine art piece. The fluid and solid excretions of his semen, hair and blood stand in as metonym for a devalued manong laboring body and other excessive, racialized and sexualized Filipino/American subjects; instead of being disposed of as waste, Villa uses this base matter to raise the market value of artworks hung on white gallery walls and sold to the highest bidder. Ybarra-Frausto writes of *rasquache* that “in an environment always on the edge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet), things are held together with spit, grit, and *movidás*” (Ybarra-Frausto 1989, 5).

¹⁰ As feminist scholars and art historians such as Robin Hackett and Patricia Leighton have well documented, it was with the appropriation of blackness and indigeneity that white western painters ushered in the age of modern art—Picasso’s *Demoiselles d’Avignon* (1907) and Gauguin’s nudes being key examples of the genesis of modernism as inextricably linked to the representation of racialized female sexuality (Hackett 2004, 14). Using the black and native woman-as-muse and “primitivist” motifs to define this aesthetic, modernism (like the sociopolitical project of modernization itself) relied on the racialized Other—subjects captured on canvas as well as captive under imperial regimes—in order to define itself.

In this case, Villa's actual spit and other bodily viscera are integral to holding the artwork together, and undoes the logic of the art market; he visually uplifts the downtrodden Filipino/American body in U.S. society, by making his bodily waste *matter*.

Villa's practice of "action painting" in *Ritual*—his use of use of kinetic movements, trance, and ritualism—situates him as both a part of, and dissenter from, the Abstract Expressionist movement, whose history is most often told absencing the participation of female artists or artists of color. Action paintings by Abstract Expressionists, in particular by Jackson Pollock, have been described as having an "intuitive gestural language with its emphasis on a subjectivity produced through the physical actions of the body in relation to the canvas" (Chadwick 1990, 320); "scale, action, and energy" define visual art produced in this way, with art critics and Abstract Expressionist artists themselves using a gendered language of subjectivity that "understood...male agency articulated through the figure of the male individual" (320). Villa, citing Pollock's influence, used his own masculine body as a tool in *rasquache* artworks and performances like *Ritual*, his "arched arms" becoming the paintbrush in relation to a canvas that was imagined as an "arena" for him to visually explore questions of "human measurement, and ... the measurement of man."¹¹ But if Abstract

Expressionism was a movement characterized as celebrating a heteromascuine ethos of

¹¹ "[A]nd I always thought of the Abstract Expressionists as having this kind of reaction to painting, to gesture, to all of these things; it was something physical they were feeling. And they would think of their canvases as being arenas. And I thought of my painting as being that kind of arena. Where I was looking at the marks, and I was smelling the blood, and all of a sudden, all of the gestures I was doing with the paintbrush were arcs of my arm. Which was pretty much about human measurement, and about the measurement of man. And i thought was clear and that was true" (Villa 2011).

Villa has implicitly and explicitly credited Pollock as an artistic inspiration: "I got anecdotal and almost colloquial in a very funny way. I was always influenced by the actions of Jackson Pollock, not necessarily by the images, but by his actions. And it seemed to be an extension of that, of abstract expressionism, (to imprint my own body)" (qtd. in French 1985, np).

independence—Pollock as its most obvious champion was, like other Abstract Expressionists, funded in the 1950s by the CIA-backed Congress of Cultural Freedom as evidence of American democracy contrasted to Chinese and Soviet communism—Villa’s inclusion into this movement radically troubles this premise (Wood 1993, 142-144).

While always fighting for his own vision as an individual artist, Villa’s subjectivity is not “*produced through* the physical actions of the body in relation to the canvas,” as characterized above (Chadwick 1990, 320; emphasis added); rather, Villa comes to the performance arena as a self-aware racialized, sexualized and gendered subject, exploring his body’s relation to the canvas and to the larger audience of witnesses gathered there. If the meaning of abstract art hinges on the inner expression of its maker, Villa’s art works and performances require an engagement with the larger dialogues around colonial, postcolonial, local, regional, and national struggles for subjectivity and independence which so deeply obsessed the artist.¹² Whereas the white male artists considered central to the San Francisco School of Abstract Expressionism, and later, to the Bay Area Figurative Movement—including Elmer Bischoff, David Park, and Hassel Smith—were resistant to identifying themselves with any collectivity, Villa’s art and curatorial praxis centered on producing new linkages between himself and others positioned as insiders and outsiders to the world of fine art.¹³ His physical body and his

¹² Yasmil Raymond writes in the introductory catalogue essay for the 2010 *Abstract Resistance* exhibition at the Walker Art Center: “Historically works of art that withhold explanation have been associated with the notion of abstraction. Yet abstraction and all its histories center on a formal analysis that assumed that the meaning of the work is in the expression of its maker” (16).

¹³ This refashioning of the principles of Abstract Expressionism was borne out most explicitly decades later, in the 2010 show and symposium held at the Luggage Store, titled *Rehistoricizing Abstract Expressionism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1950s-1960s*. Curated by Villa, the show featured over 35 Bay Area artists of color and white female artists who were “undervalued because of the public and

body of work, are thus never totally isolated or independent, the product of an individual genius, but rather produce (and are produced out of) a deep interconnection with other people of color, women, and white male artists and communities. The dialectic tension between self and the other runs throughout Villa's work, but most especially these early pieces of rasquache art and *Ritual*, a performance that combined a legible "art-making performance" with the rituals of the mundane.¹⁴

Upon the completion of the painting, Villa extended the intersubjective exchange through partaking in a shared meal between himself, his assistants and collaborators, and everyone else in attendance. For those in attendance, to partake in the sharing of a meal, itself evocative of the Biblical story of Jesus and the forty loaves of bread and fish, at the end of the ceremony was to become a part of the performance itself. Rather than take in the Catholic body of Christ, however, the audience takes in Villa's naked body, his offering of himself as a maker, a Filipino/American man, and a conduit for channeling other spaces and times besides the present of a San Francisco devoid of manongs and viable home-places for Filipino/American survival and livelihood. The rasquache quality of "temporality and importance—here today and gone tomorrow," of course does not

personal hegemonic social and aesthetic scrutiny at the time" and included works by Asian American artists Ruth Asawa, Bernice Bing, Sung Woo Chin, and George Miyasaki; Latino/a artists Luis Cervantes, Carlos Loarca, Jose Montoya, and Gustavo Rivera; and Villa's late cousin, Leo Valledor. See: "Rehistoricizing Abstract Expressionism in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1950s-1960s." Luggage Store Gallery San Francisco. June 4-July 31, 2010. <http://www.luggagestoregallery.org/2010/05/rehistoricizing-abstract-expressionism-in-the-san-francisco-bay-area-1950s-1960s/>

¹⁴ Villa says of the rituals of daily life: "I was after the power of matter and material as nourishing my personal aesthetic. To inspire me to do whatever work I needed to do. And the idea of ritual is an idea that I had because it was all about accepting and asking for things in a formal way, which is what I think ritual is all about. And a drink of water, or having a drink of water could be a ritual. Having food with someone could be a ritual. Putting on my shoes could be a ritual. There are things, things of the everyday that could be a ritual"(Villa 2011).

guarantee that this sense of community shared after the *Ritual* would last beyond that moment (Ybarra-Frausto 1989, 6). But for a moment, the performance opened a space—albeit one that was ephemeral and fleeting—for the production of community across gendered, racialized, classed, and national lines. By performing this elaborate art- and subjectivity-making ritual at Farm, Villa repurposes this location as a site where Filipino/American collective memory could be shared, at a community gathering that was

... like being in the ghetto on Saturday night. You know, what it is. That's what it is. That's the closest contemporary reference that I can think of... Meanwhile, I was talking about audience participation. Well, it was all part of something that we call, in Filipino, a [*kanyao*] which is a celebration. And all the people, later on, were brought into The Farm, where a cousin of mine had prepared something like thirty fish, and we all ate and we all drank and we all shared. And later on there was some poetry reading [by Al Robles]. That was just part of an event.¹⁵

Villa said of his collaborative practice, epitomized in this impromptu post-performance communal meal: “Think of me as a cook. I want to be able to feed as many people as I can, although I know that everybody is not going to enjoy the meal” (FAAE 1994, 17). This final component of *Ritual*, thus, worked to bridge differences and create intimacy between himself and others, a strikingly different affective maneuver than powerful pieces that call attention to the critical distance (not proximity) between native and audience, such as Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco's *The Couple in the Cage* (1993) and James Luna's *Artifact Piece* (1986); it thus diverges sharply both from the formally beautiful but emotionally distancing effect of other Abstract Expressionist works *and* from other performance art pieces centering indigeneity.¹⁶

¹⁵ Oral History interview with Carlos Villa, 1995 June 20-July 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁶ It is because of this attention to relationality and interactivity that *Ritual* can be read as more closely akin to performance pieces such as Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco's *The Couple in the Cage* (1993)

In *Ritual*, Villa utilized both industrialized and natural materials in a spectacular fashion, combining the detritus of Philippine (post)coloniality with American modern art practice; this embodied action functioned both as a spiritual ceremony and as an iteration of experimental performance art. In the gestural quality of the abstracted body imprints on canvas made during the performance, Villa both draws from and refuses to be contained by the legacies of the Abstract Expressionist movements of his teachers and artistic forebears. His body, dancing and shaking in the trance *and* relaxed during the post-ritual meal, offers testament to the endurance of the Filipino subject in multiple worlds—as belonging to downtown San Francisco even without an ethnic enclave like Manilatown to hold them, and as part of a larger constellation of 20th century modern and postmodern artists. Villa’s *Ritual* thus physically manifests the ethos behind his aptly-named course and symposium *Worlds in Collision*: by returning the Filipino/American subject back into the material geography of San Francisco in a moment when dominant discourses and practices have labored to erase its presence, and by placing the artist of color at the center of modern art practice and art history rather than as its peripheral and shadowed Other, Villa ruptures the divisions between art(ifice) and reality, challenging us to look anew at the present we inhabit.

than to Abstract Expressionist works, yet these performances are not equivalent. While *Ritual*, like *The Couple in the Cage*, uses indigenous motifs in order to challenge perceptions about the place of the native in a white settler society, the performance is not satirical, its affect serious rather than silly—Villa does not attempt to “play” with indigeneity to critique the white imperial gaze of the modern spectator as do Fusco and Gomez-Peña, but rather repurposes primitivist aesthetics in order to insert indigenous time and place as coterminous with, and in, the modern city (Fusco 1998, 363). Unlike Gomez-Peña and Fusco, Villa does not separate himself from the audience vis-à-vis a cage or barrier to juxtapose himself against more discursively “cultured” witnesses; Villa, instead, invites his audience closer into his personal ritual, inviting them to witness in close proximity his making of a new abstract art piece.

Hats and Doors: *My Uncles* in the 1990s and 2000s

Code-switching between the sacred and the secular, between high art and rasquache lowbrow culture, became a signature of Villa's later work on the manongs of San Francisco, with the fullest articulation of this being found in the *My Uncles* series of the 1990s and early 2000s and in the 1994 Filipino American Arts Exhibition (FAAE) staged in downtown San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA). *My Uncles*, Carlos Villa's first extended exploration of the manong generation's travels and labor in the West Coast that was later developed for the International Hotel exhibit at the Yerba Buena Center, pushes the limits of the discourse that realism remains the necessary representational mode for politicized, community-centered cultural productions to be rendered accessible to the broadest constituency. Rather, these two bodies of work access Filipino/American memories that remain hidden from residents of and visitors to San Francisco, especially in the absence of the physical sites of Manilatown and the International Hotel; both prominently featuring doorways, *My Uncles* and the 1994 Filipino American Arts Exposition capture the contradictory motions of entrapment and release, symbols of the larger battle against eviction and displacement that have been waged by Filipino/Americans and other working-class peoples throughout the city.¹⁷

¹⁷ Of the significance of doors, Villa said in 2010: "I've been using doors for the past 20 years. Doors are a metaphor to a lot of other things. What makes you want to go through doors, what makes you want to open the doors, and what are you curious about in terms of the other side? And what answers do you come up with, are they answers or are they other questions? So I try to deal with it in my own art in the most abstract and the most primitive way. I'm carving into doors, and that could either mean I've gone through it or I want to go through it. And some doors are more daunting than others. And some doors I don't even want to deal with. So that's what I'm doing right now" (Villa 2011).

The *My Uncles* series and the Filipino American Arts Expo were executed during a period marked by the repeated failure to reclaim place for the Filipino/American community in downtown San Francisco. By the 1990s, the International Hotel movement was in deep crisis, with years of negotiations between community activists and the city to try to rebuild the I-Hotel at a standstill. Historian James Sobredo recounts the “major snag” in the reconstruction of senior housing at the former I-Hotel lot occurring in 1996. Formed in 1979 as a Mayor’s committee to oversee development of the International Hotel site, the Kearny Street Housing Corporation partnered in 1995 with the Chinese Community Housing Corporation, Inc. (CCHC) to redevelop the I-Hotel site as a multi-building complex including a school, chapel and gymnasium for St. Mary’s Church, and an affordable housing project. Together, these nonprofit housing organizations applied for HUD federal funds, and were granted \$7.6 million in 1994 to rebuild senior housing on the site. St. Mary’s Church and the CCHC, however, did not have the funds to contribute to their end of the project and, instead, moved from co-owning the I-Hotel site to leasing the land to the Kearny Street Housing Project. Relinquishing co-ownership of the I-Hotel posed the major snag for the HUD deal, which was contingent on CCHC and not Kearny Street Housing Project purchasing the property from its landlords, PanMagna (formerly the Four Seas Corporation). Construction delays were estimated for three or four years past the intended 1995 date, and after the expiration of the HUD grant in March 1996 it looks like the demise of the I-Hotel rebuilding project.¹⁸

¹⁸ James Sobredo, “Rebuilding of International Hotel Encounters Problems,” *FoundSF* http://foundsf.org/index.php?title=Rebuilding_of_International_Hotel_Encounters_Problems

With no clear future for the International Hotel project, and with the deaths of the last original I-Hotel residents accumulating, memorializing the I-Hotel *and* activating new audiences of sympathetic witnesses seemed a crucial political and creative task. It was during this moment of political deadlock that Villa produced some of the first works for the *My Uncles* series, and began to plan what was to become the Filipino American Arts Exhibition. Villa's solo artistic practice and his creative leadership of the FAAE at this moment of crises thus can be read as necessary interventions into the hole of Filipino/American history left in the wake of the I-Hotel, one which seemed unlikely to be filled with the actual construction of a building in its former site.

In the *My Uncles* cycle (1993-1996), Villa painted black a series of wooden doors, to which he affixed hats, bronze plaques, and strategically placed masking tape and/or feathers as memorials to the manong generation of his father and uncles. Each stylistic component alludes to the "interstitial spaces and points of passage" marking the manongs's immigration histories, and, in their small variations, each door draws on a blues aesthetic of repetition without reproduction: while the materials and themes in each door are similar, they are never reproduced the same way twice (Machida 2011, 20). This rings true to the manongs's journeys, for the lives of individual Filipino/American bachelors greatly differed in their unfolding, even as they were circumscribed by a shared set of structural conditions that determined their life chances in the Philippines and the United States. By employing abstraction and minimalism, Villa aligns himself with other modernist artists, who used an aesthetics of fragmentation and dislocation to characterize the experience of the modern worker under capitalism, alienated and disoriented within the urban environment (Drucker 1994, 21). The worker central to Villa's mixed media

explorations, however, is not the universal proletarian subject of Marx, but the racialized and sexualized Filipino man; the doors functioning to both shut out and let in the Filipino/American male, at varying points, into the home—both the private single-family home and the larger, national home.

In *Where My Uncles Went* (1996) and *Future Plans* (1995), wool fedoras extend from the center of each door, positioned at approximately the same height as they would be on a manong were he wearing it. In a send up of Rene Magritte's *The Son of Man* (1964), and serving as proxy for the absented Filipino/American body, the fedora functions to signal both the hope and heartache of the working-class men of color in the early 20th century.¹⁹ Donned when going out to the taxi dance halls and pool halls, the fedora became a signature part of the aesthetic of working-class Filipino and Chicano men on the West Coast. Derided as “sheikier dressers” for these outfits and accused of preying on innocent white women because of their uncontrollable Latin passions, these nattily Filipino and Chicano men were terrorized by mobs up and down the California coast in incidents such as the infamous “Zoot Suit Riots,” and fought back to save their labor and lives.²⁰ The fedora in Villa's door series thus symbolically binds Filipino and Chicano men to a shared history of denigrated farm labor and predisposition to being

¹⁹ Margo Machida writes of a similar piece by Villa, *My Father Walking Up Kearny Street for the First Time* (1993), that he “positions a white straw Panama hat...on a thin rod extending upward from the bottom of the wooden panel. With its brim jauntily set toward ‘the avenue’ before it, as if poised to begin the journey, the hat becomes a surrogate sign for this father and for that cohort of immigrants” (Machida 2011, 18).

²⁰ Ruby Tapia's historical account of the “Filipino menace” to white labor in 1930s California illuminates the sexualized racial discourses used to justify violence against the manongs: “the Filipinos are hot little rabbits, and many of these white women like them for this reason” and were protested for fraternizing with “‘their’ [the white men's] women,” who did not want Filipinos “penetrating” their nation (2006, 65).

targeted by racist violence; the fedora, as a hat marking leisure and not labor, also points to the possibility of the manongs experiencing moments of joy that break from the mundane routines of their daily lives, moments that exceed the limitations placed upon them by the institutionalized structures of white supremacy in California and beyond.

Villa enacts this spatial reversal of manong subjectivity through the visual *and* the textual in the *My Uncles* series and in other works that explicitly refer to the manongs, including *Campo Santo* (1999), *The Blur: Remembering Hotel Whatever and the Evacuation Plan* (2003), and *A Minimalist Stretch* (2005). Text figures prominently in the *My Uncles* series: etched onto bronze plaques and affixed to the wooden doors and slabs, phrases are loosely written in the format of Malayan pantoum poetry and hexagrams from the *I Ching* (Machida 2011, 19); they are laid out so as to produce variations during the reading experience that are, simultaneously and at turns, pun-filled, funny, melancholy, perverse, and lonesome.²¹ On the bronze plaques affixed to the outer frame of *Where My Uncles Went*, Villa poetically traces what he called a “family geography” of the

²¹ It is the unique experience of the manongs in the United States that Villa turns into biting puns, that provide the context for bronze plaques on *The Blur: Remembering Hotel Whatever and the Evacuation Plan* (2003), which read “Filipinos Come Quick / Pressed and Ready / Flying with Sparrows/ Tell Stories”; “Afraid of the Dark / Upstair Desires / Dreams / Pressure / Passing Each Other”; and “Lover Boy/ With Upstairs Desires/ Uncertain Still / Jealousy/ Through Hallways.” The words, strung together in open-ended combinations, provide an additional way of reimagining history towards a different future; in their loose configurations, they allow for elements of chance in Filipino lives, with the potential for better outcomes than those of the manongs that came before. Margo Machida, in her reading of Villa’s wordplay, takes an opposing view of this series. She casts a negative spin on the manong stories of *My Uncles* and other pieces; she notes the possibility of chance for the manongs, but ultimately declares that Villa’s works demonstrate the manongs’s “pervasive sense of confinement,” their lives shown as “largely constrained within an established systemic ‘grid’” (Machida 2011, 20). Machida reads these phrases as mournful “litanies, comprising his repertoire of stories about the manongs, which in their repeated enunciation become a private meditation on that collective history” (2011, 20). To counter her interpretation, I think about *My Uncles* not in isolation, but as part of a larger body of work that includes performance pieces like *Ritual*, and later group shows and installations at the Yerba Buena Center. In their collective and communal mode of production and consumption, these pieces are not funereal knells, but are invocations that call into being new forms of Filipino/American community; they do not register privatized pain or encourage solely private meditations, but instead call for a collectivized response to the ongoing problems facing Filipino/Americans and other immigrants in the U.S.

transnational routes taken by manongs in their search for fair wages and meaningful lives (Machida 2011, 19). Each plaque contains a line from the following text:

ISLETON FROM WATSONVILLE
 LOS ANGELES FROM BAGUIO
 COLMA TO FAIRBANKS
 SAN JOSE TO DELANO
 SEATTLE TO STOCKTON
 BAGUIO TO FRISCO
 ROBERTS ISLAND FROM DELANO
 STOCKTON FROM PANGASINAN
 WATSONVILLE TO HONOLULU
 ILOCOS TO IMPERIAL VALLEY
 FRISCO TO SACRAMENTO
 UNION CITY TO PESCADERO
 HILL ST. TO KING ST.
 KEARNY ST. TO SOUTH EL DORADO
 CHINATOWN TO CHINATOWN. (qtd. in Machida 2011, 19)

Like the poetry of Al Robles, Villa's words map alternative spatio-temporalities of Filipino/American migrant labor, mapping the manongs's quest for the American Dream stymied by the "revolving door" of racist U.S. immigration policy and stoop labor conditions, evoked by the lines of masking tape trapping the fedora at its center. The strips of tape-as-door—placed in such a way as to appear, depending on the viewer's perspective, as either opening or closing—too illustrates the ways in which Filipino/American bachelor workers were, alternately, welcomed in and violently pushed out from the United States polity; initially brought in as cheap labor with "U.S. National" status before 1946, they were then subject to attempts at repatriation after the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 rendered them, like other Asian immigrants, as "aliens ineligible to citizenship" (Spickard 2010, 308). Of the thousands of Filipino bachelor migrants to the United States, only about 2,100 Filipinos returned to the United States between the

passage of the Filipino Repatriation Act of 1935 and the declaration of the act's unconstitutionality in 1940; most Filipinos chose to remain in the United States, many never being able to return to the Philippines again. Together with the single fedora, suspended in limbo within the frame of the door, the text, door, and tape convey the genealogical isolation of the Filipino bachelor who is unable to return to the Philippines, yet who is also unable to build families in the U.S. The manongs's "Future Plans" in America are just that: plans and dreams deferred, unable to be realized during their lifetimes. The "family geographies" traced in *Where My Uncles Went* thus prioritize the value of the horizontal kinships formed across space, and not vertical blood-based lineages passed generationally over time.²²

Villa's turn to abstraction and minimalism for the doors in the *My Uncles* series, beyond retelling the past of the manongs, make a profound commentary on Manilatown's present and its presence; the abstraction of *My Uncles* mirrors the derealization of Manilatown and the death and displacement of the manongs from their former home-place. The *My Uncles* series and other word pieces map new terrain and trace other routes of Filipino men's labor and lives than those produced by state narratives; in using a

²² For lack of space, I am bracketing the important conversation on the politics of curation and circulation of *My Uncles*, but the outline for that argument is as follows: The impossibility for the manongs to return home to Manilatown or to Manila, finally, is illuminated by the inherently peripatetic nature of the *My Uncles* series; while the pieces were shown in prominent Bay Area galleries and museums and as far away as Rome and Cuba in the 1990s, *My Uncles* (or any other of Villa's cultural productions, for that matter) was never exhibited in Chinatown/the former Manilatown, either during Villa's lifetime or since his passing in March 2013 ("Expanding Multicultural," *Asian Art News*, May-June 1997, p. 54-56). The works remain without a permanent home outside of private collections, major museums, or Villa's studio in the Mission district—they exist in disparate, privatized spaces far from larger Filipino/American social or cultural centers, much as the I-Hotel manongs spent their final years after the eviction night of August 4, 1977. The trauma of the manongs's forced migrations to and from the urban centers and rural outposts of United States are thus worked through in the content of individual pieces as well as the movement of the series as a whole: touring *My Uncles* to different local and global sites for brief periods of time replays the ways in which Filipino/Americans migrants continue to be the disavowed subjects of U.S. imperialism in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, without a fixed place/citizenship/home.

minimal amount of objects and text as signifiers in these works, Villa was able to powerfully illuminate the material conditions faced by the manong generation in the United States, or the many ways in which Filipino men's labor and lives have been devalued by the state and pushed to the periphery of American economic, political, and social life. The fedoras, in standing in for the body but not replacing it, register the loss of the Filipino/American bachelor community and the Manilatown neighborhood itself. They index the manong subject that no longer has a material body after death, but who has a corollary in the exploited laborers of color still being displaced in San Francisco today. The doors, also divorced from their practical function, lead to no-where and signal to the impossibility of a future return to a static, fixed version of Manilatown.

