

Indelible Practices of Hope: Worldbuilding 1990s Los Angeles

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Abstract

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Indelible Practices of Hope: Worldbuilding 1990s Los Angeles explores the ontological implications of one generation's cultural practice for communities of color in a diverse, multilingual urban hub. Defining hope as the creation of new possibilities, my research weaves together an analysis of media, literature, and cultural praxis. I show how shared strategies of radical worldbuilding, the hopeful envisioning of new worlds, connect seemingly disparate forms of cultural production. Embedded in a long historical analysis, radical worldbuilding uses narrative strategies as practices of hope to make decolonial visions a reality. In the first two chapters of *Indelible Practices of Hope*, I argue that Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* and Alejandro Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues* challenge their audiences through

radical worldbuilding narrative strategies, compelling audience members to see their complicity in neo-colonialism. The second half of the project leaves traditional texts behind to analyze cultural practice as cultural production. The chapter, “This Bridge Called Instagram: Collective Worldbuilding through Analogue and Digital Convivencia” reads the digital archive that documents the 1990s party crew communities as curated by Los Angeles artist Guadalupe Rosales, showing how Rosales’ use of Instagram facilitates hopeful worldbuilding. Connecting practices from the 1990s to those in the twenty-first century, the chapter ““Oppression exists, but not here”” | The Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade and the Importance of Storytelling,” reads the work of a Chicana and Womxn-of-color bicycle brigade from South East Los Angeles, as resistance frameworks built via practices of hope. As an example, by subscribing to different realities, the meeting guideline and narrative strategy “oppression exists, but not here” enacts radical worldbuilding through the creation of a space that is supportive, equitable, and lifegiving; it is propositional, not only oppositional.

Indelible Practices of Hope: Worldbuilding 1990's Los Angeles

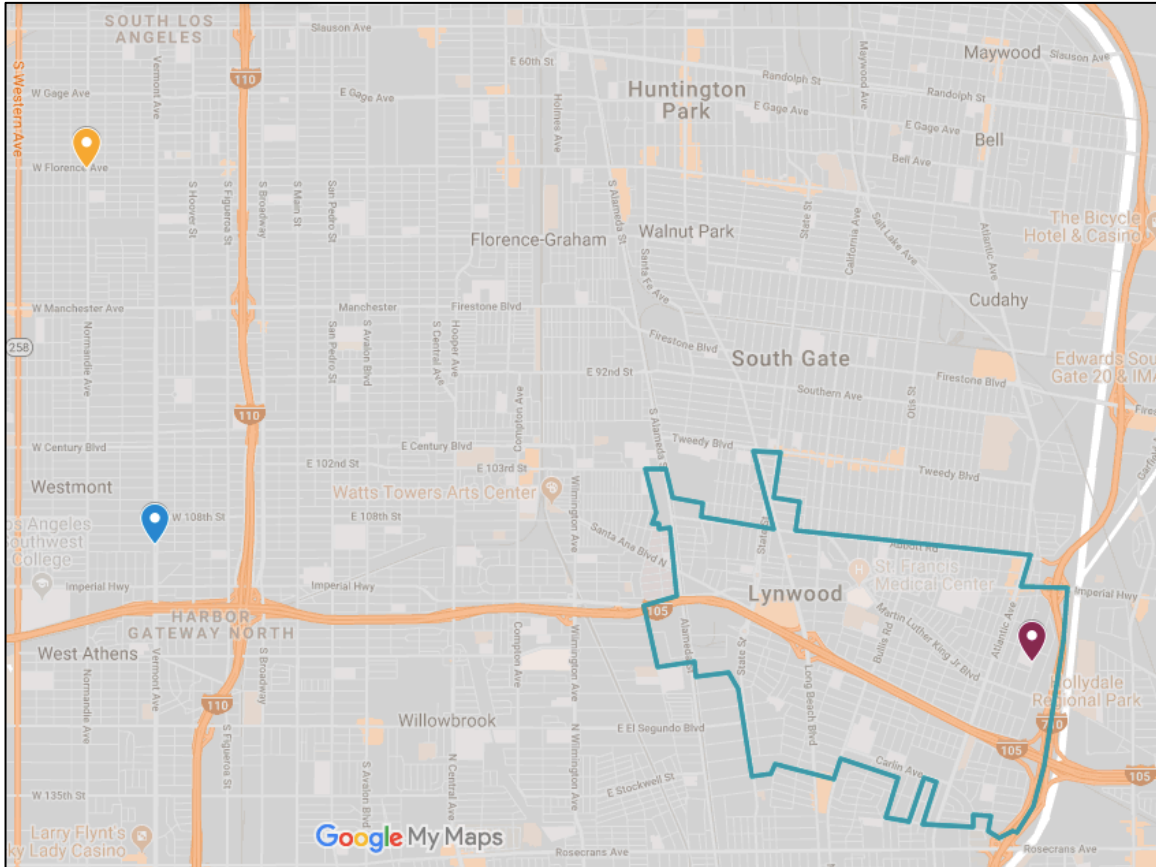
Introduction

The stories we tell shape the reality around us.