But the works are not somber, or revel in bad feelings. The black doors, somber as a casket on first glance, when imagined otherwise offer alternative, utopian trajectories for racialized communities in the city; they are portals between the lost past of Manilatown and the possible futures for Filipinos in San Francisco, futures which remember the I-Hotel and the manongs's struggle for home. As in his earlier rasquache pieces and performances, Villa's door series repurposes found objects—clothing accessories, masking tape, feathers—to imbue them with value as an “art object”; in this way, his pieces perform a double movement, of materially transforming mass produced commodities into singular works of art, and of metaphorically respatializing the Filipino laborer as a productive, desired and desiring subject and no longer a debased and devalued immigrant subject.²³ Villa's door pieces, like his other rasquache works, “find

²³ Villa played with the double valence of the fedora as a mark of both pleasure and pain, and it became a signature of Villa's spatial politics and aesthetics. In deploying the hat in these and other door pieces, Villa elevated the manongs from lowly workers to kings; he calls the fedora “a crown for the common man,”

delight and refinement in what many consider banal and projects an alternative aesthetic—a sort of good taste of bad taste” (Ybarra-Frausto 1989, 8). In the midst of ongoing attempts to rebuild the International Hotel in the mid-1990s, Villa’s door series necessarily remind us that future plans for the Filipino community in San Francisco must be based on continual motion, a pushing against the closed or revolving door, and require the reconstruction not only of an individual building but also of very streets and neighborhood on which it stands. It is this act of reconstructing the world—the social relations that made up the core of Manilatown’s functions—that is most evident in the last body of Villa’s work I will discuss in this chapter: the collaborative Filipino American Arts Expo, held in the commercial heart of downtown San Francisco.

In Bed with the Yerba Buena Center

The Filipino American Arts Exposition, held between August 2 and September 4, 1994, was Villa’s first and only opportunity to mount a full-scale art installation honoring the legacy of the manong generation and the International Hotel in a locale near the former Manilatown. Its venue, the one-year-old Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and Yerba Buena Gardens, was a significant choice: as part of the Moscone Convention Center redevelopment project, the Yerba Buena Center was seen as a bastion of responsive urban design that

and said that for the manong the hat was “a trophy...After you work your ass off washing dishes or you’re somebody’s house boy, you can leave that restaurant, you can leave that mansion, and you can be who you have to be” (qtd. in Machida 2011, 19). The hat appearing throughout the *My Uncles* series signifies as “a distinctive badge of being male in this world [and the manong’s] only salvation” (Villa qtd. in Machida 2011, 19); it is transvalued from a cheap piece of felt used by the manongs when performing an upwardly mobile subjectivity to becoming the very symbol for these men’s already-high positions as pioneer laborers in the Transpacific West and the first immigrants from the Philippines saving the lives of the families they left behind in the islands.

represents the successful transformation of an urban Redevelopment Agency from a powerhouse committed to the ‘bulldozer’ federal planning of the 50s to a sophisticated development coordinator attending carefully to the complex balance of interests important in a 1990s setting [...It is a demonstration of] a way to translate the vision of large-scale urban revitalization into the process of neighborhood empowerment. (Bruner Award Selection Committee, qtd. in Hartman 2002, 215)

After three decades of struggle between the Mayor’s office, the SFRA, HUD, and grassroots organizations such as Tenants and Owners in Opposition in Redevelopment (TOOR), the Yerba Buena Center project was unveiled, heralded for its capacity to bring together tourists, capital investors and business owners, and local San Francisco communities into one multi-use site. Gone were the working-class living quarters and attendant service industries once located between Mission and Howard Streets, its cleaning up of “urban blight” in the South of Market / Mid-Market area reframed as “neighborhood empowerment” through the discourse of multicultural liberalism. Yet in 1993, YBC’s effectiveness in actually bringing together local community organizations was still untested; Villa seized this opportunity, taking the initiative to plan and execute an event that today continues to be one of the largest annual gatherings of disparate Filipino/American communities in San Francisco proper.

Villa’s spearheading of the first Filipino American Arts Exposition provided the catalyst for subsequent and ongoing collaborations between the local Filipino/American community and the Yerba Buena Center. Its goals were ambitious in scope and scale—Villa envisioned a month-long celebration of Filipino arts and culture that would be open to the larger public, especially the Filipino/American communities dispersed throughout the Bay Area region, from Stockton to Daly City. Villa and the program committee he selected imagined the Expo as “a collaboration as well as an artistic interrogation of

community and its struggle for cultural equity... It will encourage dialogue, of *talking* with each other, *bridging* differences in generation, gender, artistic and political orientations, and *organizing* community building” (FAAE 1994a, np; emphasis in original). The collaborative team of program directors assembled for this program were artists, activists, and community leaders active throughout the Bay Area region: Delia Battle of Teatro ng Tanan; Luisa Peñaranda and husband, the Flip poet and college instructor Oscar Peñaranda; and photographer Lenny Limjoco.²⁴ Financial sponsorship and/or community endorsement was provided by a large swath of Filipino/American organizations established in the Bay Area, from educational associations including Organization of Filipino Educators, San Francisco; direct service organizations like Westbay Pilipino Multiservices; community preservation groups including Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHNS); and arts organizations such as Kearny Street Workshop and Philippine Educational Theater Association (FAAE 1994a, np).

These collaborations and organizational linkages—while not guaranteeing complete acceptance or sanctioning of this event as “appropriately” Filipino San Franciscan—provide testament to Villa’s desire for a more robust conception of the who and where of Filipino America beyond his singular perspective and vision. In contrast to the racially unmarked male artist imagined to be the individualist progenitor of abstract art, Villa tempered his individual artistic proclivities by working with a large group of partners from around the San Francisco Bay Area; this collaborative impulse was characteristic of the symposia he held from the 1970s through his final *Rehistoricizing*

²⁴ Delia Battle of Teatro ng Tanan (Theater); Luisa Penaranda (Pistahan outdoor festival); writer and instructor Oscar Penaranda (Film & Video Festival, Humanities Symposia); photographer Lenny Limjoco (I-Hotel Art Installation).

Abstract Expressionism project in 2010-2011. In its execution, the FAAE produced cultural interventions that replaced static notions of fixed identity with “multiplicity and shifting the emphasis from cultural ‘essence’ to material hybridity” (Lowe 1996, 75). It imagined the inauguration of a Filipino/American community in downtown San Francisco that was bound together not by naturalized similarities, but which chose to unite despite internal differences in class, immigration and citizenship status, sexuality and gender.

The primary goals of the Expo were interrelated but distinct: to expose and garner appreciation of Filipino/American arts, theater, and film; to educate the general public on Filipino/American history, culture, and politics; and to actively produce forms of Filipino/American community across generational and geographic distinctions. Villa’s public statement on the FAAE outlined the three main questions guiding the programming committee’s curatorial vision: “How does the Filipino experience figure in the cultural landscape of America? Where does it locate itself in the discourse of multiculturalism? How are Filipinos perceived and how do they perceive themselves?” (FAAE 1994a, np). To explore these key questions, the Expo was produced with five interlocking components that ran over the course of the month and which were dispersed between Yerba Buena Gardens and collaborating higher education institutions. Teatro ng Tanan hosted a theater program, *perigriNasyon (Is America in the Heart?)*, a transnational tale inspired and loosely based on Carlos Bulosan’s semiautobiographical novel *America is in the Heart*. The Sine!Sine! Filipino film and video festival, curated by Mauro Tumbocon, Jr. screened experimental, independent, and popular short- and feature-length pieces by Filipinos based in the Philippines and throughout the United

States; films and videos were chosen for their representations of diverse “cultural life narratives” and/or their taking up of issues around the “disenfranchisement and social dispersal of Filipinos” (FAAE 1994a, np). The International Hotel art installation, held inside Gallery 1 in the Center for the Arts building, was Villa’s main project and featured a host of emerging and established artists from the Bay Area and beyond. A series of Filipino Humanities Symposia were held between YBC and partner Skyline College, drawing “community specialists and members from mass media, arts, law and public service, health, business, educational professionals” to engage in dialogue and debate over the state of Filipinos in the United States (FAAE 1994a, np). Finally, the Pistahan outdoor festival, held outdoors over the course of the first two weekends of August on the grounds of the Yerba Buena Gardens, served as the most publically accessible event; a loose recreation of *perya* (fair) celebrations in local *barrios* in the Philippines, the inaugural Pistahan’s theme was a celebration of “traditional and nontraditional families” with events designed to “affirm Philippine traditions taking root and enriching multicultural communities in the United States” (FAAE 1994a, np).

Couched in the language of liberal multiculturalism, the Expo’s promotional material might first be read as a facile celebration of cultural diversity within a specific ethnic enclave. The art exhibit in Gallery 1, in particular, can also be read as capitalizing on the 1990s trend of “installation [being] the medium through which many Asian-American artists dealing with self-and community definition used to address histories of social rupture, ethnic and racial subjugation, and the embedded bias and silence surrounding those events...” (Machida 2008, 189). Looking closely at the Expo program and other documentation, however, most striking are the ways that the core of the project

worked to interrogate, rather than fix, the terms of belonging to Filipino America; the Expo program as a whole did not assume a monolithic experience for people of Filipino descent, but instead noted the cleavages in “generation, gender, artistic, and political orientations” that so often have been barriers to producing true coalition and solidarity for political movements like the anti-eviction and the International Hotel movements (Villa qtd. in FAAE 1994a, np).

The Humanities Symposia and Sine!Sine! Film and Video festival programs represented Filipino/American communities as variegated along differences in social positions and access to privileges. Panels such as “Going Against the Grain,” a controversial roundtable discussion on LGBTQ Filipino/American identity, health, and politics, pushed audiences to reconsider the vectors through which Filipino/American subjectivity is constructed; these dialogues challenged those in attendance to reckon with experiences of Filipino/Americans whose gender and sexual orientation, class and/or citizenship status did not neatly line up with the popular perception that Filipino/Americans in the 1990s Bay Area were predominantly middle-class and suburban.²⁵ In the artistic realm, the curatorial statement of the Sine!Sine! festival reads:

Is being Filipino contingent on the artist’s geographic origins? Should we define a film or video work in terms of being Filipino? Does it matter? ... Being Filipino is no longer a matter of geography. It is a sense of belonging to one’s own culture and to a larger reality... *[I]t is not only where we are born but what we are becoming* as a result of diaspora,

²⁵ Joel Tan, a founder of Barangay, one of the first Filipino gay organizations in the U.S., read a poem that looks queerly at the manong stories of forefather Al Robles: “We were handsome once/ manongs/ brown skin, yellow skin/ men loving men/...latino boys liked our last names/ black boys liked the way we danced/ white boys just wanted...” (qtd. in Seto, Doug. “Tempers Flare at Gay Filipino Public Discussion,” *Bay Area Reporter* August 18, 1994, p. 11). Other panels in the Humanities Symposia included: “An Intergenerational Dialogue: Pulong, pulong, a summit between the generations”; “Panahon Natin/Our Time: Filipino American Contributions in World War II”; “Breaking the Silence: Do Filipinos confront domestic violence or merely hide from it?”; “FilAm Identity: Sino Ba Ako (Who Am I)?”; and the final plenary and roundtable discussion, “Hopes and Fears.”

colonial history, and interactions with other cultures and nations. We live in a time and place where we are both singular and plural, ethnic and multicultural... Sine! Sine! Allows us to view Filipino cinema from a new historical perspective: The Pacific Rim. We draw common threads in the shared past of these two Filipino communities... It is an exciting new way to see our realities and the changing world. (FAAE 1994a, np; emphasis added)

Using the Pacific Rim as the geographical basis for a film's inclusion to the festival, Sine!Sine! and the FAAE produced an expansive cartography for locating Filipino/American subjectivity, history, and culture as shifting and porous, rather than fixed in either the Philippines or the United States. Allan Isaac usefully articulates the stakes of this modified spatiotemporal map, which he has productively named the American Tropics, writing: "Filipinoness rather than Filipino citizenship is perhaps an aporetic sense of belonging. Historically 'belonging to but not part of' the United States, and in turn belonging to but not part of a Philippines under colonial rule, the Philippines and Filipinos as categories might suggest different types of belonging outside the imperial nation-state" (Isaac 2006, 45).

Looking beyond fixed geographies or ethnic classifications that would demarcate the difference between "Filipino" and "American," Isaac's articulation of postcolonial and diasporic identification resonated with the programming choices of the Sine!Sine! festival and other components of the '94 Expo: this was evident in Sine!Sine!'s curation of anti-Martial law political films by legendary Philippines-based filmmaker Lino Brocka alongside a video shorts program titled "Brown Queering: Crossing of Self and/or Nation" featuring work by relatively unknown U.S.-based queer directors Michael Magnaye, Chris Milado, and Desireena Almoradie (FAAE 1994b,10). The dynamic staging and plotlines informing Teator ng Tanan's theater piece *peregrinasyon* (*Is*

America in the Heart?), with its centerpiece “collage tree” that functioned as an “in-between land” that was both located *and* not located in Santa Lucia in the Philippines and in California’s Central Valley, is also a paradigmatic example of the FAAE’s commitment to looking at the multi- and trans-national routes and roots of Filipino/American experience.²⁶

The International Hotel installation, curated by Villa, most clearly channels the “aporetic sense of belonging” to the United States and the Philippines experienced by Filipino/Americans; in this multimedia exhibit, the manongs of the I-Hotel are both confined by, and free from, the trappings of money and success that first lured them to the United States. The lives of others in the homeland affected by the manongs’s leaving are also displayed here, to represent a web of kinship across the ocean that has been strained, but not fully severed, over time. The credited collaborating artists on the installation were Carlos Villa, Lenny Limjoco, Rick Rocamora, Butch Baluyut, Zand Gee, Dan Begonia, Tony Remington, Chris Huie, Leland Wong (FAAE 1994a, np); many more artists and community activists were involved, however, including Reanne Estrada, Zand Gee, Curtis Choy, (members of the DIWA collective) Johanna Poethig and Rommel

²⁶ Teatro ng Tanan (TNT)’s *perigrinasyon (Is America in the Heart?)* ran for two weekends—premiering August 18, 1994 and ending August 28—and was a signature program of the first Filipino American Arts Exposition. The surrealist play follows Simeon and Mariano, two Filipino migrants chasing after work in Alaska and Central Valley; interwoven with this storyline is that of Simeon’s younger brother, Esteban, a peasant embroiled in an anti-American rebellion in Sta. Lucia Philippines. To anchor these two stories, set designers created a “collage tree,” described thus: “[it] stands rooted in suitcases with a 30ft. long branch reaching across the eky and melting into stalagmite. Fragments of luggage, farm tools, spears and machetes are embedded in the tree, and the earth and sepia tones of this land emote the nostalgia of distant and close places/memories. Men and women enter and exit this place, talking, chanting, dancing, resisting, and defending themselves. This ‘in-between land’ is the creation of the two worlds that *perigrinasyon (Is America in the Heart?)* inhabit [... Playwright-Director Chris Millado] said that the characters’ spiritual world are ‘never fixed in one location,’ so the action moves back and forth simultaneously [between the Philippines and US]” (FAAE 1994b, 11).

Padilla, and Al Robles.²⁷ The exhibit ran the duration of the Expo in Gallery 1 of the Center for the Arts, and was funded by NestleBeverage Company, Zellerbach Family Fund, Grants for the Arts/SF Hotel Tax Fund, National Endowment for the Arts Visual Arts Program, and NEA Expansion Arts Program.²⁸

If the comprehensive goal of the 1994 Expo was to locate the Filipino in America's multicultural landscape, the International Hotel installation situates them in one end-point of a diasporic journey. Using the German myth of Hansel and Gretel as a metaphor for the manongs's journey to and experiences in the United States, Villa shows us where the trail of crumbs leads: not to prosperity and freedom, but to hard labor, poverty, and displacement from homes like the International Hotel. In the middle of the gallery, set up to look like a darkened room, is the centerpiece of the installation: "A Manong's Room," conceptualized by Villa and constructed by Tony Remington and Presco Tabios.²⁹ In the middle, we find a bed covered with a "quilt of dreams" (the work from which Jerome Reyes's *Quilt of Hope* takes its name); underneath the bed, an audio tape recording of the Hansel and Gretel myth repeats, recited in Tagalog.³⁰ Two overlapping diagrams were imposed on the floor beneath the bed: a floor plan of the I-Hotel and a diagram of the Filipino hopscotch game *piko*. Behind the bed was installed a

²⁷ Internal documentation, fax from Rene de Guzman to Eliza Barrios, July 27, 1994.

²⁸ FAAE 1994a, np. A further investigation and critique of public arts funding by foundations with ties to corporations known to exploit Filipino laborers (Nestle) and to construction companies profiting from redevelopment (Zellerbach) will be a key component of my subsequent book project.

²⁹ Internal documentation, fax from Rene de Guzman to Eliza Barrios, July 27, 1994.

³⁰ The catalog for the installation described the piece as having this audiotape; conversations with artist Eliza Barrios, who worked with Villa on this project, reveal that the Hansel and Gretel audio recording never materialized in the final iteration.

faux wall, where two flags (of the United States and Philippines) crossed each other and were affixed high. A simple brown wooden chest of drawers rested against the center of this wall, as utilitarian and featureless as the furniture in the manongs's single rooms once was; taken from the Clayton Hotel, another single-occupancy residency hotel similar in function to the International Hotel, the furniture in *A Manong's Room* evoked the sparseness with which this generation of laborers lived. Freestanding windows and black doors encircled the bed—some of the windows had rice sack curtain coverings, while many of the doors and windows were covered with feathers. Hung over each doorway and window, a thirty-watt bulb illuminated the objects underneath, making them stand out in an otherwise darkened room.

Playing with the duality of permanence and impermanence, *A Manong's Room* exhibited the volatility and vulnerability of even the seemingly most stable of architectural structures. As in his mixed-media paintings such as *Kearny Street Gameboy* (2003), Villa employed the imagery of games to signify the chance and risk inherent to Filipino/Americans, with the *piko* game and the I-Hotel diagrams gesturing towards the imaginative possibilities—and actual failures—of finding permanent dwelling and stability in the US.³¹ Unmoored from the walls, the doorways and windows are as fleeting as the light feathers placed upon them. The “quilt of dreams,” its stated function of comforting and keeping out the cold, cannot serve its intended purpose; made, instead, of a series of squiggles and words just barely held together by string, the quilt is colorful

³¹ Carlos Villa on his painting *My Dad Seeing Market Street for the First Time* (1979), talks about the what games meant to the *manongs*, and to his artistic representation of their lives: “In the 1970s, newly-arrived Filipinos would seek out low-cost housing just below Market Street. I remember seeing young Filipinos walking up and down Market Street—wide-eyed as they looked at the penny arcades and video machines. I would say to myself, ‘Gosh, that might have been just like my father when he came to the U.S.’” (qtd. in Villa 1994, 24).

and beautiful but ultimately useless, just like the dreams the manongs had for a better way of life. Absent of any figurative representation of the manongs, *A Manong's Room* calls them into being through the objects they had to leave behind when they were evacuated from the International Hotel. Mere commodities, the bed, dresser, and national flags are transformed into the essence of manong lives—simultaneously belonging to and expelled violently from places in both nations, in search of stability and made to abandon whatever small homes they had made for themselves, the manongs have been disappeared from Manilatown and from public memory.

Lucy Lippard reads Villa's incorporation of the Hansel and Gretel myth into the I-Hotel installation as a useful metaphor for this paradigmatic Filipino experience in the 20th century; she writes that "the parallels [between the two] are diasporas, betrayal, separation, communal support, the search for 'home.' The gingerbread house whose interior contains danger and misery is the American dream" (Lippard in Villa 1994, 10). In portraying symbolic and literal death, by showing us the misery of the manongs and the failure to save the International Hotel from the wrecking ball, however, Villa also saw his project as affectively *giving life*: "Things are fermenting, at the moment, as people have petitioned the city to create low-income housing in that area. After twenty years the issue of housing for seniors has surfaced again. The Expo will help give another life to the I-Hotel" (Villa 1994, 14). Even as the manongs do not appear in *A Manong's Room*, other representations of *ongoing* Filipino presence in the Bay Area in the exhibit—and in the Expo program as a whole—proffer a subtle call for the necessity of housing reform and immigrant rights, issues as important in 1994 as they were in 1977.

On the gallery walls surrounding the bed tableau were a range of additional images, videos, and text that gave additional historical context to the I-Hotel struggle and manong experience. Paintings by five “pioneer” artists from the manong generation were exhibited in conjunction with Skyline College, to reveal “the diversity and resilience of Filipino artmaking in America”; these mostly unknown male artists were Sylvester Pili Mateo, Carlos Maganti Tagaroma Carvajal, Victor Duena, Dr. Robert Vallangca, and I-Hotel resident Joaquin Legaspi.³² A series of recent photographs of young Filipinos in the provinces and Filipino Americans, taken from Lenny Limjocos’s *Larawan* book, explicitly brought the Philippines into San Francisco and temporarily collapsed the distance between the two. Finally, six video monitors placed around the exhibit played documentary films and recordings of staged performances about the International Hotel and the ongoing involvement of Filipinos in the US military.³³ Each tape looped continuously, and each began with a scene of children playing *piko* and ended with an image of sign announcing “No Filipinos Allowed” (Villa 1994, 16). Wall text near the films on the Filipino WWII veterans (*veteranos*) gave a brief history of their struggle for naturalization, reparations, and veterans benefits, yet ends with a positive take on their story: “With the same courage they exhibited during the war, they are determined to face

³² Internal documentation, fax from Rene de Guzman to Eliza Barrios, July 27, 1994.

³³ Shown were *The Fall of the I-Hotel* (1983, dir. Curtis Choy); *Manong: An Action* (a 1990 performance by Al Robles, Manong Freddie Reyes and Carlos Villa at Mills College); *Army Life* (Alex Fabros on Filipino military involvement and a conversation with Dan Gonzales and Dan Begonia); *I-Hotel Documentary* (Kearny Street Workshop documentation of the I-Hotel struggle); *Fulfilment of Dreams vs. the Bitter Realities: Filipino World War II Veterans in America* (text and photo slideshow by Rick Rocamora); and *Young Manongs* (a performance by DIWA members Rommel Padilla and Johanna Poethig, with Lisa Hewitt). From internal documentation, fax from Rene de Guzman to Eliza Barrios, July 27, 1994.

all the adversity in America. They are living out their dreams. The beauty and promise of America still exist for them, if only in their hearts and souls.”³⁴

The language of patriotism and service for the United States ran throughout the wall text on the veteranos in the exhibition, and was in stark juxtaposition to the critique of the failures of American democracy present in *A Manong's Room*. If the intent of the FAEE was to locate the Filipino/American in the “multicultural landscape” of the nation, this contradiction—of America as land of plenty and land of wasted opportunities—places Filipinos alongside other immigrant and refugee communities in the U.S., who find themselves both financially and ideologically indebted to a benevolent empire that has provided them shelter, even as the U.S. has been partially or wholly responsible for the warfare, political dismantling, and economic crises in their home nations. This *utang*, or debt, of Filipinos to the United States, is a theme covered in the extensive scholarship on Filipino/American cultural productions such as Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart*; this *utang*, I argue, is the obvious affective outcome of the discourses of multiculturalism that structure post-1965 American race relations, and the discursive deployment of *utang* remains a strategy for some Filipino/Americans such as the veteranos to gain recognition by a so-called multiculturalist state. The power of dominant multiculturalist discourse is the following, writes Kandice Chuh:

“Multiculturalism” attempts to attain a liberal conception of subjectivity while simultaneously claiming to take seriously the radical critiques of the liberal subject. In so doing, it occludes and effaces the historicity of racism and the deep-rootedness of racialization as a technology through which the United States has perpetuated a self-stylization as the achievement of the universalist enlightenment values of equality and liberty. (2003, 6)

³⁴ Internal documentation, fax from Rene de Guzman to Eliza Barrios, July 27, 1994.

Using this language of desired inclusion into American society, the veterano wall text demonstrated the contradictory desires of different Filipino constituencies from some of the more radical leanings of Villa and the I-Hotel activists. Yet while honoring the desires of activists for World War II veteranos, Villa did not capitulate to this dominant discourse; the I-Hotel installation of *A Manong's Room* instead revealed the constitutive failures of U.S. democracy to ever provide for not only Filipinos, but for all other people of color and native peoples in the country. Thus, Villa and the FAAE did not uncritically use, but instead strategically *disidentified* with, liberal multiculturalist discourse in order to imagine other ways of working towards a truly multi-racial, egalitarian, and diverse society in San Francisco and on the national scale.³⁵

In summation, the 1994 Filipino American Arts Exposition was less a celebration of a singular, pre-existing Filipino/American community so much as it was an expression of a utopic longing for the formation of Filipino/American collectivities bound by more than a shared ethnic or geographic affiliation. With the I-Hotel installation as the visual centerpiece of the Expo, the event under Villa's leadership expressed a forward-looking desire that Filipino/Americans across differences in class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, immigration and labor history, could collectively labor together towards shared goals—a primary one being that of restoring the International Hotel. In coming together—however briefly— to view the I-Hotel installation and other events, performances, and

³⁵ I borrow here from José Muñoz's productive formulation of *disidentification* as a "mode of *recycling* or re-forming an object that has already been invested with powerful energy," a performative and "crucial practice of contesting social subordination through a process of worldmaking" that is undertaken by minoritized subjects (1999, 39 and 200). In taking up the signs of majoritarian discourse about the minoritized subject, disidentification "reworks...those energies that do not elide the 'harmful' or contradictory components of any identity" (Muñoz 1999, 12); while disidentification is not equivalent to "picking and choosing" what one takes out of a dominant identification, it is a "partial disavowal of that [dominant] cultural form that works to restructure it from within" (12).

demonstrations at the Expo, many sectors of Filipinos were able to learn about other Filipino/Americans from prior generations with different histories and trajectories which brought them to the Bay Area. Post-1965 immigrants and their children living in suburban areas in Daly City or the East Bay, for example, could sample foods made by famed Philippines-based cook Doreen Fernandez alongside manong elders in the Yerba Buena Gardens; I-Hotel and other anti-eviction activists could meet artists from the Philippines's Teatrong Mulat ng Pilipinas puppet troupe, and perhaps reconsider cultural activist strategies or at the very least, take a short break from their work. While many tourists and visitors to the FAAE undoubtedly approached the event as mere entertainment, the critical utopian imaginary behind the Expo enabled the possibility of deeper, more transformative encounters to occur. This worldmaking project sought to challenge both dominant histories of Filipinos in the United States, while carving out a place in San Francisco—at the newly built Yerba Buena Center—where Filipino/American lives could be affirmed and achievements honored in the present. Its opening statement summarizes the imagined community desired by Villa and his collaborators well:

We Filipinos are a diverse community of individuals. This Exposition aims to bring us all together to acknowledge each other's presence. We hope that we may come together to share and exchange experiences—intergenerationally and without prejudice to class, color, gender, sexual orientation, region, or dialect. We wish to contribute those individual experiences, past and present, in forums so that we can envision a dynamic Filipino American culture (FAAE 1994a, np).

As the late Performance Studies scholar José Muñoz wrote, this critical utopianism allows us to see how “the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds”

(2009, 27); it is an act of calling on the past “to animate it, understanding that the past has a performative nature, which is to say that rather than being static and fixed, the past does things” (Muñoz 2009, 27-28). Though using the language of state multiculturalism in its promotional materials, Carlos Villa’s I-Hotel installation and his larger FAAE project challenge the city’s ghosting of Filipino lives from downtown San Francisco. The FAAE’s existence did not merely celebrate diversity, but instead issued a proclamation of ongoing Filipino/American *presence* in San Francisco. If the manong’s room inside Gallery One was symbolic, and devoid of figurative representation, the Filipino/American visitor to the installation attests to the continued inhabitation of Filipino/American on the scales of the city and the region. The past-ness of the I-Hotel was used to affirm the present-ness of the ongoing demand for affordable shelter and racial justice in the afterlife of the International Hotel.

In the years following the first Expo, the Pistahan Festival and Sine!Sine! Film Festival continued but Villa no longer remained involved. The art exhibit component of the festival was dropped, due to lack of funding and Villa’s other community and educational commitments. While he no longer worked on that project, Villa continued his projects elsewhere, bringing fine arts education into contact and collaboration with “street scholarship,” nurturing further generations of artists at institutions like the San Francisco Art Institute and the University of San Francisco until his death from cancer in 2013. At his memorial on May 4, 2013 at Intersection for the Arts, the oldest continuing arts nonprofit institution in the city, a motley crew of artists, arts administrators, educators, community workers, and friends gathered to pay tribute to Villa. On a blackboard set aside for remembrances of the artist, a former student, “Tina R.” left this note: “Carlos

had this amazing capacity to nurture and nourished my own visions and other students without projecting his own vision... he only enhanced and informed [my vision and way of seeing the world].”³⁶ Villa’s talent was his ability to transform how we viewed the world, not through pedantic educational models or overly didactic representational forms, but instead through open-ended collaborative process and through modes of abstract art and ritualistic performance. His promiscuous methods of artmaking allowed for audience members, students, and others to critique their own ways of seeing and understanding Filipino/American history, and the history of art, through a dialogic process of self-reflection. Villa’s bodily presence, his collaborative and solo works, together labored to fill the hole of Filipino/American history that the city and state willfully produced with their razing of Manilatown and the I-Hotel. With Villa’s own passing, however, what remains?

Legacies, Continuations

Carlos Villa’s life was exceptional in several senses: as one of a small generation of Filipino/American born to two Philippines-born parents in San Francisco in the 1930s, and in his remarkable professional trajectory from private art school student to locally-renowned abstract artist in San Francisco. Villa’s relative mobility and success as an artist, however, has led to his life’s work and artistic practice being written out of the history of community-based, activist Filipino/American art. As this chapter has hopefully begun to illuminate, his exclusion from this artistic and political genealogy is misguided. In his engagement with various Filipino/American communities, social and cultural

³⁶ From personal field notes and photographs from event.

groups and institutionalized arts spaces, Villa was able to bridge multiple constituencies on the scales of the city and nation, and across the divide of the Pacific, revealing the ways in which they were—and are—mutually dependent upon the other for continued survival. By revisiting Villa’s visual art and performance practice, we can reconsider and expand the repertoire of representational strategies and forms that constitute the category of “activist art” and “Filipino/American art,” as well as stretch the parameters of fine art to include artists that bridge these categories.

Asian American artists and community organizers in San Francisco have long been debating over the demarcations between “activist” or community art and “fine art,” with one of the most recent public discussions happening in 2008. As part of the year-long *Activist Imagination Project* commemorating the 35th anniversary of Kearny Street Workshop, KSW presented a series of discussions exploring the “past, present, and future of activism, the arts and the APA community” (KSW 2008, 47); its first discussion was held at the rebuilt Manilatown Center, where KSW co-founder Nancy Hom recalls:

I think there’s always a conflict between artists and what our role is in society...I came from an art school that had a very biased way of defining art. Even in the funding world, some funders define art a certain way; it’s so easy to be pigeon-holed as a fine artist or a community artist [...] It’s so easy to draw all these boundaries that keep artists separate from each other, or keep the genres separate from each other. (KSW 2008, 49-50)

Productively, Hom then goes on to redefine community art, saying:

Community art is all about community building, relationships, interaction. That term really has a lot of meaning. I know that through the years some people have shied away from identifying with community art. They don’t want to be boxed in; they don’t want to do *that* kind of art. I feel the opposite, that it opens the door to many connections and many ways of relating. The whole secret to it is to know who you are, what you stand for, what you’re about, and then getting your work out to the community you intend to see it. (KSW 2008, 50)

Hom's expansion of the definition of "community art" allows for creative works produced by the community-minded artists to fall under this category, irrespective of the genre or form these works take. Using Hom's definition, Villa's body of work, as conceptually driven projects aimed at rethinking history and alterity, is activist art as much as work deploying the visual language of mural and street arts. Villa's modes of indexing—by intentionally refusing to figuratively represent—the manong figure are grounded in the spirit of honoring the manongs's lives in the I-Hotel while being attentive to the ways that others currently bear the brunt of redevelopment.

Jonathan Beller writes that abstract art "indexes the becoming-abstract of the world," for (borrowing from Frederic Jameson), "we can think abstractly about the world only to the extent that the world itself has already become abstract" (2006, 3). This chapter has centered on Villa's abstract art practice and rasquache performances as effective conduits for transmitting the manong generation's experiences in the United States on different scales, precisely because his work makes evident the abstraction and erasure of Filipino places in San Francisco, in the United States, and in exceptionalist historical narratives of U.S. involvement in the Philippines. Abstraction, Ruth Gilmore writes, is central to understanding the workings of structural racism, for

Racism is a practice of abstraction, a death-dealing displacement of difference into hierarchies that organize relations within and between the planet's sovereign political territories. Racism functions as a limiting force that pushes disproportionate costs of participating in an increasingly monetized and profit-driven world onto those who, due to the frictions of *political* distance, cannot reach the variable levers of power that might relieve them of those costs. (2002, 16)

On the scale of the city, the violence of the International Hotel struggle came not only from the moment of eviction and displacement of the manongs and the demolition of the building; the violence of the eviction moment continued for decades, and continues still, through the discursive abstraction and obfuscation of the ways in which capitalist greed has prioritized profit over the maintenance of working-class kinship structures and dwelling places. The urban renewal programs that led to the razing of Manilatown was coded in the discourse of progress and modernization for a city rapidly undergoing a shift from a production-oriented economy to a speculative finance-based economy in the late 20th century; and it remains a powerful discourse that enables present-day redevelopment throughout the city, most often in formerly working-class neighborhoods like the Mission and the South of Market.

Villa's mixed-media cultural productions and live performances were hybrid creations that mined sources disparate over space and time; he used materials inspired by those used in postcolonial nations and techniques appropriated from Abstract Expressionists in order to reconcile the dueling "Filipino" subject and individual "artist" within himself. The dictates for activist art to "prioritize the communicative and educational aspects of art over the notion of creativity as the expression of a privately held truth" did not appeal to Villa, and he actively eschewed such didacticism in his work and in those he taught and curated (Widener 2010, 202). Villa's practice skewed towards supporting self-determination through the individual artist's practice, an alternate perspective that contends that the revolutionary potential of art comes "not as a result of art's collective nature or social utility but precisely because it offered a path toward individual growth and change" (Widener 2010, 208). Revisiting Villa's career thus

provides the opportunity to witness one artist of color's negotiations between expressing a self-actualized interiority shaped by his social location with his commitment to social change through a half-century's worth of art practice, teaching, and collaborative performance, curation, and dialogue.

Villa's legacy continues in the work of his former students, such as Jerome Reyes, who use his artwork and life as inspiration to produce pieces that, too, intervene into dominant renderings of Filipino/American life in San Francisco, even after the rebuilding of the International Hotel. Following Villa's lead, Reyes's show at the Manilatown Center attempted to enfold audience members into a present-day political community, even (or especially) those who had no direct connection to the city's Asian American movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Like Villa's performances and shows, Reyes's installation labored to create a world, however ephemeral, where

liberation and imagination are inseparable. Political transformation begins with the belief in a different reality, an achievable vision of life better than what currently exists. It stands to follow that activities that force us to rethink perceptions, boundaries, and limitations objectively advance other struggles for change. (Widener 2010, 289)

In Reyes's three-part installation *Routes and Seasons*—comprised of a rug, fedora, and table that appeared solid at first glance—its impermanence was only discovered when viewers physically interacted with the objects over time. The feather “rug” was actually constructed out of 2,005 individual feathers dipped in the dust from the last ton of remaining I-Hotel bricks from the original structure; these feathers were laid in a chevron pattern directly on the floor and were dusted again to finish it. Viewers stepped on the rug over the course of the show—many not considering it an “artwork,” instead treating it as any other home furnishing—so that by the show's end, there was

little of the piece left intact. As the “rug” was transformed back into dust by being interacted with, visitors too were transformed into participants as they stepped on the feathers, their shoes picking up the I-Hotel brick dust, scattering it throughout the center and, further, onto the streets of San Francisco.

Created so carefully by Reyes, who intended for the piece be destroyed in this way, *Routes and Seasons* functioned to metaphorically and materially enfold participants into the genealogy of the International Hotel struggle. By being designed towards disappearance rather than endurance, the objects called attention to the precarity of the lives of the manongs who once made their homes in the International Hotel and other single-occupancy hotels throughout San Francisco. Moreover, the installation mirrored the reality that *all* the structures that one dwells in, and the objects we use to affectively transform buildings into homes, are vulnerable to destruction by forces entirely outside our control. Yet in being dusted with the residue of the original I-Hotel, *Routes and Seasons* left a trace that remained long after the rug itself had dissipated—participants were imprinted with the knowledge that they had taken material remains of Manilatown’s history with them. In the trail of dust participants scattered throughout the center and outwards, they were urged to look for other traces of past/passed on communities of color in the places they travel through and settle in, even if the evidence of its original inhabitants and built structures no longer remains in solid form. It is through the ongoing interactions within the rebuilt International Hotel, both at spectacular public events such as Reyes’s solo show and in banal moments such as bingo nights with the seniors, that Villa’s political project—of making worlds collide in order to reconstruct the world — lives on.

CHAPTER 4
Embodying Community:
Respatializing the South of Market through Performance

*I'm-a gonna raise your rent
I'm-a gonna raise a condo
I'm bleed you every day
So that I can have more dollars*

*Ellis Act evictions
My landlords a dope
(He's trying to make me think that
there ain't no hope)*

*Taking back my home that I don't want to lose
... But there is a cure for the SOMA-time blues...*

*I'm gonna stand and fight and I'm
not gonna lose
'cause there is a cure for the
SOMA-time blues
(DA-DA...DADA...DA-DA...DADADA)
— "SOMA-Time Blues"*

To a tourist visiting San Francisco, the Central Market Business Corridor is a playground of commerce and entertainment devoid of residential dwellings. The Yerba Buena Center on 3rd and Mission is the cultural heart of Central Market, and houses the Yerba Buena Gardens, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA), the City Children's Museum, and the Metreon shopping and entertainment complex. Adjacent to the Yerba Buena Center are some of the city's most significant cultural and arts institutions: the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), the Contemporary Jewish Museum, and the Museum of the African Diasporas (MOAD). One block southeast of the Yerba Buena

Center is the Moscone Convention Center; as the centerpiece of the city's business-related tourism, the convention center is its top revenue generator and, as of 2011, draws in about one third of the city's \$485 million tourism-related taxes annually.¹ Hotels, restaurants, shops, and bars around Market Street and Union Square service tourists' demands and desires; these businesses' hours match those of tourists and the financial district's white-collar workers who populate the area on weekdays, rather than those of the area's permanent residents, many of whom are of the Filipino/American working class. With its façade as a glittering center of American modernity and capitalism, the Central Market corridor and the larger South of Market (SoMA) neighborhood look very unlike the ethnic enclaves of imagination and nostalgia—there are no ornate Orientalist gates welcoming you to the new Manilatown in the South of Market, as there are for Chinatown to the north of Union Square. The traces of Filipino life here are just out of sight, with only the bodies of Filipinos who traverse the space signaling its ethnic character—they are found working in downtown's hotels and restaurants, but are also the seemingly useless, non-laboring and leisurely subjects found in public and private spaces. Further buried, the architecture of the Yerba Buena Center itself points towards another place and time, one that values Filipino/American labor and lives, if only one could see it.

That the South of Market is a residential community—home not only to Filipino/Americans but also to other minoritized and marginalized urban populations—is a fact hard to justify through city records alone, in that it historically has been zoned for industrial use; because of the lack of documentation supporting its residential character,

¹ Downs, David. "Moscone makeover could draw higher-profile events to San Francisco." *San Francisco Examiner*. November 13, 2011. <http://archives.sfexaminer.com/sanfrancisco/moscone-makeover-could-draw-higher-profile-events-to-san-francisco/Content?oid=2185802>

the district has constantly been a site of struggle, with residential communities threatened by repeated attempts at rezoning designed to increase the construction of office space in former industrial warehouses and land plots. Since the late 19th century, the flow of immigrants, working class white and brown peoples, and queer people to and from the South of Market has differentiated this district from other residential neighborhoods in the city like Pacific Heights, the Sunset, or the Richmond. Originally covered in large sand dunes penetrated with valleys, tidal streams and estuaries, the South of Market in the late 19th century was changed dramatically through grading and filling operations that “even[ed] out the topography and extended terra firma into what had once been water.”² Formerly a mansion district named South Park, the South of Market changed class character in 1869, when developers and local politicians leveled the Second Street hill to allow for better commercial traffic to downtown (Canlas 2002, 48). In response, the rich fled the neighborhood, and SoMA’s industrial business and its location by the railyards and ports made it an ideal location for transient laborers to base themselves during their sojourns through San Francisco. As one of the earliest developed areas in San Francisco, the “South of the Slot” district, according to the writer Jack London, housed “the factories, slums, laundries, machine-shops, boiler works, and the abodes of the working class,” in contrast to the areas north of the Market Street streetcars where “respectable businesses” and dwellings of the upper class were based (qtd. in Hartman 2002, 57).

² City and County of San Francisco Planning Department (CCSFPD). *Historic Context Statement: South of Market Area, San Francisco, California*. San Francisco, 2009. pp. 3.

After the 1906 earthquake and fire that leveled large swaths of San Francisco, the district was rebuilt consolidating its status as “single-laborer zone”³; it was home to “blue-collar workshops, high-density apartment houses, and cheap hotels” and provided many services to ethnic and immigrant male day laborers including “employment agencies, cheap lodging houses, secondhand clothing stores, pawn shops, coffee houses and restaurants, and houses of prostitution” (qtd. in Godfrey 1997, 323). During World War II, the South of Market expanded as war industry laborers and military personnel relocated to the dormitories, boarding houses, and single occupancy hotels that serviced the adjacent shipyards and ports; by 1950, single men were 72% of the district’s population (Hartman 2002, 59). Beginning in this period but especially after the war, many of the heavy industrial businesses in SoMA were replaced by smaller commercial and light industrial activities such as the garment, printing and publishing, wholesale import/export, and auto repair industries; the collapse of the war industry in the Bay Area made entire lines of work obsolete, and other industries arrived to take its place.⁴ In this moment, Filipinos began to appear with more frequency in the historical record of SoMA, although Filipino migrant workers had frequented the district since the 1920s—veterans and seasonal workers who did not land on Kearny Street found cheap rents and entertainment on Third to Sixth Streets, as it was the only other locale affordable enough to survive on fixed pensions, low wages or welfare. By the 1970s, 5,000 Filipinos made the South of Market home, comprising nearly a third of the district’s estimated population

³ For exact accounting of damage in fire see the report by SPUR. “A Walk Down Market Street.” *SPUR*. July 1, 2011. <http://www.spur.org/publications/article/2011-07-01/walk-down-market-street>

⁴ City and County of San Francisco Planning Commission (CCSFPD). *Draft Report, East SOMA Area Plan: An Area Plan of the General Plan of the City and County of San Francisco*. San Francisco, April 2008.

of 17,000 (Canlas 2002, 60). Two factors contributed to this influx of migrants from the Philippines: first, the expansion of immigration categories in the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act meant that more Filipino families were able to migrate and settle into the South of Market⁵; second, with the decimation of Manilatown by the late 1970s, SoMA became one of the only viable options remaining in the city for affordable housing, especially for new migrants unable to buy in the burgeoning suburbs of Daly City and the East Bay.

There are few secondary accounts of Filipino/American migrants in the South of Market in the mid-1900s outside of community-based testimonials, as Filipino/Americans were not considered a stable or permanent presence to account for, nor were they seen as economically or socially valuable to the city. Significantly, like other transient populations of laboring men, homeless and poor peoples living in the single residency occupancy (SRO) housings and daily-rate hotels, Filipinos were rendered as without value, and were thus marked for removal with the implementation of Justin Herman's Yerba Buena Center redevelopment scheme in the late 1960s. As early as the 1950s the South of Market was labeled as a blighted neighborhood, with the SFRA saying that:

The South of Market area for many years has been recognized as an area of blight producing a depressing, unhealthful, and unsafe living environment, retarding industrial development, and acting as a drain on the city treasury. This study of 86 blocks is concerned with the problems of blight and with ways and means of improving the area through the use of the redevelopment process... The South of Market Area ranks among the most severely blighted sections of the city, along with Chinatown and the Western Addition... [T]he conditions of blight are such as to be highly

⁵ See Chapter Two for a breakdown of the revised immigration preference categories in the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act.

conducive to social disintegration, juvenile delinquency, and crime... The present wasteful use of potentially valuable land must be stopped if the South of Market area is to become a well functioning part of the city's environment.⁶

As part of the overall push to transform downtown San Francisco into a tourist and leisure hub financed by office and retail space rentals and parking lot fees, Herman and the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency renamed the South of Market zone bounded by Third, Mission, Fourth, and Folsom Streets as part of the Yerba Buena Redevelopment Area in 1967 (CCSFPD 2009, 68). This new area was to be ground zero for San Francisco's downtown revitalization, with the massive Yerba Buena Convention Center—an 87-acre redevelopment project located between Mission and Folsom, Third and Fourth Streets that was completed in 1981 and named the Moscone Center after slain San Francisco Mayor George Moscone—envisioned as its centerpiece (Godfrey 1997, 323-4). The massive redevelopment scheme, once completed, displaced over seventy-six hundred mostly blue-collar jobs in 723 businesses that formerly occupied this site (Hartman 2002, 202). Waves of subsequent investment by tech firms and the conversion of rental properties into commercial properties, office space, or condominiums since the first dot com boom of the 1990s has plagued the remaining Filipino/American population and other working class residents in the South of Market ever since; it has transformed and partitioned this place from a thriving “Soma Pilipinas” into the business-friendly mini districts such as the Central Market and Mid-Market Corridors that we see today.

While once-yearly spectacles held at the Yerba Buena Center, such as the Pistahan Festival in August and the Parole Lantern Festival in December, bring

⁶ Redevelopment Agency of the City and County of San Francisco (SFRA). *The Feasibility of Redevelopment in the South of Market Area*. San Francisco, 1952. pp. 12.

Filipino/American communities in the larger Bay Area to the fore, it is the banal daily presence of the *veteranos* and *manangs* that traces of Filipino/American life in the SoMA remain visible to careful observers; they sit, quite literally, in the shadows of the reconstructed SoMA brought about by new economic developments.⁷ What remains most visibly is St. Patrick's Cathedral: situated across the street from the Yerba Buena Center grounds, it is an anachronistic Gothic structure that starkly contrasts with the metal, glass, and concrete of the modern buildings around it. The Tagalog-language masses bring Filipinos who work and live in the area twice a day; these times of entry and exit are the most visible visual proof of Filipina women's presence in the area, a time where they are not cloistered in the hospitals and offices where they spend their days. During the day elderly Filipino men populate the grounds of the Yerba Buena Gardens, playing chess and sitting on the benches idly; they pass time leisurely and quietly, their manual labor no longer desired due to the men's advanced age. The *veteranos*, or veterans of World War II, also pass their time here, waiting for pension checks that may or may not ever come. On occasion we see an elderly Filipina woman—a grandmother (*Lola*) or a paid domestic caretaker, perhaps—walking through the gardens with her young charges; sometimes the children look Filipino/American or multiracial, sometimes they are white, but are differentiated by their Americanized clothes and mannerisms that

⁷ The Yerba Buena Gardens is one of only a handful of public gathering spaces built in the SoMA. The City and County Planning Commission names four in its General Plan: “South Park, an oval-shaped open space of less than one acre surrounded by residential and commercial development; landscaped areas on top of the Moscone Center; and a .22 acre minipark at Langton and Howard Streets, consisting of a children's play area, grassy areas, and sitting facilities and a 1.9 acre park and recreation facility at the corner of Sixth and Folsom Streets. In addition, there are two paved playground facilities, one at Bessie Carmichael School located at Folsom and Columbia Streets and another at the Filipino Education Center located at Fourth and Harrison Streets” (City and County of San Francisco Planning Commission [CCSFPD]. *South of Market General Plan*. San Francisco, 1995).

contrast sharply with the manang's worn tsinelas (slippers), her woven plastic bag carrying diapers or food or consumer goods. These elders' bodily presence is what remain of "Soma Pilipinas" in the absence of larger, built structures on these streets; they are among the population that anti-gentrification activists want to make more visible to the tourists and newcomers to San Francisco who only see this area as a place of consumption and leisure for the middle classes.

Since the 1950s, the discourse and material production of SoMA as primarily an industrial and commercial zone has characterized this district as one without permanent and stable residents, making it available for private investment by construction companies, hotel and condo developers, dot com startups, and even arts institutions. The difficulty of advocating for South of Market residents is compounded by their general transience and their social precarity, although grassroots organizations and non-profit centers including West Bay Community Services, the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN), the Bill Sorro Housing Program (BiSHOP SF), and Veterans Equity Center (VEC) have assisted Filipino/American residents with finding employment, housing, medical care, legal representation, and social services since the 1990s (Sobredo 1998, 285). Thus, simply naming the area as a Filipino/American home-place remains a challenge, even prior to initiating the larger task of sustaining and developing the area to serve the interests of residents rather than those of tourists, corporations and the city. While pressuring the Board of Supervisors at nearby City Hall and staging larger-scale protests on city streets have remained enduring forms of action to illuminate the historical and contemporary conditions of Filipino/Americans in the SoMA, other modes of cultural resistance have emerged which use the very transience of

the population as the formal basis and content of their political protest, visual art and performance; it is to these works that I now turn to, seeing in these site-specific performances a vehicle to uncover the submerged Filipino archive of San Francisco's South of Market.

The Stakes of Performance: Respatializing and Rehistoricizing the South of Market

This chapter offers a reconsideration of “connectivity,” that highly prized goal of today's social media and technology-based industry, to recall analog modes of connection between Filipino/Americans and other poor and marginalized inhabitants of the South of Market with those who now claim this place as their own. It investigates three discrete site-specific performances—a “Walk of Shame” led by a coalition of anti-eviction and other city-based community organizations; a psychogeographic *derivé* by performance artist Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa; and a musical stroll through SoMA as part of a larger exhibition and performance event dubbed *Make Your Own Revolution*— that reveal several braided yet discrete historical moments impacting the South of Market's present cartographic and social configuration. These performances, when read alongside one another, invoke a Filipino/American community in the South of Market that is not based on an idea of an unbroken presence of Filipino/American subjects here over time; the imaginary of a “Soma Pilipinas” functions instead to recall the precarious existence of Filipino migrants in this neighborhood over the course of the past one hundred years. By remapping routes of Filipino/American settlement to and displacement from the SoMA, I argue that these walking performances ritualistically respatialize the South of Market and

“Central Market Commercial District” as a Filipino/American home that has endured multiple waves of development and increasingly rapid forms of gentrification.

Performance and multimedia work by Filipino/American artists have been central to the genealogy of Asian American community-based art in San Francisco. Performance, as Performance Studies scholars such as Peggy Phelan and Diana Taylor write, is an embodied mode of passing on cultural memory, and exceeds the knowledge that historians attempt to fix in the written archive. The impermanent nature inherent to performance is both its strength and its weakness. Performance is, by its ephemeral nature, that which cannot be contained in the official archive: the knowledge passed through the performance, and the affective bonds produced in the relationship between those involved with and witness to the performance, are impossible to replicate in any recorded documentation—even visual documentation—of the event.⁸ This ability to create transient moments of affection, dis-ease, and/or (dis)affiliation between a collective mass makes the performative unique among art forms. Yet in its being impossible to fully capture in the archive, the performance must continue to be repeated in order to be passed on; it must remain performed repeatedly over time, becoming part of an ongoing repertoire.⁹ The continuation of the repertoire is thus the greatest difficulty

⁸ This follows closely but not identically to Peggy Phelan’s claim that “performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive. It is this quality which makes performance the runt of the litter of contemporary art. Performance clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital” (1993, 148).

⁹ According to Diana Taylor, “The question of disappearance in relation to the archive and repertoire differs in kind as well as degree. The live performance can never be transmitted through the archive. A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a *thing* in itself (the video is part of the archive; what represents it is part of the repertoire). Embodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it. But that does not mean performance...disappears. Performances repeat themselves through their own structures and codes. This means the repertoire, like the archive, is mediated” (2003, 20-21).

with performance as an artistic medium—the inability to sustain the performance depends not only on the personal abilities or desires of the performers to continue but to external factors, such as the financial difficulties of supporting performers and the performance space for an extended duration of time. What can remain of the three performances in this chapter, however, are the banal reiterations of the spectacular performative event practiced by Filipino/Americans continuing to traverse SoMA’s streets; a point I will return to in the close readings of each performance and in the

For Filipino/American artists and community members in San Francisco, live performance—both those coded as “political” or “cultural”/aesthetic by their originators—has served as a mode of communicating Filipino diasporic (hi)stories which have seen little to no representation in historical scholarship or dominant narratives of the city. In San Francisco, street performance is practiced both out of choice and of necessity by artists affiliated with long-time Filipino/American arts organizations such as Kularts and Bindlestiff Studios. While Bindlestiff Studios, after multiple relocations, has finally settled on Sixth Street in the SoMA, Kularts has no permanent home due to the city’s increasingly high rents and to the tenuous financial support from private and public funders; artists affiliated with both spaces have practiced modes of guerilla street performance over the years in the absence of dedicated theater space. Moreover, with the shuttering of galleries throughout San Francisco and the loss of secure space to house large art works—paintings, installations, and the like—independent artists have always taken to the streets, making themselves visible to those living and working outdoors and to those who do not have financial or cultural capital to feel welcome in institutionalized

art spaces. In order to remain flexible and relevant to their audiences, artists such as Allan Manalo and Alleluia Panis have learned to improvise with what time, financial resources, and physical space is available and accessible; they have turned to “portable” types of performances that do not require a fixed location in order to be viewed or experienced.

Typical to other major cities in the U.S. and globally,

dance, music, theater have varying audiences and spatial needs, but their essential immateriality and performative quality means that they are for a group audience, a public, at least. And writers and performers can usually live in ordinary circumstances; visual artmaking requires a lot of individual work space, which is why visual art is the most high-profile and most endangered genre in San Francisco. (Solnit 2002, 88)

Yet there is more than necessity driving the turn to performance by Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa, Alleluia Panis, and the other Filipino/American artists and organizers discussed in this chapter. These projects, I argue, are part of a radical praxis of respatializing the South of Market as a residential place, by illuminating the Filipino/American presence and persistence in SoMA throughout the tidal changes in the social, economic, and political life of city, the region, and of the Philippine and American nations. Critical geographer Katherine McKittrick defines “respatialization” as a returning to, and a humanizing of, geographies of racial violence that illustrate how we are implicated in the production of space (2006, 86). In *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, McKittrick writes particularly of the dehumanizing geographies of slavery, and at one moment, revisits a staging of Robbie McCauley’s play *Sally’s Rape*. An interactive performance event, *Sally’s Rape* reinvents the scale of the auction block, transforming it into a place of black profit and freedom rather than death; in placing herself, naked, on the makeshift auction block and calling upon audience

members to “bid in” and witness the reenacting of Sally’s rape, McCauley not only makes visible the violation of black bodies under slavery, but also testifies to her own presence and survival in the face of contemporary practices of subjugation that are part of a larger, ongoing story of black death (88-90). By “sit[ing] and sight[ing] the memory” of the auction block, McCauley’s play implicates not only the performers but also incites the audience members into “understanding how our present condition informs the ways that blackness is displayed” (89). It is this affective charge of recognition experienced by witnesses, I contend, which underlies the increase in live, site-specific performances by Filipino/Americans and their allies in this second dot-com era South of Market. These performances function as embodied modes of negotiating and re-investing one’s surroundings with different forms of value; they denaturalize the experience of the South of Market had by tourists, young tech industry workers, and other consumers of this place, to advance another geographic formulation that makes room for transient, working-class, communities of color to live productively alongside (or instead of!) the developments at their door.

In investigating site-specific performance as an alternative, embodied modality of retelling the South of Market’s historical past, I am interested in how Filipino/American artists, activists, and others activate different ways of experiencing the district in the present and future that differ from officially-sanctioned and -supported paths of moving through this place. I investigate how these performances challenge the idea of SoMA as devoid of homes, raising up instead the district’s ghosts—the queer ones, the brown ones, the artists, the transient—through a combination of interactive and relational kinesthetic movements, music and ambient sounds. As Avery Gordon writes:

Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future. (1997, 22)

Here, I am thinking materially about the productivity and performativity of haunting invoked by Gordon, or about the spatial and temporal interruptions and interventions that are made into the South of Market by Filipino/American performers who ritualistically walk its streets to make spectacular this typically mundane act. By dredging up memories of Filipino/American life forgotten or suppressed through the act of walking through SoMA streets, these performances refuse the dominant, colonial spatial logic that presumes the inevitability of the disappearance of Filipino/Americans and other marginalized peoples from South of Market. Through their small walking spectacles, furthermore, these performers move backwards and forwards in space and time; they dredge up the buried histories of Filipinos in the SoMA, while also dreaming of a utopian future-space where Filipino/American people remain.

To think through the dual temporal-spatial movements of Filipino/American performance in the South of Market, I have found inspiration in late Performance Studies scholars Joseph Roach's and José Muñoz's writings on performance, social history, and collective memory. Joseph Roach, in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, refers to performances which interface between the body and the city as a kind of "kinesthetic imagination," a way of "thinking through movements—at once remembered and reinvented—the otherwise unthinkable" (1996, 27). Drawing from and extending Pierre Nora's concept of *milieux de memoire* and Walter Benjamin's writings on the

flâneur in the Paris Arcades, Roach posits that everyday and spectacular articulations of kinesthetic imagination can powerfully activate the urban spaces in which they are staged; during a “condensational event” in an urban zone, these performances “gain a powerful enough hold on collective memory that they will survive the transformation or the relocation of the spaces in which they first flourished” (Roach 1996, 28). His work is helpful for my rethinking of the walking performances in the SoMA as simultaneously “taking back” and “remaking” of place—of understanding these performances as condensational events that recall a collective memory of a SoMA neighborhood where Filipino/American communities flourished *and* perform a utopian redrawing of the SoMA as a place where Filipino/American life can *continue* to proliferate, despite the massive redevelopment happening in the area. This chapter diverges from Roach’s work, however, in two key ways; namely, Roach thinks about space primarily as metaphorical rather than material, and his text is concerned with the ways in which the lost/imagined homeland is “relocated to” or “transformed in” sites of the black diaspora, particularly in New Orleans. In contrast, I am interested in how the very materiality of the South of Market is produced and reproduced through kinesthetic performances; or, how the peripatetic journeys of migrant workers, performers, activists, and artists over the streets of SoMA labor to transform the neighborhood from a site solely for commerce and tourist pleasures to a home-place for Filipino/Americans and other poor and working-class people.

Secondly, José E. Muñoz, drawing from Ernst Bloch’s writings on utopia, helps me theorize the simultaneous backwards- and forward-looking performances of Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa, Alleluia Panis and company, and the SF anti-eviction coalition as

forms of utopian performatives that respatialize the South of Market. Muñoz writes that “the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds” (2009, 27). Performances of queer utopian memory, for Muñoz, are world-making projects that understand “its time as reaching beyond some nostalgic past that never that never was or some future whose arrival is continuously belated—a utopia in the present” (37). Such a utopia is not romantic or idealistic, but is critical of the present, and allows us “to see beyond its ‘what is’ to worlds of political possibility, of ‘what might be’” (38). In recalling the ghosts of the past, thus, the utopian performatives of Muñoz’s text use absence as a way of pointing to what is missing, what is not enough, or what is hidden in the present as things to strive for and work towards in the present. Simultaneously, these performances also point to the presence of non-linear, non-heteronormative lifeworlds that *do* exist in the present, as a kind of already-existing utopia that is still continually yearned for. This working-towards utopia that performances enact are powerful political statements that imagine ways of occupying place which are outside the logics of the dominant order, and that envision potentialities beyond that which does not want poor, queer, working-class, and people of color to survive.

Entering the South of Market through these walking performances makes for a telling of contradictory, recursive yet unique stories. The chapter unfolds by following my encounters with three discrete performances by Filipino/American artists, activists, and community members, performances which are attentive to the disjunctures between Filipino migrants with other constituents also vying for space in the neighborhood—a predominantly white LGBT community, artists and art institutions, and the tech industry

and its workers. Rather than point to these other parties merely as interlopers into a purely Filipino/American neighborhood, these performances navigate the messy and uneven power dynamics between them, leaving open the possibilities for either repeated contention or the hope for social and spatial transformation of relations. The affective architectures built through these performances stretch across space and time, bringing together multiple players and participants, working across global and local conditions, that are unwieldy to synthesize in succinct and chronological fashion; the differences in the artists' intentionality over the three year span in which these performances were staged also reveal the contradictory and, at times, competing narratives for space that continue to evolve every day. Importantly, none of these performances offer static or clear resolutions to the problem of displacement. Rather, their power lies in their "ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging" (Muñoz 2009, 99); this "kernel of potentiality that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses" is unique to performance, and what makes it an urgent and timely medium for communicating the distress and resilience of Filipino/American communities in San Francisco's South of Market (99).

Performance 1: "Soma Psychogeography"

I first intentionally sojourned through the South of Market not as a tourist visiting San Francisco, nor, years later, as a recent transplant to the Bay Area, but encountered it first as a disembodied voyeur by "walking" its streets alongside performer Gigi Otálvaro-

Hormillosa.¹⁰ Her “Soma Psychogeography” or “Psychogeography: Drifting through Soma” (2011) is simple, a short video documentation of an afternoon amble through the South of Market, shot and narrated by the artist using a handheld video camera. Otálvaro-Hormillosa, a self-identified “queer Filipino Colombian artist and activist” was raised in Miami and has been a resident of the Bay Area since 1998; her art and texts on queer of color subjectivity, cultural memory, and Filipino/a and Latino/a diasporic performance have received critical attention nationally and internationally (Otálvaro-Hormillosa 2005, 332-339). In her long resume of accomplishments and performances, however, “Soma Psychogeography” does not appear, and a cursory look at the video reveals the reasons for the piece’s omission.

A class assignment made while Otálvaro-Hormillosa was enrolled in a master’s program at California College of the Arts (CCA), “Soma Psychogeography” in its form and content seems a throwaway piece compared to the larger oeuvre of her performance practice. A simple class exercise, the work seems done to help her prepare for more polished psychogeographic performances, such as 2012’s “Implicated Spaces,” a “performative lecture applying phenomenological and visual analysis to a mapping of the murder, disappearance, and reappearance of Rodolfo Walsh,” the journalist-activist disappeared during Argentina’s Dirty War. With its clumsy camerawork and unrehearsed

¹⁰ Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s description of the project, posted on the Vimeo video sharing website, reads: “In grad school, one of the assignments for my Sites class during the Spring ’10 semester was to create a psychogeography, as conceptualized by Guy DeBord, a founding member of Situationist International, a group of international revolutionaries who were influential during the May of 1968 strike of France. DeBord wrote about the concept of the *derive*, translated as ‘drifting’ in English, during which a psychogeography might take place. A psychogeography calls for a demystified experience of urban space and an intentional element of chance. During a psychogeography, one elicits activities and engagements that one would not normally pursue. My psychogeography began at the San Francisco campus of California College of the Arts and continued throughout Soma” (Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa. “Psychogeography: Drifting Through Soma.” Vimeo. 2011. <http://vimeo.com/67070006>).

narration, this video has an amateur production value, in stark contrast to Otálvaro-Hormillosa's *Inverted Minstrel* (2001) and *Cosmic Blood* (2002), staged performances that respectively address histories of racial appropriation and Spanish and American colonization of the Philippines through outlandish and fantastic visual aesthetics and scenarios. As a random stroll through the neighborhood adjacent to her art school, the video's content hardly seems to warrant the kinds of serious theoretical and historical background necessary to understand her other, more conceptual performance and video pieces.

It is precisely the low-tech production of this video that draws me to it as a site for the production of other forms of sociality, forms of offline connectivity between queer and brown subjects that escape attention otherwise. Otálvaro-Hormillosa, in this brief piece, attempts a psychogeography of the South of Market, and reveals in her ramblings the built and affective architecture of this place as being more than a site of touristic consumption and tech innovation; she attempts to “identify and distill the varied ambiances of the urban environment” in SoMA, or what Raymond Williams has called elsewhere a “structure of feeling” we can understand as both material and imaginary (Coverley 2010, 91). Following Guy DeBord and the Situationist International's concept of the psychogeographic *dérive*, or aimless stroll, Otálvaro-Hormillosa maps “a new cartography characterized by a complete disregard for the traditional and habitual practices of a tourist” (Coverley 2010, 91); she wanders through the neighborhood with seemingly no direction, commenting and stopping at sites of personal interest that do not hold an attraction for a visitor expecting to see places of great cultural significance.

At the start of the video, Otálvaro-Hormillosa shows us her props—a water bottle and plastic tulip petals that she says she will use to “beautify” the neighborhood on this “beautiful San Francisco day.” Taking off and walking east to King and Seventh streets, she comments on mundane objects such as the freshly-painted red fire alarm boxes along the side of the street. Jokingly repeating “following the white man, following the white man” as she crosses the street at the stoplight—the “white man” being the small lit figure in the signal box—Otálvaro-Hormillosa begins to show the viewer places far from what normative whiteness would deem noteworthy (1:29). Before walking under the Highway 80 underpass on Sixth Street (which she misidentifies as Hwy 101), Otálvaro-Hormillosa points her camera at the SF Police Department station at 850 Bryant Street, jesting that she is “going to behave for a moment” as she walks by (2:55). Just on the other side of the underpass, she tells us about her one of her favorite San Francisco clubs, The EndUp, where she says she would probably try to get in without paying the cover charge (3:22). Located at 401 Sixth Street and founded in 1973, the EndUp is one of the last after-hours clubs left in San Francisco after continuous SFPD raids for drugs and crime cleared out many late-night venues in the late 1990s.¹¹ A block from Victoria Manalo Draves Park, named after the Filipina/American diver who won two gold medals at the 1948 Olympics, The EndUp is gay nightclub that attracts a mixed clientele, especially as it does not close on weekends. But it is a weekday afternoon when Otálvaro-Hormillosa swings by, and she briefly laments its closure before continuing on her walk of “intentional chances.” As she continues northwest on Sixth Street, Otálvaro-Hormillosa comments on the

¹¹ County of San Francisco Superior Court of California. *Club Permits: Report of the 1999-2000 San Francisco Civil Grand Jury*. San Francisco, 2000.

“Defenestration Building,” where in 1997 artist Brian Goggin installed pieces of furniture that appear to be jumping out of the windows of the vacant Hugo Hotel.¹² She says she has “never understood this building” but notes appreciatively that the installation “shift[s] our sense of space, getting that furniture up there somehow” (4:08). As at other moments throughout the piece, the video cuts to a closeup of Otálvaro-Hormillosa placing a plastic tulip petal onto a parking meter, continuing her work of “beautifying” the South of Market.

At this halfway point of the eight-minute long video, Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s *dérive* finally brings her to a more-legibly “Filipino” space, albeit one hidden from the general public. Exclaiming “I love this little garden on Langton Street... ¡Que bonito!” she zooms in on a fenced-in garden, locked but through which we catch a glimpse of beautiful trees, flowers, and a mural nearly covered by the foliage (5:10). Though she does not name it for the viewer, Otálvaro-Hormillosa is referring to Howard/Langton Mini Park, a playground-turned-community garden that, in the 1980s, was known as “Needle Park” for all the homeless and drug users who congregated in the space. In 1989, “neighbors got Friends of the Urban Forest to plant a few trees on Langton Street in memory of a resident who died of AIDS”¹³; by 1996, after organizing by the local

¹² The Hugo Hotel on the corner of Sixth and Howard Streets has been empty since a 1988 fire gutted the place, and was taken over by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency by eminent domain, making it the first eminent domain case in twenty-five years. Since the SFRA was disbanded in 2011, Mercy Housing CA, an affordable housing agency named by the late Filipino housing activist Bill Sorro, has taken over, and is looking for new funding to renovate the building. As of August 2013, the San Francisco Planning Commission has staged hearings to proceed with the demolition of the hotel for new mixed-use residential and commercial development (San Francisco Planning Department. *Executive Summary, Case No. 2011.0119ECKV*. San Francisco. August 1, 2013).

¹³ Zane, Maitland. “Needle Park Renaissance: Once-blighted playground transformed into Soma Gardens.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. April 1, 1996. <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Needle-Park-Renaissance-Once-blighted-2988268.php>

residents, the playground was converted into a community garden that is now colloquially called “Soma Gardens” and also known as the “Langton Alley Garden.” On the side of the building adjacent to Soma Gardens, the Filipino-American Friendship Mural appears and features a skyline view of downtown San Francisco in the background, with generic Filipino and white figures standing in the foreground; it evades engagement with the troubled political history between the U.S. and the Philippines by framing the relationship as mutually based on “friendship,” yet remains an important reminder of the Filipino presence in the South of Market.¹⁴

At minute six, Otálvaro-Hormillosa zooms her camera to the front of The Stud, a leather bar at 401 Sixth Street opened in 1966, proclaiming jauntily “I pledge allegiance to the gay flag” (6:10). She professes an alternative expression of affiliation and loyalty to the LGBTQ community rather than to the “white man,” although this too remains outside of the economy of homonationalism in which LGBT equality is mapped onto support of US militarism and the culture of individualized consumption. We see in this last segment of the video, instead, Otálvaro-Hormillosa practicing a form of what she calls elsewhere *(a)eromestizaje*, or a “subversive hybridity that celebrates the aerodynamic, sex-positive, and ethereal manifestations of identities grounded in shifting notions of community, desire, and cultural resistance” that both “queer[s] *mestizaje* as well as the racial hybridization of queerness” (2005, 327). That is to say, Otálvaro-

¹⁴ The city’s generic description of the Filipino American Friendship mural reads as follows: “The Filipino American Friendship mural at the Howard Langton Community Gardens depicts a grand neighborhood festival that brought the Filipino community together with Filipino food, dancing, and music. Community organizing in the Filipino community was at its height during this time, so community pressure brought about the removal of no parking signs on Minna Street, a primarily Filipino residential neighborhood” (San Francisco Planning Department [CCSFPD]. *Central Corridor Plan: Draft for Public Review*. San Francisco, April 2013. pp. 88).

Hormillosa's cheeky identification with queer culture in her salute is not for or with mainstream liberal LGBT politics, but is an expression of other forms of connectivity that rely upon small acts and interactions between herself and other non-normative subjects in subcultural spaces that geographically are not bound inside the Castro, the city's more visible gay neighborhood.

Otálvaro-Hormillosa's next stop is at the Lone Star at 1098 Howard/1354 Harrison, "a bar for bears [and] one of the few bars I don't go to in SoMA" (6:35). The video cuts as she "pops in for a little happy hour," places a green hat on her head for St. Patrick's Day and drinks her "Mexican beer," only resuming after she has exited the bar (7:21). Once outside, she hints at what might have transpired inside in the absence of video documentation:

I had a little drifting interlude at the Lone Star. I met a very nice gentleman bear. We had some drifting conversation on gay marriage, and fag hags, and gay men who fetishize lesbians, and gay marriage, and Britney Spears, who apparently is doing a free concert in front of the Castro Theater for the *Good Morning America* show. Anyway, back on track with the drift. (8:12)

Otálvaro-Hormillosa, who has turned the camera to face towards her as she speaks these lines, then pans the camera quickly back to the street in front of her, before the video cuts off abruptly; even as she says she is "getting back on track with the drift," the viewer never knows where she ends her walk or what else she encounters on the way there. Between the exclusion of footage from inside the Lone Star, and the sudden ending of the video, Otálvaro-Hormillosa's psychogeography frustrates the viewer wishing for narrative closure. Out of the performer's choice or sheer circumstance, the video requires viewers to fill in the gaps in information with their own imaginaries of what might have

been, or what may be in the future. The video's sudden end is its final gesture of utopianism; for in its indeterminacy, it opens up "a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema... a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and now is transcended by a *then* and a *there* that could be and indeed should be" (Muñoz 2009, 97). "Soma Psychogeography" forces the viewer to reckon with the past, present, and future of the South of Market without making prescriptions as to whom the space rightfully belongs.

In my own reviewing of this video, I look forwards and backwards in time; "Soma Psychogeography" challenges my understanding of the district's history, and reveals the incompleteness and the limited access I have to what happens both on- and off-camera in queer and Filipino/American spaces in SoMA. Accounts in historical archives, along with recent press and government publications, posit the LGBTQ and Filipino/American communities in South of Market as discrete entities, sharing space but not interacting within its borders. Tantalizing tidbits are heard in second- or third-hand stories from others shared in literal passing moments, such as an anecdote shared by scholar Susan Stryker as we leave YBCA in search of a bar in SoMA one December afternoon: a rumor that in 1966, the militant homophile organization the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) purchased their building from a Filipino community organization, a building which became the nation's first gay and lesbian community center in that space on Market and Sixth Street.¹⁵ Available documentation of the property holdings of the Gran Oriente Filipino Masonic Lodge, a Filipino fraternity formed so that veteranos could collectively purchase apartment complexes for their

¹⁵ Anecdote told to me in a personal conversation with Susan Stryker on December 15, 2013.

housing and social needs and the most likely party in Stryker's story, do not list any such record of sale.¹⁶ Besides this story, highlighting a relationship based on commercial transaction, what other interactions occurred then, and occur now, between white LGBTQ people and Filipino/Americans in the South of Market?

Gayle Rubin, renowned queer theorist and historian, has little to say about Filipino/Americans in her prolific body of published writing and public speaking on the history of gay male leather culture in the South of Market. Years of neighborhood activism and historical research do not include the stories of queer and Filipino/American relationality, nor discuss the possibility that some of the famed "Leathermen of the Valley of the Kings" were Filipino themselves. In claiming SoMA as an LGBTQ Social Heritage Special Use District, a collective appeal to the city government to provide protection for the remaining queer-owned businesses by designating them historical landmarks and spearheaded in part by Rubin, she elides a more complicated history between Filipino/Americans and gay communities in this place; Rubin's stories of SoMA written since the late 1980s consistently, in fact, rely on a settler colonial logic that materially and metaphorically evacuates Filipino/American presence in order to reclaim the neighborhood for white, gay leather and BDSM subcultures whose businesses and places of communal gathering are under threat.

¹⁶ The Gran Oriente Filipino Hotel, at 106 South Park, has been owned by the Gran Oriente Filipino Masonic lodge since 1920. Even though Filipinos were forbidden from purchasing private property in the 1920s, as Masons they were able to circumvent racial restrictions to housing. The Filipino Social Heritage SUD proposal states that there are two more additional properties held by the Gran Oriente Filipino in South Park; additionally there is a Masonic Temple at 95 Place Center (*Recognizing, Protecting and Memorializing South of Market Filipino Social Heritage Neighborhood Resources* [Filipino SUD]. Unpublished draft for review. San Francisco, 2011. pp. 10).

In the first instance, Rubin imagines SoMA as an “urban frontier,” an empty space available for deracinated artists, squatters, and gay men to live, work, and play with relative privacy and obscurity (Rubin 1998, 251). In a 1989 article for *Southern Oracle*, “Requiem for the Valley of the Leather Kings,” Rubin chronicles that leatherman and gay men first moved into the neighborhood in the 1970s after “earlier residents” were displaced in the first stage of the Moscone/ Yerba Buena Center redevelopment project, but does not explicitly name the racialized and transient peoples who would have comprised this residential community. Her account relies upon a developmental model in which earlier residents are entirely obliterated, allowing for other subcultural populations to flourish in this newly empty space and who transform themselves, oxymoronicly, into its native population. She writes in the same article:

Gay “leathermen” are one of the most visible and least understood of the ostensibly vanishing group of SOMA aboriginals. Reading about the world of leather in the straight press is a bit like reading about reports about indigenous peoples written by dumbfounded missionaries in the heyday of colonialism.¹⁷

While Rubin rightly calls out the homophobia of the local media, her defense of queers in the SoMA uncomfortably flattens the differences between mass genocide of native peoples with the policing, surveillance, and displacement of LGBTQ people in San Francisco. In removing Filipino/Americans from her mapping of SoMA “natives,” Rubin loses an opportunity to link the forced displacement of multiple groups to a longer history of U.S. land grabbing practices and native genocide not only within the borders of the nation but also across the Pacific. Rubin thus unwittingly colludes in the discourse of what queer theorist Scott Lauria Morgensen has called “settler homonationalism,” or a

¹⁷ Rubin, Gayle. “Elegy for the Valley of the Kings: AIDS and the Leather Community in San Francisco, 1981-1996.” *Found SF*. 1997. http://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=SOMA%27s_Gay_Leather_Kings.

white US sexual minority political culture that translates queer marginality into a normative assertion of settler citizenship (2010, 119). In noting the ways that “aboriginal” leathermen were sensationalized in popular San Francisco press, Rubin’s settler homonationalist logic presumes that “authentic Native people had already disappeared from the modern and settled spaces where queers... would be found” in the South of Market (Morgensen 2010, 119).

Rather than place the blame on Rubin, however, I find that the erasure of the social relations between Filipino/American and queer communities in the South of Market is a systemic occurrence, one initiated by city agencies in collusion with private developers; it is a discourse of claiming one’s right to place through possession of superior cultural and economic capital, and is a discourse that other marginalized groups in San Francisco repeat in order to legitimate their own claims for space.¹⁸ We can see this most clearly with the proposal for the LGBTQ Heritage Special Use District (SUD), drafted by Rubin and a coalition of other unnamed members of the “LGBTQ community” in San Francisco in 2008. While in 1989 and again in 1998, Rubin lamented the loss of the South of Market (“In the long run, the South of Market is probably lost to the leather population, despite the stubborn vitality of a few remaining strongholds”), the introduction of the Western SoMA Community Plan by the SF Planning Department

¹⁸ This is also a case where history repeats itself: as Christina Hanhardt notes, in the early 1970s, the call to clean up Central City (an area including the South of Market) of low-income Filipinos and transient queer people in order to make the neighborhood “safe” for business investment was opposed by Filipino and LGBT neighborhood organizations that unfortunately did not work in concert (2013, 62-63). Hanhardt cites William Beardemphl, former director of militant homophile organization Society for Individual Rights (SIR), who stated that “I am a firm believer that combining the homophile, homosexual revolution, gay liberation or anything else with the black community or the Asian community or with anything else or any other level except homosexual rights is wrong” (56).

provided an opening for a concerted effort to turn the tide of redevelopment (1998, 269). First proposed by the Western SoMA Citizens Planning Task Force and the Planning Department in 2008 and adopted by the Board of Supervisors in March 2013, this area plan is imagined by the city as setting a democratic agenda for residential and commercial zoning and development that takes into account the

living, historic, and sustainable neighborhood character of social, cultural and economic diversity, while integrating appropriate land use, transportation and design opportunities into equitable, evolving, and *complete* neighborhoods.¹⁹

This Area Plan proposes new land use development, environmentally sound infrastructure improvements and safety guidelines, and gives recommendations for zoning and residential density limits within the area roughly bounded by Third, Mission, Brannan, and Twelfth Streets.²⁰

Still in the initial planning stages as of early 2014, the Western SoMA Community Plan, once implemented, would guide community improvements over a twenty-year time period; as in other Area Plans in San Francisco, city agencies such as the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA), the Department of Public Works (DPW), the Mayor's Office of Economic and Workforce Development, the Public Utilities Commission, the Recreation and Parks Department, Human Services Agency (HSA), and the San Francisco Public Library would build, operate, and maintain the proposed community improvements.²¹ Open to "public" input gathered through town hall

¹⁹ Western SoMa Citizens Planning Task Force and the San Francisco Planning Department [WSoMA and CCSFPD]. *Western SoMa Community Plan*. San Francisco, Fall 2011. pp. vii; emphasis added.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:1.

²¹ Especially with the shuttering of city redevelopment agencies in California in 2012 under order from Governor Jerry Brown, funds for community infrastructure improvements necessarily rely on

meetings and correspondence, the Western SoMA Citizens Planning Task Force merely has two representatives for “residents” interests and one for “the interests of the homeless,” with a majority of members representing city agencies and Supervisors. While previous iterations of the Task Force included representatives for community-based organizations, SRO hotel residents, families, disabled, and senior residents, the Western SoMA Community Plan does not comprehensively address their particular concerns and needs. Additional advocacy for these special interest groups thus only continues through open forums such as Town Halls and other, private, meetings; some of the most organized community groups have further organized for Special Use Districts (SUDs) to be recognized within the Western SoMA Community Plan, in order to order to win gains for the imagined constituents whose interests they speak on behalf of. The LGBTQ Heritage Special Use District and Filipino Social Heritage Special Use District are the two SUDs in Western SoMA actively under consideration by the Planning Commission; although Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s psychogeography shows us otherwise, these two SUD proposals imagine the queer and Filipino/American communities as totally discrete. In both proposals, anxieties about the threat of contention between the LGBTQ and Filipino/American populations of SoMA are played out, and evidence a failure to imagine a district where both groups could flourish and thrive.

“development impact fees” charged to new development projects. Projected impact fee revenue generally funds 30% of total capital costs for plan implementation. These fees are the only dedicated revenue source for implementation of Community Improvements Program. In some cases project sponsors may provide infrastructure directly in lieu of paying developmental impact fees through in-kind agreements authorized by the Planning Commission. Other funding sources also include federal, state, regional grants; local public infrastructure funds (ie Prop K sales tax revenue); and general funds (San Francisco Planning Department [CCSFPD]. *Interagency Plan Implementation Committee Annual Report*. San Francisco, November 2012).

A Social Heritage Special Use District identifies businesses and residences as cultural resources or landmarks significant for the memorialization and maintenance of the “beliefs, customs, and practices” of a distinctive community; economic and zoning benefits accrue to these buildings, preserving them from demolition.²² While the Filipino Social Heritage SUD—roughly bounded by Third, Harrison, Tenth and Mission Streets—identifies a mix of buildings primarily associated with the arts and community centers, the LGBTQ Heritage Special Use District foregrounds the revenue-generating businesses of the Folsom Street corridor as worthy of preservation.²³ In doing so, the LGBTQ Heritage SUD appeals to the city’s Area Plans, which conceal their pro-growth agenda of expanding the development of high technology industries and private market-rate residential buildings within the language of community preservation and support of “innovation” (W SoMA and CCSFPD 2011, 2:2).

For example, to support its promotion of a “high-tech corridor” on Townsend Street, cheaper warehouse and office space south of Harrison Street, and a relaxation of office regulations throughout the district, the city planning commission equivocates transnational tech companies with the locally owned gay businesses established in the 1960s and 1970s:

²² “The term ‘social heritage’ is understood to mean those elements, both tangible and intangible, that help define the beliefs, customs, and practices of a particular community. These elements are rooted in the community’s history and are important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community. The Western SoMa Area Plan identified two groupings of social heritage resources related to Filipino Social Heritage and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Social Heritage... These areas are significant for their association with the uses, meanings and memories of these populations, rather than the architectural significance of individual buildings” (CCSFPD 2013, 88).

²³ The Filipino Social Heritage SUD identifies the following in its community zoning plan: “Business, Office, Filipino Residents, Community Facilities, Social Services, Cultural Centers, Art/Mural/Theater Art and Monument/Historical Landmark” (Central Corridor Plan 2013, 88). The LGBTQ Social Heritage SUD prioritizes the following: “Arts, Bath House, Entertainment, Foundation, Media, Nonprofit Service, Residential Hotel, Retail, and Institutional” resources (CCSFPD 2013, 88).

Commercial traditions in the Western SoMa SUD can largely be characterized by one word—innovation. To this day, the neighborhood has been one of the preferred San Francisco locations for new start up businesses that define emerging market opportunities. In part led by gay and artists communities that located in the area during the last few decades of the 20th Century, the neighborhood continues to provide a cornucopia of business types. (W SoMA and CCSFPD 2011, 2:2)

The city’s discourse transforms the gathering spaces that poor and policed LGBTQ peoples and artists collectively financed and built into mere sites of capitalist production and consumption, rendering them useful insofar as they support a justification for rezoning measures hospitable for the infiltration of technology start ups into the South of Market. Moreover, the Western SoMA Plan and other SoMA Area Plans (the Central Corridor and Eastern Neighborhood Area Plans also include sections of the South of Market) cover over the violence done to LGBTQ communities in the late 20th century, portraying San Francisco as a multicultural haven welcoming to all marginalized groups.²⁴ Even as it rightfully revises city history by directly addressing the structural and physical violence experienced by gay and leather communities throughout San Francisco, the LGBTQ Heritage SUD proposal redeploys the language of the free market when advocating for the necessity of city support for annual leather community events, such as the Folsom Street Fair:

According to the organizers, over its 17 year history, a conservative calculation is that the *Folsom Street Fair* has returned over four million dollars in earned revenue to local and national charities.²⁵

²⁴ The Central Corridor Area Plan, for example, glosses over the brutal impact of the AIDS crisis, saying: “The gay and leather occupation of SoMa reached its zenith by 1982 then shrank dramatically in the mid-1980s before stabilizing by the early 1990s” (CCSFPD 2013, 88-89).

²⁵ *Recognizing, Protecting and Memorializing South of Market LGBTQ Social Heritage Neighborhood Resources* (LGBTQ SUD). Unpublished draft for review. San Francisco, July 18, 2011. pp. 5.

An ongoing challenge thus remains for the LGBTQ Heritage District SUD committee: to avoid being co-opted into redevelopment schemes that perpetuate the displacement of low-income residents of the SoMA under the pretense of supporting LGBTQ-run businesses along the Folsom Street and Townsend corridors, while still fighting to preserving the existing bathhouses, bars, and retail centers that have long been gathering places for the gay and leather communities of San Francisco.²⁶ Queer activists organizing for the LGBTQ SUD must be aware of the ways that neoliberal multicultural discourses conflate the state's guaranteeing of economic rights with winning civil rights for minoritized communities, and the ways the granting of economic rights privilege some minoritized groups over others.²⁷

Just as the LGBTQ Heritage SUD proposal contains measures that can be read as counter to the interests of SoMA's Filipino/American community, so do the Filipino Social Heritage District in the Western SoMA zone and the Youth and Family Special Use District in Eastern SoMA zone include provisions with potentially negative consequences for both queer people and immigrants of color in San Francisco. Both of these zones emphasize a "sense of family" inherent to Filipino culture as reasons for preserving the Filipino/American residential and commercial architectures in the

²⁶ Queer studies scholars have dubbed this practice of displacing minoritized poor and immigrant communities to cater to consumption-based LGBT lifestyle businesses and tourism as "pinkwashing." Martin Manalansan writes: "Mainstream gay culture has been calcified into the enactments of consumption rituals—buying, eating, dancing, wearing, and yes, even fucking. Indeed, there is rarely any mention in the gay media of these kinds of tensions between other forms of gay cultures or other communities as well as the stepped-up policing of communities of color. The connections between the common narratives of fear and the intrusions of private gay enterprise are blissfully ignored" (2005, 149).

²⁷ Jodi Melamed warns that the neoliberal multicultural state often incorporates the rhetoric of civil rights "in order to portray 'economic rights' as the most fundamental civil right and... advocate[s] in an absolutist manner for deregulation, privatization, regulated 'free markets,' and other neoliberal measures as the only way to guarantee economic rights" (2006, 17).

neighborhood (Filipino SUD 2011, 21). Ongoing modifications to the Youth and Family SUD proposal, in particular, call for increased police surveillance, street lighting and noise ordinances to be instilled as means of protecting school-aged youth, especially around the Bessie Carmichael Elementary School and in the Minna and Natoma residential alleys where many Filipino/American families make their homes. As queer theorists such as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998), Samuel Delany (1999) and Martin Manalansan (2005) have shown, the enforcement of similar morality-based zones by city, state, and federal agencies in New York City has calcified existing hierarchies of economic privilege and social reproduction, rather than ameliorated inequalities. Simply, the increased policing of queers/of color by the state does not maintain “law and order,” but rather works to protect private property through intimidation or outright violence against those targeted for loitering in public space. I argue thus that in the SoMA, the increased policing of these alleys would criminalize the very youth of color that the proponents of the Youth and Family Zone aim to protect; the SF Police Department would clear the streets, not for the protection of Filipino/American immigrant families in SoMA, but rather to sell new residential condo conversions to high-income earners—many from outside the city, many working in tech industries—as a “safe” financial investment.

Insofar as the Youth and Family Zone lies in the Eastern SoMA zone while the LGBTQ Heritage SUD lies in the Western SoMA zone, expanding the geographic and social boundaries to accommodate both SUDs’ “preservation and memorialization” requirements would seem to be mutually beneficial. The actual porosity between Folsom Street and Natoma Alley, as we see in Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s promiscuous

wandering between these zones on her afternoon *dérive*, challenge us to reconsider the spatial claims made by both the Filipino and LGBTQ Social Heritage Special Use District committees; while each committee is well-intentioned, each group's attempts to preserve what little remains of its distinctive domain undercuts the viability of the other. As I have tried to briefly outline here, the LGBTQ Heritage SUD's emphasis on commercial venues as the lifeline of the SoMA gay and leather community runs the risk of opening the entirety of the Folsom Street corridor across both Eastern and Western SoMA zones to additional office and retail space construction with little to no affordable housing provisions included. Thinking of the pinkwashing of the Castro as a precursor for what can happen in the South of Market, I borrow from the warning issued by Martin Manalansan, who writes: "the rise of a vibrant exclusive real estate, gay commodified businesses, and other signs of the new gentrified [city] are based on the very process of eradication and disappearance of the unsightly, the vagrant, the alien, the colored, and the queer" (Manalansan 2005, 152). Likewise, in emphasizing heteronormative family values as the basis for preserving the homes and livelihoods of Filipino/Americans and other working-class residents in the SoMA, the Filipino Social Heritage and Youth and Family SUDs also risk cooptation by the city's redevelopment agenda, which would use the discourse of crime reduction and child protection as a pretense for increased surveillance and policing of sexually and racially non-normative bodies that are seen as lowering the property values of the district. This move would have deleterious consequences not only on LGBTQ-identified peoples but also on the very working-class youth of color which SOMCAN, United Playaz, and other Filipino/American neighborhood groups have mentored and organized for many years. As Amit Rai and Jasbir Puar write, activists

working for both the LGBTQ and Filipino Special Use Districts must “confront the network of complicities that structure the possibilities of resistance,” in the hopes of finding new languages and drawing new maps that can make the SoMA a safe place for *all* of the minoritized communities who make this place their home (Puar and Rai 2002, 140).

Nascent attempts in SoMA’s Filipino/American community have begun the work of imagining what such an expansive social and spatial map would look like, which more sustained efforts would need to push farther. The 2013 Annual Parol Lantern Festival and Parade, held during the December holiday season since 2003 in the South of Market and the “Filipino community’s gift and contribution to the multicultural fabric of San Francisco,” for the first time attempted to include LGBTQ issues into its social justice-themed procession (Filipino SUD 2011, 13). The festival’s 2013 theme was “*Liwanag para sa tanan: Enlightenment for All*,” and called for “celebrating movement towards a better, more inclusive society for everyone, including immigration reform and equal rights for LGBTQ.”²⁸ Sponsored by the Filipino American Development Foundation and Kularts and held in the largest open spaces in SoMA—the Yerba Buena Gardens and Jesse Square—the event’s emcees and co-hosts, Allan Manalo and Joyce Juan-Manalo, repeatedly announced this inclusionary theme throughout the evening’s performances to a crowd that swelled to roughly 200 at its largest point in the evening. Aside from the pre-event advertising and notes by the host, however, there was no other representation from queer Filipino/American groups or other LGBTQ individuals and organizations in the

²⁸ Kularts. Press release for 2013 San Francisco 11th Annual Parol Lantern Festival and Parade. *Kularts*. December 2014. <http://kularts.org/wp/kularts-presents/parol-festival/>

parade and festival. The parols, handmade by members of Filipino/American organizations, more often represented the main missions and interests of these collectivities: the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN)'s youth program featured a parol with the San Francisco skyline and Golden Gate Bridge, a representation of the urban home they want to remain living in; Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solidarity (FACES) had several eco-friendly parols powered by different renewable resources; and Bindlestiff Studios made a parol with silhouettes, in an interpretation of the shadow puppet plays the theater has featured in past productions. The winning group, Veterans Equity Center (VEC), eschewed a themed parol altogether, instead making a cardboard jeepney with the words "Biyaheng SOMA" (translated to "Journey to SOMA") emblazoned across the dash. This nonprofit was formed to support Filipino/American World War II veterans find affordable housing, receive pensions and benefits, and partners with other social service agencies in San Francisco to address the needs of the elderly population in city. Following the VEC jeepney at the parol lantern parade is to see a multigenerational cross-section of the South of Market Filipino/American community which, at least in this iteration of it, is absent of LGBTQ subjects except in name alone. Outside of this nascent attempt, then, what other formations of community—however ephemeral and passing—can be imagined or materialized?

As a queer, multiracial Filipina/Columbian artist, Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa traverses multiple spatial and social boundaries in her video psychogeography of the South of Market; turning to her work is suggestive for the ways in which it helps us answer the above question. Her body (itself a marker of and marked by complementary

and contradictory crossings of race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and class) opens up the space for me to think of Filipino/American geographies *as* queer geographies— how, historically, Filipino/Americans were produced as colonial and postcolonial subjects of the U.S. state as always already outside of the heteronormative boundaries of whiteness. Moreover, as she moves through the city’s arbitrary divisions of “west” and “east” SoMA; between “residential,” “entertainment,” and “industrial” spaces, Otálvaro-Hormillosa uncovers the ways the multiple sources of queer and Filipino affective sustenance and communal affiliation that are possible in this place. Her experience in SoMA makes no differentiation between “Filipino,” “Youth and Family,” and “LGBTQ” zones, as she beautifies each area with her mass produced plastic flower petals; her video performs a way of adding value to the place that leaves the district intact, unlike the city’s beautification schemes that would transform SoMA into a playground solely for the city’s new tech elite. Her off-camera interactions with the patrons of the Lone Star Bar, and perhaps with others on the streets that she meets, also serve as reminders of the person-to-person interactions unable to be captured by any of us trying to define the neighborhood—not by the city planning commission, not by a poster for an annual parade, not by the academic typing on a computer.

These small movements and moments, outside of the public spectacles calling for LGBTQ and Filipino/American solidarity, perhaps are what is needed for the formation of a true queer *and* Filipino/American counterpublic that, borrowing from José Muñoz, “makes an intervention in public life that defies the white normativity *and* heteronormativity of the majoritarian public sphere” (1999, 149). In his work on queer Latino/a performance practice as a strategy of disidentification with both majority and

minority discourses about Latino/a and queer bodies, Muñoz writes that performance not only remaps but also *produces* minoritarian space; disidentificatory performance “insists on a Marxian materialist impulse that *regrids* transgressive subjects and their actions as identifiable social movements” (Muñoz 1999, 149). What is primarily at stake, in Muñoz’s account and in my own, is space—who has the power to live and work in the South of Market; who is permitted to build and expand and for what purpose; and, ultimately, what defines the character of South of Market not only today but in the years to come (1999, 149). Since the late 1800s, the South of Market has been a commercial zone surreptitiously transformed into a residential zone not only by Filipino migrants but by other transients: white, black, poor, queer, male. These narratives are often forgotten by LGBTQ and Filipino/American interest groups appealing to the city in their attempts to preserve their homes, houses of worship, and places of commerce and leisure. The psychogeographic performances of Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa, however, respatialize the SoMA by bringing together seemingly disparate spaces housing queer and brown people. In the figure of Otálvaro-Hormillosa herself, as well as in her off-screen interactions at the Lone Star, she produces a sensorial experience of SoMA from which others can imagine new ways of building solidarities across difference in order to keep the district alive.

Of her art practice, Otálvaro-Hormillosa writes that she wishes to use it as “a way to create ritual in bringing people together to celebrate the queering of *mestizaje* and the hybridization of queerness... Queerness is sexuality in constant motion in a similar way that *mestizaje* functions as world transformation” (2005, 339). While seemingly a throwaway video piece paling in comparison to Otálvaro-Hormillosa’s elaborate

multimedia productions such as *Cosmic Blood*, “SoMa Psychogeography” literalizes the ritualistic movement of queerness and *mestizaje* through space and time. The *dérive* of “intentional chance” leads Otálvaro-Hormillosa to interacting with “Filipino/American” places (Langton Minipark’s Filipino American Friendship Mural) as a queer woman and “LGBTQ” places (the EndUp, the Lone Star) as a mixed-race Filipina/Colombian; through these geographic and cultural crossings, she queers both and in doing so, “rearranges the world, in the community” in order to continue her life (Robles 1989, 207). The ritualistic walk performed by Otálvaro-Hormillosa moved me towards uncovering the histories of queer and Filipino/American South of Market; another performance, which I participated in two years after first viewing “SoMA Psychogeography,” leads me down other paths to, and inside of, this place.

Performance 2: “Make Your Own Revolution”

On a bright Sunday afternoon in September 2013, the procession begins. A rag-tag group of musicians, artists, and participants emerge from the dark, graffiti-covered stairwell from the 509 Cultural Center (also known as the Luggage Store Gallery) to enter the bustle of Market Street. On this corner of Market and Sixth Streets, the chic shopping district of downtown San Francisco’s Union Square and Westfield Mall developments just two blocks away fades, the street now lined with boarded-up buildings, liquor and cigarette stores, cheap eateries, and the occasional grey market business endemic to the South of Market. Nothing nearby is like the Luggage Store, however, a gallery and performance space at 1007 Market Street run by artists Laurie Lazar and Darryl Smith

and supporting local Bay Area arts since 1991; its exceptional setting on Market Street makes it the perfect starting point for an interventionist action that melded social commentary with music, that brought beauty and lively noise to the South of Market for a fleeting moment in time.²⁹

The procession, led by local Filipino/American jazz-funk musical group Dirty Boots and folk vocalist Aireene Espiritu, leaves the Luggage Store (where an exhibit featuring murals by San Francisco-based Filipina/American muralist Cece Carpio and multimedia installations by legendary Philippines-based filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik has been staged) towards its next destination in SoMA: Bayanihan Community Center on the corner of Sixth and Howard Streets. The lead singer of Dirty Boots, Rachel Lastimosa, cuts a striking figure—a slim, pretty Filipina/American woman with long hair, she wears a large feathered indigenous-styled headdress, and a woven Kalinga belt over her red jeans. Espiritu, dressed in a white linen tunic and brown combat boots, juggles her multiple instruments—a ukulele slung across her back stays tied in a blood red scarf as she plays acoustic guitar during the walk. Lastimosa’s bandmate, James Dumlao, wearing a black porkpie hat to keep out the sun, is more subdued and simply keeps the beats on his small drum. Some participants have chosen percussion instruments—both Western and Filipino in origin—to accompany the musicians as they meander and perform through the streets of SoMA. A very enthused Kidlat Tahimik trails behind the party,

²⁹ In November 2013, it was announced that 1007 Market was bought by the nonprofit Community Arts Stabilization Trust with money from the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, with the goal of providing the space to arts organizations in rent-to-own arrangements. The goal ostensibly is for the Luggage Store to buy their building back in seven to ten years, with the money from sale being reinvested in buying more buildings for the same purpose (Coté, John. “Nonprofit Helping Arts Groups Stay in Mid-Market.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. November 12, 2013. <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Nonprofit-helping-arts-groups-stay-in-Mid-Market-4979152.php>).

simultaneously playing a gong and capturing with his iPhone the goings-on in the street. Though trailing the procession, Tahimik's appearance, too, is an arresting sight—his white dreadlocks trail wildly down his back, his loose clothes are ripped and shredded, and he wears an irrepressible smile as he both obsessively documents and participates in the events of the day. Tahimik's aesthetic, combining indigenous-influenced motifs and body fashionings, recalls that of Carlos Villa's *Ritual* with its integration of oceanic and tribal elements into a contemporary performance art piece.

As the group moves through the streets of SoMA, bystanders stop and take notice. Down Sixth Street, the poor, homeless, and transient people that make the street home clap, cheer, and walk with the procession for short moments of time. We stop in front of the Bayanihan Community Center, and see there is a large chalk drawing on the sidewalk, depicting Filipino faces and an anti-imperialist slogan in bright colors.³⁰ We gingerly stand on and around these drawings to listen to Aireene Espiritu singing quietly but fiercely, strumming her ukulele with skill and deftness as accompaniment for her remixed renditions of Filipino revolutionary folksongs. Espiritu performs two songs on the street before the sound of the buses stopping in front of the Bayanihan Center begin to drown her out. We follow her inside, to the performance space/multi-purpose room in the back

³⁰ The Bayanihan Community Center, located on the first floor of 1010 Mission Street, is part of a small complex owned by the Filipino-American Development Foundation. Sharing this space is Arkipelago Filipino Bookstore and the Veterans Equity Center. 1010 Mission Street was the former site of the Delta Hotel, purchased by a Filipino immigrant doctor Mario A. Borja in 1976 and rented to Filipino WWII veterans for low cost after Dr. Borja took over its management in 1993. He co-founded the Filipino American Development Foundation in 1997 and began to establish a community center on the ground floor of the Delta Hotel. That year, however, a large fire damaged the entire building, and was sold to TODCO (Tenant and Owners Development Corporation), a nonprofit housing developer that later worked on rebuilding the International Hotel. TODCO consolidated the building as an SRO and, under its agreement with Borja, renamed it the Bayanihan House, which opened in 2001. FADF was provided a ground floor lease for \$1 a year for twenty years, allowing for the establishment of the Bayanihan Community Center, which opened in 2005. ("History of the Filipino-American Development Foundation." *Bayanihan Community Center*. <http://www.bayanihanc.org/bcc-fadf.html>).

of the center. It is the first time I have seen it so empty—no chairs, no flyers, with no one present in the room having a meeting or hanging out. Espiritu stands under a spotlight, the only light on in the room, and sings a lullaby. One of the babies in attendance, strapped into his stroller, shakes his legs and wiggles his toes in rhythm. There is a moment of pure silence as Espiritu finishes the song while the audience takes it in. Then we move on. Dirty Boots with Espiritu lead up the group as we once again reenter the street, bathed in the bright San Francisco sunlight.

The performance's final destination, Bindlestiff Studios, is only a block or two away, back east on Sixth Avenue, but we take the scenic route instead.³¹ The group walks west on Mission, then turns onto the small side streets and alleys of SoMA—its residential, hidden, heart, where the murals and playgrounds add cheer to the small rowhouses, the new condos, and the trees lining the sidewalk. Here, the reception to the growing group of wanderers is mixed—it is hard not to take notice, whether or not you find the music pleasing, for the sheer space that the group takes up on the sidewalk and spilling over into the middle of the street. New transplants to the neighborhood—young, white, and moneyed—look at the group warily, or honk at us for blocking traffic as they move their cars. A young African American hipster opening his front door looks

³¹ Originally founded by Canadian artists Chrystene Ellis and Chris Brophy in 1989 as an experimental black box theater space, Bindlestiff Studios became the first permanent performing arts venue in the United States dedicated to Filipino/American artists in 1997. That year, Allan S. Manalo, a comedian and artistic director for the Filipino/American comedy troupe *Tongue in a Mood*, became Bindlestiff's Artistic and Managing Director, and reoriented the theater towards incubating emerging Filipino and Filipino/American artists and performers. In 2003, the SFRA acquired the building housing Bindlestiff Studio under the Ellis Act, to build a low-cost housing project. After years of negotiation and protest, Manalo and others in the Filipino/American performing arts community were able to force the SFRA to commit to building a new black box theater for Bindlestiff in the basement of the housing complex. The new Bindlestiff Studios at 185 Sixth Street opened in September 2011 (Interview with Allan Manalo, North Beach, San Francisco, July 10, 2013).

surprised, then smiles and waves us on when he sees who is performing. Longtime residents—Chicano, Filipino—sit at their windows, impassively watching this group on the streets below, wondering perhaps if these artists are just passing through, or if they mean to stay.

A moment of beauty is captured on an iPhone for posterity: the three professional musicians take up the width of Natoma Alley, first passing a playground park on their left, then a spray-painted mural of two children with the words “Grown ups, the way you live shows our children how to live. What will your legacy be? Children are the future!!!” next to them. Lastimosa, who has been strumming the guitar steadily in a hypnotic looping beat this entire time, opens her mouth to sing a wordless tune, syllables making no discernible words but echoing the rhythm of guitar. The musicians are in the shade, the mural and park are in the sun. There is a slight breeze, blowing the hair of the women and stirring one’s dress. It could be a music video shoot. It could be a Santa Cruzan procession. It is beautiful. But they continue walking, and eventually the motley crew finds itself back on Sixth Street, where we all finally enter the lobby of Bindlestiff Studios to end the procession. The moment of communal ritual has passed, the tenuous connection broken. Participants disperse—downstairs to the blackbox theater, to the restroom, outside to smoke—and return to the theater now as more passive audience members, watching the performers continue their final act on stage.

To outsiders and perhaps even to some participants, the stroll through SoMA looks aimless, a happenstance sojourn through the streets of the neighborhood that eventually finds its way back to the neighborhood’s Filipino cultural institutions. On the contrary, the performance is tightly choreographed—just far ahead enough to be

unobtrusive, Alleluia Panis, director and principal at Alleluia Panis Dance Company and the executive director of Kularts, guided the musicians so they would not get lost.³² A longtime resident of San Francisco, she knows the streets well, and found the routes most amenable, and most beautiful, for a large group to travel. Panis, in fact, is one of the lead choreographers of the entire weekend's performances—this musical walk is part of the third, and final, performance of *Make Your Own Revolution*. This series of events was held in commemoration of Proclamation No. 1081, the September 1973 declaration of Martial Law in the Philippines by dictator Ferdinand Marcos. In its second iteration—the first held the year prior, in 2012—the program was lengthened by one day, to include a repeat performance on Sunday afternoon for those not able to make Saturday evening's stroll and showcase. The event had expanded to include more durational pieces, with the films, installations, and murals of Carpio and Tahimik remaining in the Luggage Store Gallery for another month, until October 5, 2013. Significant too was this being the first collaboration between these local Filipino/American arts organizations and the Luggage Store, despite their sharing a location in the South of Market for over two decades; while

³² From the Kularts website: “founded in 1985, Kularts is the premier presenter of contemporary and tribal Pilipino arts in the United States. We are a not-for-profit arts organization based in San Francisco, California. Our mission is to inform and expand the understanding of American Pilipino culture and preserve the spirit and integrity of ancient Pilipino art forms. We produce innovative artistic works, foster mentorship among emerging and established artists, facilitate local and international collaborations; design and implement educational outreach programs for elementary through college age students; lead cultural tours to the Philippines, and more. [... Kularts] showcases contemporary and tribal Pilipino art through works by local American Pilipino and international Philippine artists. From the new world aesthetics of emerging and accomplished Pilipino American artists in POMO (Post Modern Performance Project) to the page-to-stage programs in Pinay Stories, to the transnational activities of the Philippine Master Artists In Residency Program (PMAIR), to the Parol Lantern Festival & Parade, and to exhibitions at Bayanihan Center, Kularts engages the public in contemporary and tribal Pilipino arts and culture through full-length concerts, evenings of shared programming, and through visual arts exhibits & installations” (“About Kularts.” *Kularts*. <http://www.kularts.org/about.php>). For lack of affordable space and because of executive director Panis's desire for artistic autonomy, Kularts does not have its own performance or gallery space, and instead partners with groups such as Bindlestiff Studios, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, and Bayanihan Community Center to stage its events.

the Luggage Store has long supported artists of color, Lazar and Smith more often work with fine artists, especially those with an association with the San Francisco Arts Institute, such as the late Carlos Villa discussed in the previous chapter.³³

Make Your Own Revolution: Fictions of Dictatorship served as a meditation on, and intervention into, the Marcos regime's ruses of power that held the Philippines captive for close to twenty years. It forced participants to question how far Filipinos in the homeland and the diaspora have really come since the 1986 People Power revolution ousted Marcos from power, through its presentations of stunning video documentation, satiric sendups of Imelda and Ferdinand, and live performances that made national and transnational linkages between the Philippines and the U.S., and between the Philippines and Caribbean nations.³⁴ The live performances, in particular, dramatized the divergent lineages of descent and geographies of dispersal that written work, such as the poem of Barbara Jane Reyes, asks its readers to imagine; these palimpsestic spaces and times were manifested through the bodies of the performers as much as through the content of the weekend's performances.

The focus on live performance in the 2012 and 2013 events intentionally redeployed the artistic forms most popular during Martial Law and the People Power

³³ Kidlat Tahimik serves as bridge between Luggage Store and Kularts—considered an avant-garde postcolonial filmmaker for his film *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977), Tahimik's transnational political work with San Francisco-based *babaylan* indigenous Filipina women's groups brought him into contact with Panis and Kularts. Tahimik thus straddles the line between fine artist and community-based artist, and has access to both particularly as he does not live in San Francisco and comes as an international visitor from the Philippines.

³⁴ Magabo Perez staged a reading of Narcisco Perez FBI case, in which two Filipina nurses were accused of murder in Michigan; Sean San Jose directed readings that mixed scenes from Jessica Hagedorn's novel *Dogeaters* with Junot Diaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* on the Dominican Republic and its dictator Trujillo.

Revolution. Doreen Fernandez, writing of the importance of Philippine theater before and during the 1986 People Power Revolution, notes:

In the Philippine experience, drama has been the literary form quickest to respond to current history. It does not mean that playwrights have been more courageous than poets and novelists. It simply means that Filipinos have discovered how eminently suitable drama is for dangerous times. It is flexible, amenable to improvisation, and is not pinned down to a printed page as are the other literary forms. Its natural predilection for allegory and metaphor allows it to comment indirectly and without confrontation. Its arsenal of styles allows theatre to happen anyplace where people gather and ideas can grow. (1987, 113)

While Fernandez was writing specifically about the importance of performance in the 1980s Philippines, she could just as easily be speaking of San Francisco in the present. Like the “portable poetry” of Al Robles and the Flip Poets, the outdoor perambulations of “Make Your Own Revolution” functioned as a cultural and political expression of Filipino people’s transience and an embodied enactment of the Filipino/American arts community’s mobility in San Francisco since the Philippine-American War. The curatorial team behind the weekend’s performances—which included writing workshops, musical performances and theater readings inside the three spaces, and a live art-making performance by Tahimik—was a who’s who of the Filipino/American theater world in San Francisco, with all of their individual stories and those of their organizations serving as testament to the impact of gentrification on Filipino/Americans in the South of Market: Bindlestiff director Allan Manalo, also founder of Filipino comedy troupe Tongue in a Mood; Sean San Jose, artistic director of multicultural theater group Campo Santo and a longtime program director at the established arts non-profit Intersection for the Arts;

Alleluia Panis; and the emerging musicians Dumlao and Lastimosa of Dirty Boots.³⁵ Finally, the three scholars/performers on the curatorial collective—Christine Bacareza Balance, Lucy San Pablo Burns, and Jason Magabo Perez—are all currently based in Southern California branches of the UC system, yet all three have lived at one time in the Bay, and too have experienced the shifts in San Francisco’s artistic landscape.

In naming these performers and telling of their organizational histories, I call attention to the ways that these performances signify in excess of memorializing the Martial Law period. In walking alongside and with Manalo, Panis, and company, I and other participants were transformed into witnesses to the persistence of Filipino/American communities, artists, and art organizations in the South of Market, their survival triumphing over attempts by private developers to displace these groups even as they profit from the image of SoMA’s “diverse” and “multicultural” past.³⁶ Our

³⁵ Intersection for the Arts is the oldest alternative non-profit art space in San Francisco, having been founded by an interdenominational ecumenical peace movement in 1965 (Hamlin, Jesse. “Life Met Art Here.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. June 13, 2005. <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/LIFE-MET-ART-HERE-Part-one-1965-75-Forty-years-2628356.php>).

Originally in North Beach, Intersection relocated to the Mission district in 1989, first to 766 Valencia Street, then to 446 Valencia Street, where they stayed for over twenty years. In 2011, faced with eviction from the gentrifying Mission district, former Executive Director Deborah Cullinan partnered with The Hub Bay Area, an affiliate of “a growing global community of social entrepreneurs” to bid for their new, joint permanent home in the former San Francisco Chronicle building on Mission and 5th Street. One of their partners was the 5M Project, “a major urban development project in downtown San Francisco with a focus on diversity and equity.” Today, Intersection for the Arts is lead collaborator on the 5MPlaceWorks project, “a creative placemaking and economic opportunity program that produces a spectrum of equitable employment options for low-income people and people of color with specific attention given to residents of the South of Market neighborhood” (“About 5M Placeworks.” *5M Placeworks*. <http://www.5mplaceworks.org/about/>).

³⁶ As discussed in Chapter One, there is a long history in 20th century San Francisco of the eviction of people of color from neighborhoods such as the Fillmore, only to have these evacuated districts later being publicized as sites of sanitized multicultural “arts” and “culture.” Today, this is evidenced most in the Mission district, where longtime Chicano/a artists such as René Yanez, founder of Galería de la Raza, are being evicted so that affluent young white people can move into a hip “cultural” neighborhood. As early as 2000, Yanez was under threat of losing his home, but it was finally in 2014 that speculators succeeded in having him and his family evicted from the home they had occupied since 1970 (Solnit 2000, 105).

walk evoked the procession of saints and pilgrims in Barrio Fiestas in the Philippines, enacting a similar blessing of the space through improvised and participatory musical performances rather than through the rote chanting of fixed hymns and prayers. In this shared moment of musical improvisation, with the chaotic noise of the untrained participant being woven by the skilled artists back into their melodious refrain, Dirty Boots, Panis, and Tahimik reworked the blues epistemology of Al Robles and the Flip poets to speak to the conditions of Filipinos in the present day United States. Their forms of musical improvisation labored to produce new spatial and temporal imaginaries, or as Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble and George Lipsitz write:

[Improvisation] can create performance spaces that transform physical place. It can produce performance times that interrupt and redirect historical times. The scholarly categories favored by disciplinary knowledge teach us that there is a time and a place for everything—that people need to be on time and stay in their place. That is exactly the kind of thinking that improvisation at its best can help us overcome. (2013, xxii)

If improvisation “reiterates a defining condition for rights: the capacity to freely express oneself, to be heard, to give testimony, to not be forgotten or silent,” then the performances by Dirty Boots, Panis, and Tahimik interrupted the linear history of the South of Market as a place where poor people of color once lived but do not any longer (Fischlin et al. 2013, 61). By recalling Filipino/a displacement not only from the Philippines in the wake of Martial Law but also from the South of Market since the 1970s, and then reminding us through their embodied presence that SoMA is a place where Filipino/Americans *continue* to live, these performers collectively and affectively respatialize this place. By revisiting the cultural sites and homeplaces of Filipino/Americans, the *Make Your Own Revolution* team, together with others in active

and passive participation, produced “Soma Pilipinas” on multiple scales of the body, the street, and the neighborhood. They testified to the joy of being in community with others through dance, music, and movement; their performance bore witness to the necessity of keeping open the cultural centers and sites where these creative actions can take place, not for mere pleasure, but for the very sustenance and survival of community.

The *Make Your Own Revolution* performance illuminated the resilience of Filipino/American people, but it also did something else: it offered witness to the maintenance and importance of cultural and social institutions to Filipinos in San Francisco. The plight of independent Filipino/American arts organizations such as Bindlestiff Studios to remain open in the midst of rampant real estate speculation and financial precarity is one shared by other non-profit and grassroots community and neighborhood organizations in SoMA such as Veterans Equity Center, the Galing Bata Program at Bessie Carmichael School, and United Playaz. Community spaces like Bindlestiff do complementary work to those of service-based organizations; in bringing together disparate generations and socio-economic classes of Filipino/Americans and other peoples in solidarity to share space, these cultural organizations produce and solidify forms of collectivity that are difficult to sustain with the dispersal of Filipino/Americans to East and South Bay suburbs, other San Francisco neighborhoods, and additional places far from the disappeared ethnic enclave of Manilatown.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, events such as *Make Your Own Revolution* work as ephemeral, performative idealizations of the outcomes that Filipino/American neighborhood groups and other progressive organizations want for their constituents. Thinking again about the power of improvised performance to imagining utopia-in-the-

present, *Make Your Own Revolution*—seen in its titular call for the self-generated formation of a liberatory movement—was, ultimately, a gesture to produce an “as yet unwritten future,” where the dream of a better life for people in SoMA and the Philippines is possible, and where daily celebration supersedes the difficult, everyday struggles for safe and stable homes (Lipsitz 2007, 265). Like the poetry of Al Robles and Barbara Jane Reyes, and the visual art and performance of Carlos Villa, *Make Your Own Revolution*'s crew memorialized lost pockets of Filipino San Francisco while creatively finding ways to produce affective communities across geographic distance and social location in the present, communities invested in collectively working towards a different future.

Performance 3: SOMA-Time Walk of Shame

On October 9, 2013, the first “SOMATime and the Livin’ Ain’t Easy Walk of Shame” action was held, led by the Bill Sorro Housing Program (BiSHoP) of the Veterans Equity Center, Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco, and Senior and Disability Action, with additional representation and solidarity coming from individuals and organized groups including South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN), POOR Magazine, Eviction Free San Francisco, San Francisco Tenants Union, and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project. Congregating inside the Bayanihan Community Center, housed in the first floor of the Bayanihan House (an SRO servicing some of the most indigent people in the South of Market and Tenderloin), representatives from each organization began by stating the purpose of the event and drumming up enthusiasm among the participants. The day’s targets were the landlords and developers

responsible for the most recent Ellis Act evictions and largest ongoing condo constructions, respectively, in the South of Market; structuring the spectacle as a “Walk of Shame” was designed as a public shaming of these entities, with participants visiting apartment complexes and construction sites to call attention to the displacement of residents due to abuses of the Ellis Act.

The activists’ focus on the misapplication of the Ellis Act highlighted the ways that the face of urban renewal has changed since the dismantling of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency in 2012 by then-governor Jerry Brown; rather than large-scale “slum clearance” and abuses of eminent domain law, as was seen in the Western Addition/Fillmore and Manilatown of the 1960s and 1970s, today unscrupulous landlords in concert with private developers have used the Ellis Act as a means of displacing the working class from their long-term residences. First passed by the California State Legislature in 1984, the Ellis Act (SB 505) was intended to provide landlords with a statutory right to exit the rental housing business; in the words of the bill’s co-sponsor, the California Association of Realtors (CAR), the Ellis Act “very fundamentally and simply permits the owner to cease offering the property for rent. It does not permit the owner to change the property to another use.”³⁷ For the first ten years of the act’s lifespan, only 29 Ellis evictions were filed with the San Francisco Rent Board. Beginning in the late 1990s during the first tech boom, however, Ellis Act evictions spiked: in the

³⁷ Tenants Together and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project. *The Speculator Loophole: Ellis Act Evictions in San Francisco, a report by Tenants Together and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project*. San Francisco: 2014.

1999-2000 fiscal year alone, there were 440 Ellis Act evictions.³⁸ While Ellis Act evictions decreased steadily between 2001 and 2010, the second tech boom in the city has ushered in a new wave of speculator frenzy. Speakers during the Walk of Shame cited the staggering ways that Ellis Act evictions have impacted city residents, most disproportionately the elderly and the disabled. They stated statistics such as the 170% increase in Ellis Act evictions between March 2010 and February 2013, a huge upsurge from the first decade of its passage and much higher than during the first tech boom of 1999-2000.³⁹ The activists linked this sharp increase in evictions to the misappropriation of the Ellis Act by serial investors, those who buy entire buildings to convert it to a tenancy-in-common (TIC), an ownership designation similar to condominiums. Rather than long-term landlords exiting the business, as per the original designation of the Ellis Act, researchers and activists have found that speculators owning for five years or less most often invoke the act, with many of them re-entering the rental market using other dummy corporations, to continue the cycle of buying, evicting renters, and reselling the units or buildings to buyers who can pay the exorbitant selling prices for these units.

Joining in coalition with other nascent and established grassroots organizations has been essential to publicizing and educating the general public living outside SoMA of the problems facing the neighborhood's residents. As in the International Hotel protests of the 1960s, which brought together a wide coalition of labor, political, and neighborhood groups such as "the Longshoreman, lady garment workers, Teamsters,

³⁸ Bowe, Rebecca, and Dylan Tokar. "Out of Place." *San Francisco Bay Guardian*. February 5, 2013. <http://www.sfbg.com/2013/02/05/out-place?page=0,0>

³⁹ Lagos, Maria. "San Francisco evictions surge, report finds." *San Francisco Chronicle*. November 5, 2013. <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/San-Francisco-evictions-surge-report-finds-4955020.php#page-1>

retail clerks, United Farm Workers, the U.S. Senate Committee on Aging, gay and lesbian groups, the Gray Panthers, Self-Help for the Elderly, Western Addition Project Area Committee, Tenants Organization Opposed to Redevelopment [TOOR], the Goodman Building Tenants, Potrero Hill Association, [and] Committee Against Nihonmachi Eviction,” in the first two decades of the 2000s similar cross-generational, multiracial coalitions have been forged; although temporary, they have attempted to bring together the displaced and those under threat of displacement, to strategize new ways for fighting for their homes and their lives.⁴⁰ In order to present this information to the public in a way that would effectively transmit the individual and communal trauma of the displaced, this particular collective produced a performative “Walk of Shame,” featuring music, testimonies, and performance that would invoke a range of emotions in viewers.

Similar to the *escraches* popularized by Argentinean protestors against the disappearances of their children and parents in the Dirty War, the mood of the SoMA Walk of Shame was both somber and celebratory.⁴¹ At each stop on the Walk of Shame, the loss of the homes of Filipino/Americans, other people of color, and other working poor were mourned in the form of testimonies from the evicted or displaced, punctuated by calls from housing activists for reforms in Ellis Act legislation and cries for the City government to intervene in the ongoing crisis. These actions, coming from a disparate

⁴⁰ *The Fall of the I-Hotel*, VHS, directed by Curtis Choy (Los Angeles, CA: Chonk Moonhunter Productions, 1983). Mins. 36-37.

⁴¹ Diana Taylor writes, “*escraches*, acts of public shaming, constitute a form of guerilla performance practiced by Argentina’s children of the disappeared to target criminals associated with the Dirty War. Usually *escraches* are loud, festive, and mobile demonstrations... H.I.J.O.S, the organization of children of the disappeared and political prisoners, organize carnivalesque protests that lead participants directly to a perpetrator’s home or office or to a clandestine torture center. *Escraches* are highly theatrical and well-organized... Though carnivalesque and rowdy, *escraches* enact collective trauma” (2003, 164-165).

collective bringing together wide sectors of the urban population—from the elder Filipino men and women walking slowly in the back, to the Chicano/a workers and Supervisor David Campos from the similarly-besieged Mission district marching in solidarity, to the working class white organizers involved with Eviction Free San Francisco—served as embodied testament to, and celebration of, the vitality of the anti-eviction and housing rights movement in the South of Market and beyond, its existence a small victory in the face of such massive changes in the city’s housing stock and the its resultant effects on city demographics.

The dually celebratory and mournful affective charge of the action was most clearly signified by the collective’s reworking of two blues standards: “Summertime and the Livin’ is Easy” and “Summertime Blues.” With the lyrics and titles modified to “SOMATime and the Livin’ Ain’t Easy” and “SOMA-Time Blues,” these songs drew from and produced a blues epistemology of place, a way of remembering the displaced among those still able to live in the South of Market.⁴² As Joseph Roach writes, the blues has a

ghostly power to insinuate memory between the lines, in the spaces between words, in the intonation and placements by which they are shaped in the silences by which they are deepened or contradicted... This is the purview of orature, where poetry travels on the tips of many tongues and memory flourishes at the opportunity to participate. (1996, 69)

As the procession snaked from Sixth Street to its three stops—Russ Street and Natoma, Trinity Place at 1190 Mission Street, and 744 Clementina—the lyrics to these songs playfully, yet poignantly, testified to the conditions facing many of those participating in

⁴² See Chapter One of this dissertation for a discussion of the blues epistemology.

the Walk of Shame. Even if evidence of working class people living in SoMA is being actively erased by new condo developments and Ellis Act evictions, the songs narrativized a more complex history of SoMA while the singers' presence reinserted them bodily into the district's streets. "SOMA-time Blues" narrates the story of poor elders like Arturo Noriega,⁴³ homeless due to Ellis Act evictions and a city bureaucracy that bars their access to low-income housing:

I'm-a gonna raise your rent
 I'm-a gonna raise a condo
 I'm bleed you every day
 So that I can have more dollars

Ellis Act evictions
 My landlords a dope
 (He's trying to make me think that
 there ain't no hope)

Taking back my home that I don't want to lose
 ... But there is a cure for the SOMA-time blues⁴⁴

The first verse is somber, the second verse incendiary—it invigorates the listener into action by articulating the need for ongoing resistance to displacement:

My landlord said to move out on
 Monday
 So he could re-rent my unit for a lot
 more money

I told the developer to kiss my ass
 (You try to push us out but you have no class)

I'm gonna stand and fight and I'm

⁴³ "Homeless Elder Approved for Housing at Trinity Place Gets Door Shut in Face by Developer." *POOR Magazine*. October 10, 2013. <http://poormagazine.org/node/4921>

⁴⁴ From chant flyer passed out on day of protest, October 9, 2013.

not gonna lose
 'cause there is a cure for the
 SOMA-time blues
 (DA-DA...DADA...DA-DA...DADADA) x2⁴⁵

Not content to accept their lot as displaced or soon-to-be-displaced people, the participants in the Walk of Shame articulated their stoicism through song, speech, and physical occupation of space. These songs make an ethical claim to place, calling attention to the moral bankruptcy of the developers, landlords, and speculators that have driven them out of their homes in their relentless quest for profit. These musical expressions, Katherine McKittrick reminds us, are fundamentally geographic: they are about place because they alter the soundscape, filling the air with the history of Filipino/American lives that have been rendered invisible in the South of Market (2006, 138). The song's moral imperative, utilized by a majority of organizations involved in the anti-eviction struggle in San Francisco, accompanies the testimonies of the evicted, most powerful when it comes to the elderly and disabled targeted by the Ellis Act. Cases such as that of Lee family and 98-year-old Mary Elizabeth Phillips have galvanized the largest collective actions on their behalf; their advanced age has served as prime evidence of the anti-people policies of private industry.⁴⁶ While anti-eviction activists were not able to save the home of Gum Gee Lee (73 years old), her husband Poon Heung Lee (80 years old) and their 48-year-old disabled daughter in fall 2013, their increased pressure on real estate speculator Urban Green won a small victory in July 2014 for Mary Phillips to

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Fagan, Kevin. "S.F. family loses fight, evicted after 34 years," *San Francisco Chronicle*. October 24, 2013. <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/S-F-family-loses-fight-evicted-after-34-years-4920650.php>

remain in her Mission district apartment.⁴⁷ This win can be attributed, in part, to increased public outcry about Ellis Act abuses, with spectacles such as the Walk of Shame being the major catalysts for wider media coverage and public awareness.

In bringing the private lives of the evicted into the public realm of the streets through song, testimony, and physical presence, such processional spectacles as the Walk of Shame accomplish two tasks. First, by revealing the back-door dealings that developers and landlords try to conceal, the SoMA Walk of Shame turned out the private into the public realm. Using the personal stories of elders, youth, and workers, these organizers—many of whom are the very people most affected by redevelopment—challenge dominant narratives of the evicted as undeserving of basic housing rights and protections; the performance reinvests value in Filipino/American lives, value that has attempted to be stripped from them over the fifty-year course of urban renewal projects in the San Francisco Bay Area. Their presence, articulated through performance, illuminates Filipino/American presence as an integral and meaningful part of the cityscape (McKittrick 2006, 139). Secondly, as with all of the processional performances in this chapter, the Walk of Shame fostered a nascent community of individuals and organizations desiring to seek changes in local and state rental and housing policy, with a mix of scornful outrage and fierce resistance; this sentiment is embodied clearly in the elder Mary Phillips, who had these words for reporters: “Just because of your age, don’t

⁴⁷ Brown, Kristen B. “Landlord will not evict 98-year-old woman, after all.” *San Francisco Chronicle* [Blog]. July 11, 2014. <http://blog.sfgate.com/techchron/2014/07/11/landlord-will-not-evict-98-year-old-woman-after-all/>

let people push you around.”⁴⁸ Her determination to stay in her home echoes the lyrics of the “SOMA-Time Blues,” repeating like refrain alongside the younger generations who march the streets of San Francisco on her behalf. In collectively singing a verse written in the singular first person (“I’m gonna stand and fight and I’m / not gonna lose / ‘cause there is a cure for the/ SOMA-time blues”), participants in the march and witnesses interpellate themselves into a coalitional struggle against the “SOMA-time blues.” In their becoming one through verse, singers produce a form of collective counter-memory that recreates as well as affectively restores what abusers of the Ellis Act have tried to strip: the homes, lives, and belonging to SoMA that Filipino/Americans and other working-class, queer, and other communities of color have spent years building. While these processions alone will not bring people back into their homes, they enable the forging of longer-lasting bonds of coalition necessary to develop and sustain the anti-eviction and anti-gentrification movement that the San Francisco Bay Area still desperately needs.

Connection After Displacement

The history of Filipino/Americans in the South of Market has been difficult to track through the official archive; with the redevelopment of the South of Market being a continually unfolding process, I have best been able to follow the changes through the daily reports circulated on online newspapers, blogs, viral social media posts, and word of mouth. Through online and in-person conversations with housing activists and through

⁴⁸ Sevilla, Marlo. “Woman, 98, Evicted from San Francisco Apartment After 50 Years.” *KRON 4*. July 9, 2014. <http://news.kron4.com/news/woman-98-evicted-from-san-francisco-apartment-after-50-years/>

constant combing of the internet, I have only begun to corral the unwieldy forms of information about Ellis Act evictions; backdoor deals between local politicians, tech CEOs, residential and commercial developers; and activist demands for preserving a mixed-use but still residential neighborhood actively under erasure. The impossibility of fully synthesizing this information is not unique to my subject—as all archives are fragile and partial, as Performance Studies scholars such as Diana Taylor and Joseph Roach are quick to remind—but the precarity of the online archive uncannily mirrors the precarity of life in the present moment, especially in places like the South of Market, places whose very physical borders are being redefined by developers interested in cashing in on the promises of benevolent technology.

Even as technology firms promise more connectivity, more social interaction, and more access to information for their users, their physical presence in places like the South of Market and the Mission have led to the disruption of existing Filipino/American, queer, and/or working class community formations in this neighborhood; from Google buses that take up public infrastructure without paying city fees and which isolate its transplant employees from the everyday lives of the people taking public transport, to the catering of new businesses to their tastes and desires, the South of Market and other districts in the downtown core are being transformed without concern for longstanding residents' wellbeing or livelihoods in mind. To work against the logic of increased technological “connectivity” without deep-seated ties, performances like those discussed in this chapter endeavor to produce alternative models of connection that bring together, even ephemerally or tangentially, those treated as excess populations.

The three performances discussed in this chapter, for all their formal and political differences, all labor to contest two dominant discourses: 1) that SOMA is a place without permanent residents, with available real estate for development of tech and other businesses profiting from new neoliberal, flexible, globalized economy; and that 2) technology brings people together, as a means of social connection through social media (Twitter, Facebook), and that tech businesses' presence in San Francisco is an unmitigated positive source of financial growth and social exchange. Working on different geographic scales and engaging different, yet interconnected, local, national, and transnational histories of Filipino/Americans, these performances all deploy the dual affectivities of mourning and militancy to illuminate their political claims.⁴⁹ The SoMA Walk of Shame, through its reworking of blues songs, contests the effects of the misapplication of the Ellis Act in the city and its disproportionate impact on the elderly and the disabled. It remembers those who have lost their homes since the Western Addition and Manilatown redevelopment projects of the 1960s and 1970s, and pushes for a continuation of organized, collective action that incorporates both anger at the loss of homes and joy in the sustenance of community despite these losses. Gigi Otálvaro-Hormillosa's psychogeographic *dérive* through SoMA illuminates the overlapping histories and geographies of LGBTQ and Filipino/American people in the district, and in

⁴⁹ Douglas Crimp's seminal essay, "Mourning and Militancy" (1989) reconfigures Freud's pathologization of mourning, to consider the ways in which AIDS activism in the 1980s produces forms of militancy through the productive use of mourning. He writes: "...militancy might arise from conscious conflicts *within* mourning itself, the consequence, on the one hand, of 'inadvisable and harmful interference' with grief and, on the other, of the impossibility of deciding whether the mourning will share the fate of the mourned" (10). He writes that a militant mourning arises from dealing with not only the "dismal toll of death" but also a "culture of sexual possibility" and pleasure (11). He calls us to see that militant AIDS activism works through both loss and pleasure, to work against "civilization's law of compulsory genital heterosexuality" and other forms of normative discourse and practice (11). In that vein, I too wish to consider what other kinds of affects can be channeled by queer and of color people through activism and performance today.

doing so, pushes one to reconsider tactics for fighting for space that includes both constituencies. In its memorialization of the trauma of displacement wrought by Martial Law, *Make Your Own Revolution* also celebrates the ongoing presence of Filipino people and Filipino/American and other independent arts organizations in the city; through improvisation, it looks forward to an alternative future while also looking backwards to the lessons of past collective struggle.

Together, these performances produce new worlds and create queer counterpublics, showing us new modes of being in connection and of having “connectivity.” As José Muñoz writes:

Oppositional counterpublics are enabled by visions, “worldviews,” that reshape as they deconstruct reality. Such counterpublics are the aftermath of minoritarian performance. Such performances *transport* the performer *and* the spectator to a vantage point where transformation and politics are imaginable. Worldmaking performances produce these vantage points by slicing into the façade of the real that is the majoritarian public sphere. (1999, 195-6; emphasis in original)

Through walking the streets of the South of Market, the performers and other participants are transformed into cartographers, respatializing the district into one hospitable to the labor and lives of working class people of color, queer peoples, and others who the city and developers have zoned out and displaced. These performances are both forward- and backward-looking: they re-enact the kinesthetic memories of longtime SoMA residents as well as project a future where they can continue to live here.⁵⁰ Finally, these performances challenge those of us who participate, are eyewitnesses to, or encounter accounts of them on the printed page to question our own motivations for being in the

⁵⁰ Muñoz writes: “If disidentificatory performance transports us across symbolic space, it also inserts us in a coterminous time where we witness a new formation within the present and the future” (1999, 198).

SoMA. Do we arrive to the space as a newcomer, a lifetime resident, a tourist, a voyeur, the *flâneur* or the ethical witness? How do we position ourselves in this place, and what will be our impact in the short- and long-term future? Will we actively join in solidarity with this oppositional counterpublic, or do we turn a blind eye to the gentrification of the South of Market and other downtown San Francisco neighborhoods? Moreover, what ethical forms of action—through creative interventions or material struggle—will we perform to realize the utopian dreams that the cultural producers from this and the preceding chapters have for a Filipino San Francisco?

CODA
**“To Organize the World, To Make It Universally
Accessible and Useful”**

Under the cover of darkness, they hunt. Beautiful, successful businesswomen in Silicon Valley corporation Manananggoogle, Inc. by day, they transform into voracious eaters of entrails and unborn babies once night falls. They are members of the pantheon of Filipino folkloric monsters transported to the New World, now making their demonic presence known not only to the people of Northern California, but throughout the globalized world. Is anyone safe from the clutches of the dreaded Manananggoogle?

In the brief discussion that follows, I explore a recent body of work by the Filipina/American performance and visual art collective, the Mail Order Brides (M.O.B.). I read M.O.B.’s *Manananggoogle Project* for the ways their relocation of the Filipino demon to California’s Silicon Valley provides a critical commentary on global circuits of political and economic exchange, mapping the local and regional economies that voraciously consume the labor and lives of Filipina women and other communities of color. I also use this opportunity to think through the decolonial, feminist and queer politics that can be opened up through the *Manananggoogle Project*—of adopting the radical worldview that of this feminized Filipina monster as our own.

Since 1995, Reanne “Immaculata” Estrada, Eliza “Neneng” Barrios, and Jenifer “Baby” Wofford have collaborated as the Mail Order Brides. Independent visual and performing artists currently based between Los Angeles and San Francisco, the three have occasionally come together to produce live and taped performances, installations,

photo and video series that skewer American and Filipino popular culture. From the Southern gothic/neo-noir karaoke video “Mail Order Bride of Frankenstein,” their Technicolor photo shoots at the over-the-top Madonna Inn in Central California, to their “Rent-A-Bridesmaid” services at San Francisco City Hall, the Mail Order Brides have made their name playing with gendered and racial discourses of Filipina femininity in a signature flamboyant and camp style. With their garish white-face makeup, shellacked up-dos, and *terno* dresses, perfected over the past eighteen years of their collaboration, the three M.O.B.s evoke nothing as much as an Imelda Marcos returned from the grave, a revenant of Filipino (post)colonial excess that refuses to die in the modern age.¹

M.O.B. take monstrosity quite literally in their latest series, *Manananggoogle*, performing as high-powered executives at a company whose name is a mashup of two different terrors—that of the Filipino monster, the manananggal, and the other of a truly global corporation with physical headquarters in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. In this satiric sendup, M.O.B. update the visual representation of the manananggal, one of a class of folkloric monsters in the Philippines known as *aswang* which “incorporate aspects of five creatures: witch, self-segmenting viscera sucker, were-beast, bloodsucker, and corpse eater” (Lim 2009, 97). The manananggal is unique among other *aswang* in part for its gender presentation as “an attractive woman by day, buxom, long haired, and light-complexioned” that, on its nightly hunt, “discards its lower body from the waist down and flies in search of human prey” (99). The manananggal’s prey of choice is also similarly gendered—they are feared for hunting pregnant women, their long thread-like

¹ A *terno* is a traditional woman’s dress from the Philippines, and the clothing item was popularized in the 1970s by Imelda Marcos, the wife of Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos. She was famously called the “Iron Butterfly,” in part for her association with the *terno*, a one-piece dress with butterfly sleeves.

tongues piercing the women's bellies to suck out the fetus (97). While M.O.B. stay fairly true to the physical description of the monster, these characters are successful tech executives—the powerholders of Manananggoogle, Inc.—rather than the rural and poor Filipina women usually associated with being manananggal.

Commissioned as part of a mini-retrospective at the San Jose Museum of Art in 2012, the *Manananggoogle* exhibit consisted of six photographic prints and props from the photo shoot. Accompanying the exhibit, M.O.B. also created a publicly accessible website for the Manananggoogle Corporation, where viewers learn of the company's founding in 1898 and its mission “to organize the world and [to] make it universally accessible and useful.”² Visitors encountered *Manananggoogle* immediately after entering the main gallery space of SJMA from the second floor foyer. Six photographic prints flank a large boardroom table covered with props: we find three binders and a Rolodex (all having entrails spilling out of them) and several branded company mugs. In the prints, we see three “before” and three “after” shots of Mail Order Brides-as-businesswomen. In the before shots we encounter a triptych of “Executive Portraits” of Mail Order Brides (R. Immaculata Estrada as Chief Executive Office, E. Neneng Barrios as Chief Operating Office, and J. Baby Wofford as Chief Financial Officer of Manananggoogle, Inc); the three seated around the boardroom table staring imperiously at the camera as if we have interrupted their “Conference”; and a third shot of the women relaxing (though looking quite discomfited) during their “Coffee Break.”

² Mail Order Brides. “About Manananggoogle.” *Manananggoogle, Inc.* <http://manananggoogle.com/about-manananggoogle/>

The location of Manananggoogle Inc. in Silicon Valley and the displaying of this exhibit in the heart of downtown San Jose reflect the local, national, and global scales of capitalist circulation compressed in this region. In their human form, the Manananggoogle executives embody the fantasy of progress expounded by global technology companies based in Bay Area cities such as Mountain View and Cupertino. Many of them prominently feature female CEOs, CFOs, and COOs—such as eBay’s Meg Whitman, who ran a multimillion dollar campaign for the 2010 California gubernatorial seat—as evidence of the full incorporation of women into the national workforce. The technology that these companies proffer, moreover, promises open access to information without bias—and in real time at that. Like the manananggal whose true nature is hidden in daylight, companies like Apple and Google hold their customers in thrall, seducing them by their aesthetics and their delivery of information at ever-faster speeds on their ever-faster proprietary devices. The seductive power of technological innovation has worldwide reach, even as these companies’ headquarters are based in the former farmlands of Northern California, a true accomplishment that would make any earth-bound manananggal proud.

If Benedict Anderson’s imagined national community is bound together by the newspaper—by delivering a fantasy that throughout the nation, there is a simultaneous consumption of the very same information—the global community dreamed up in Silicon Valley is bound together by the iPhone, through which consumers can participate in the sharing of news, business and fun communication through email, online chat, Facebook

posts, and other social media and online services.³ The discourse of “calendrical coincidence”—borrowing from Bliss Cua Lim’s phrase—of simultaneous media consumption flattens world time, as technology touts itself as bridging differences and distance in social and geographical location to produce an ever-increasingly modern, liberal and multicultural world community. This is perhaps the greatest fantasy envisioned by the Mananangooglees of Silicon Valley—a more harmonious, open global society, (re)produced and managed through the benevolent use of technology.

As the visitor to *Mananangoogle* discovers, however, the beautiful veneer of modernity has its dark underbelly. Hanging on the adjacent wall, the three “afterhours” prints of the Mananangoogle execs, now revealing their true form as manananggal, are far more sinister and playful: “Feeding” shows the manananggals, hard at work, greedily devouring entrails from an unseen victim; “Fission” reveals the three digesting their meals before completely detaching their lower human halves to fly away to continue their hunt; what is left behind, finally, is depicted in the last photo of the series, “The Bottoms.”

If the viewer did not know of the manananggal’s deadly duplicity before encountering these images, it becomes apparent by the end of the photo series why it the Mail Order Brides were so taken with the monster to comment upon the contemporary tech industry: like the manananggal, Silicon Valley companies disguise their true nature while sucking the lives from poor communities and communities of color. On the Mananangoogle Corporation website, a map of its headquarters in Mountain View –

³ Bliss Cua Lim, expanding on Benedict Anderson, writes that consumption of the national newspaper produces “an experience of ‘calendrical coincidence’ [that] fosters an imagined national meanwhile” (2009, 126).

established in 1946, coincidentally the same year as the Philippines's "independence" from the United States—casts a dark shadow over the greater Peninsula. The region's main traffic routes are stained red, giving bodily inflection to the arteries of local travel and global commerce the map represents. On the regional scale, these arteries illuminate the bleeding out of labor, investment, and infrastructure from formerly dominant economic sectors and locales—from farmlands and suburbia of the East Bay to the banking and financial industries of downtown San Francisco—into the new edge nodes of Silicon Valley. While once agriculture was the lifeblood of Northern California, with war industries and postwar suburban construction giving the region new life in the mid-1900s, the two tech booms of the 1990s and 2000s have created new centers of commerce, construction, and development in Silicon Valley that, once again, only benefit a few at the expense of many.

In the Bay Area region, communities of color have economically been "sucked dry" by the ongoing dot-com and real estate boom-and-bust cycles of the 1990s and 2000s. Even as San Jose has the second largest highest per-capita income of any city in the US, mostly going in the pockets of tech professionals,⁴ cities and suburbs such as Stockton and Vallejo, from where many poorer service workers to Silicon Valley make their supercommute, were the hardest hit by the subprime mortgage crisis.⁵ In San Francisco, housing and rental prices have hit an all-time high in desirable, gentrifying neighborhoods such as the South of Market, the Mission and Bernal Heights, where

⁴ Lewis, Michael. "California and Bust." *Vanity Fair*. November 2011.
<http://www.vanityfair.com/business/features/2011/11/michael-lewis-201111>

⁵ Rohr, Mimi. "Stockton, the Epicenter of the Subprime Mortgage Crisis in the U.S." *Gamma*. 2008.
<http://gamma.fnphoto.com/stories/Texts/2385-text.html>

young tech professionals enjoy “ethnic” foods and new “local” business while pushing out the very Latino/a, Filipino, and black communities that have given these places their very “diverse” character. Like the Mananangoogle executives, it is the developers, programmers, and middle management in these harbingers of modernity whom have greatly profited, at the expense of those left out of this bubble centered quite literally in their own backyards.

In a place discursively produced as a “Happy Valley” of prosperity for all its inhabitants and workers, Silicon Valley’s effects on women’s bodies differentially across lines of race and class mimic the manananggal’s gendered predatory logics. In many contemporary aswang films, the manananggal descends into the poorest slums of the city or the barrios in the provinces, finding young and vulnerable women with little cultural or economic capital to protect them from the monster. Meanwhile, the manananggal herself, while in human form as a beautiful woman, is able to move freely throughout the city or countryside, reaping the social privileges accorded to the area’s most beautiful women. Likewise, the manananggal’s targeting of the unborn fetus in Philippine myth perfectly, and tragically, mimics the disproportionate risk to reproductive health for women working in Silicon Valley’s sweatshops. David Pellow and Lisa Sun Hee Park, in their searing account *The Silicon Valley of Dreams: Environmental Injustice, Immigrant Workers, and the High-Tech Global Economy* (2002), document that “miscarriages, birth defects, sterility, distorted menstrual cycles, toxic breast milk, and breast cancer are only a handful of the illnesses and disorders women electronics workers face” (12). For these women, on the scale of the body, to be a victim of the manananggal is to also experience real harm to your person *and* to the land that you live on. From the exploitation of

feminized workers on the factory line, making microchips and assembling iPhones in hazardous conditions in China's Guangzhou province, to the environmental destruction in the Silicon Valley, which hosts the highest density of federally designated toxic Superfund sites in the nation, Manananggoogle respects no national boundaries or the sanctity of the individual body in its pursuit of profit.⁶ The natural landscapes rendered unnatural, unhealthy and monstrous by the imposition of global corporations spans from Mountainview to Manila and to the rural places in between. They are located in places given designations like "Export Processing Zones" in order to escape regulation and remain sites of great physical pain for the women most targeted to work there.

Even as the Silicon Valley is a geography of death for the women on the assembly line, other feminized bodies—those of the executives spoofed by the Mail Order Brides—have become the spokespeople for mainstream feminist "success," their entry into leadership positions in highly male-dominated corporations being used to sell the idea that any woman can, in Sheryl Sandberg's terms, "lean in" to achieve power in the boardroom. M.O.B.'s critique of this privileged and highly limited conception of feminist self-realization was most evident in their site-specific, participatory performance on October 12, 2013. Conducted at the downtown San Francisco offices of the Global Fund for Women, "Divide//Conquer: The Manananggoogle Onboarding Experience" invited approximately forty "new hires" for "an enthralling evening of immersive indoctrination." Told only to "dress to impress," this small group of fellow artists,

⁶ According to David Pellow and Lisa Park: "The 'Valley of the Heart's Delight' is often referred to as the 'Valley of Toxic Fright' by environmentalists and occupational health advocates. The Valley... consistently ranks among the top cities in the United States with regard to urban sprawl patterns, average time spent on the freeway, and auto-related smog" (2002, 19).

scholars, activists and other curious folks were surprised on arrival with multiple training videos (a mix of movie clips from classic 80s office films like *Working Girl*, YouTube videos of *aswang* films and lip-synched performances from the Philippines, and disorienting digital montages created by Barrios), and gender-specific “team building” challenges run by the three Manananggoogle executives and with the assistance of their three submissive Renfields A, B, and C. Emphasizing the gender inequality in the white collar workforce of the real world, the Mail Order Brides’s exercises worked to playfully overturn the glass ceiling, by training the female hires to harness tyrannical power, at one point having us cheer/jeer at the male hires made to run an obstacle course consisting of menial clerical tasks such as stapling and carrying trays of coffee.

With its emphasis on creating tongue-in-cheek group bonding experiences over shared exercises in domination, the “Manananggoogle Onboarding Experience” could easily be read as one-note, a light and entertaining reminder for the small group of us—good Bay Area lefties who already “get” the politics—of the need to overturn gender hierarchies. Yet, I would argue that the very affective community of joyousness and play that was produced that evening was a performative iteration of the affects needed to reproduce global capitalism—or the need to produce collective indifference to labor exploitation in exchange for the promise of creating superficial connections through social media and other technology. The infamous video game and sports rooms at Apple, the free lunches in the Google cafeteria and bikes on the Google “campus,” the colorful open office spaces at Zygnna: these infantilizing work spaces are built to create an atmosphere of “fun” that benevolently reproduces neocolonial divisions between the First and Third Worlds. Even with women at the helm of some of these corporations, the

pursuit of profit and violation of workers' rights remains unchanged, the boys club as intact as ever.

As the new hires exited the building at the close of the performance, we came across a table of branded Manananggoogle merchandise: several coffee cups, and their version of Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's bestselling self-help book, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, its subtitle reworked to instead evoke Nietzschean commentary on human nature: *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Power*. What is the "community" of women that Sandberg's book conjures and celebrates as central to winning it all, in the bedroom and in the boardroom? Manananggoogle's version of leaning in makes its methods far more transparent by refusing to hide the insatiable appetites and predatory impulses of its aswang executives. In their consumption of those beneath their station, the Manananggoogle executive literalizes the master-slave dynamic of global power, and reveals that such exploitation is not unique to the contemporary work force, but has a much longer genealogy and expansive geography based in Euro-American domination of racialized Others. Using the aswang as mascot, Manananggoogle's mission of "reorganizing the world" satirizes late capitalism's predatory logics as rearticulations of colonial divisions between human and non-human, between master and slave; so central is this logic that "Divide and Conquer" is Manananggoogle's slogan, framing the company's bloody logo on its website. As the project takes pains to remind us, preying on the poor and brown has long precedent; the 1898 founding date of Manananggoogle not coincidentally marks the year of America's violent acquisition of the Philippines. In relocating the manananggals to Silicon Valley, the Mail Order Brides's project allows us to see that rather than being discrete and

separate, the spatiotemporal borders between the rural, global South and the modern, global North are actually mutually dependent and quite permeable. Their work also reminds us that the creation of a modern, wired society continues to rely on things imagined to have been “left behind” in the global South: on the exploitation of feminized laborers trafficked across and between national borders, and on the sucking dry of natural resources for the creation of unnatural technology. Manananggoogle, Inc. and the globalized industries it is based on, thus simply *works*—both literally and metaphorically—by collapsing the geographic distance between the Philippines and the US and compressing the elapsed time between the pre-modern world of aswangs and the hyperreal future of high technology. That these industries predispose so many to premature death is the true terror that the Mail Order Brides personify as the executives of Manananggoogle, Inc.; their callousness and embrace of death for their pleasure makes them not bygone creatures of the past but the perfect symbols of the modern world.

In this coda, I have only read the Mail Order Brides’ manananggals as the [white] female tech executives shown in this exhibit. I wonder, however, what kind of alternative reading would emerge if the manananggals were not, in fact, the executives but rather the women of color who labor in various lower roles for these high-tech behemoths. What if they, in fact, were Filipina women as programmers, project managers, and other middle management, or even the service workers in the cafeterias and as the caretakers inside the homes of Google office workers? If the manananggal were these racialized, gendered subjects, how would my entire reading of M.O.B.’s performance shift? Would it be possible to see radical possibility in the manananggal—as the worker who is hired as a “safe bet,” easily exploitable and imagined as keeping up good appearances, yet who is

ultimately able to cannibalize the entire system from the inside? What if the entrails spilling out of the rolodexes and binders on the table were those of the real power-holders, eaten and ultimately replaced by the manananggal women?

The manananggal as folkloric creature has roots in precolonial Philippine belief systems, but was first documented by Spanish friars who used the fearsome creature to discredit *babaylans*—Filipina women who served as healers, midwives, and respected elders in their local communities (De Guia 2005, 46). Decolonizing the monstrous figure of the *manananggal* to return her to her human form, she no longer is a viscera-sucker or predatory creature, but is the bearer of *kapwa*, an intersubjective notion of personhood based on mutual cooperation with and dependency on nature and on your fellow wo/man (9). She too reorients space and time, but not with the aim of exploitation, of dividing and conquering others, but of working for mutual benefit of all. Katrin De Guia calls the time of *kapwa* consciousness “unstructured” or “experiential” time, a “felt time filled with memories, not the repetitive staccato of machine time, nor the sterile flip-on/off bytes of computer time” (22). The space of “out there” where toxins can be dumped and chemicals expelled with impunity is instead seen as one’s “here,” one’s home that must be respected, not drained of resources nor destroyed for profit (10). Clearly, such an ethical reorientation of the world “to make it universally accessible and useful” is the antithesis to that of the fictitious Manananggoogle Corporation and the very real Apples and Googles of Silicon Valley. This is the world that Mail Order Bride’s manananggals are ushering in, and is a beautifully monstrous vision indeed.

After the I-Hotel?

This project ends with visions of the monstrous, but perhaps it is better to consider ghosts. Returning to José Muñoz one last time, I am taken by his call to reshape social relations—temporally and spatially—by transforming, in part, our ways of seeing, moving, and experiencing the world:

To see ghosts we must certainly read the “specific dealings, specific rhythms” that bring to life a lost experience, a temporally situated picture of social experience, that needs to be read in photo images, gaps, auras, residues, and negations... But if the eye is sensitized in a certain way, if it can catch other visual frequencies that render specific distillations of lived experience and ground-level history accessible, it can potentially see the ghostly presence of a certain structure of feeling. (2009, 42)

This project has been an exercise in looking for the ghosts—those long buried, those still among us—of Filipino San Francisco. Over the course of four chapters I explored the various strategies through which Filipino/American writers, visual artists, and performers have dared to imagine place differently, and by doing so, uncovering sites of Filipino/American pasts, presents, and futures. These artists have transvalued blighted populations into communities useful outside of capitalism’s dictates to being productive through the blues’s tones of uplift; they have reconceptualized Filipino/American flight from urban centers to suburbia not only out of “conservatism” or anti-manong sentiment, but because of real fears of violence experienced in the Philippines under martial law; they have absented the manong figure from conceptual art and performance pieces in the hopes of forging Filipino/American presence in downtown San Francisco in the physical absence of the I-Hotel as home-place and as meeting site; and they have taken psychogeographic and peripatetic walks as embodied practices of occupying space in the

South of Market to mark it continually and repetitively as a place of Filipino/American residence and leisure.

None of these creative strategies is without difficulty or contradictions, but all offer modes of imagining affiliation that *must* continue in the present moment as San Francisco continues to reshape itself in order to profit an elite few at the expense of the rest. Al Robles's poetry invokes Third World connections between Filipino/Americans with black Americans and other people of color, his poems opening an avenue to study the ways urban redevelopment schemes mark communities of color as socially and sexually disorganized, violent, and in need of increased surveillance and eventual eviction as "blighted" populations. Barbara Jane Reyes's poem "Placemarkers" suggests alternative affiliations possible between suburban-based Filipino/Americans with inner-city Filipino/American residents of San Francisco—to imagine possible political alliances that can be built if U.S. involvement in the Philippines (from the Philippine-American War of 1899, through backing of Marcos dictatorship, to the U.S. War on Terror) can link the violence of urban renewal to continuing anti-immigrant violence in suburbia as having the same transnational roots. Carlos Villa's visual art and performance practice expands the category of Filipino American art outside of a fixed genre, opening up avenues of flexible representation and multiple forms of engagement with working class Filipino/American communities—expanding conceptions of political artmaking praxis to include abstract and conceptual art *and* encouraging us to find avenues such as teaching/education, dialogue and symposia as opportunities for constructive dialogue and collectivity mobilizing against eviction. It is in the act of *being there* that successful anti-eviction politics continue to be waged, as the *dérive* performances of Gigi Otlavaro

Hormillosa, *Make Your Own Revolution* collective, and “SOMA Walk of Shame” action remind us. These performances reclaim the city as belonging to multiple marginalized communities, and coupled with large-scale mass mobilization (sit-ins, occupations, demonstrations, strikes, escraches, etc.), it is a reminder that visibility and physical presence on city streets still matters, especially as the internet and other forms of technology promise connectivity virtually while severing our physical connections to our neighbors, districts, our local places. Finally, Mail Order Brides’s Mananangoole Inc. breaks us out of our normalized perceptions of space, perceptions that have us believe that the evictions of working-class peoples, the influx of skyscrapers and new offices, and the increased amount of homeless in the streets are natural parts of the urban landscape.

Together, these cultural productions conjure up the ghosts of Manilatown, repurposing the past for the present, into the future. These—and all of us still here, in this City by the Bay—are the afterlives of the International Hotel.

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