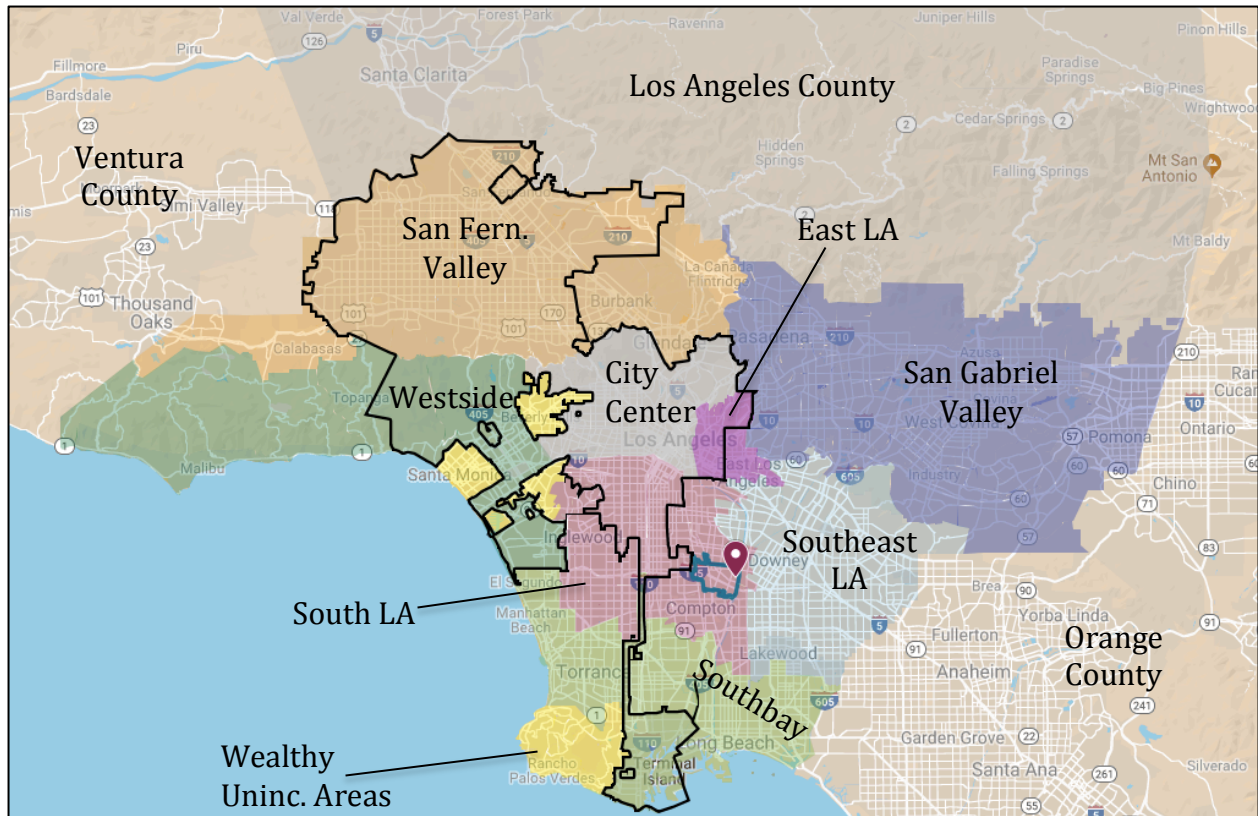
Some of my clearest memories are of the car trips my mother and I would sometimes take just to explore Los Angeles. I do not know how my mother did it all on a small social security check; money had been tight after my father's death and the sale of the restaurant. Somehow my mother managed to purchase a Dodge Ram pickup, our first car in years, and every so often, when there was nothing to do around the house, or sometimes on the way home from the market, we found a street we had never before been on, turned on to it, and drove. Rarely heading over into Downtown, my mother and I wandered. Sometimes we would take Imperial Highway (more like a boulevard) far, far east. Others, we would explore the dead-end streets near the concrete LA River. A couple of times, we checked up on our old restaurant, El Taco Vaquero, on Vermont and 110th. It had new owners.

You could chalk it up, this driving, to living and breathing LA's car culture. Lynwood, California is bisected by the 105 (Century Freeway), and hemmed in on the southeast by the 710 (Pasadena Freeway). My family's home since 1980 sits near the intersection of these two major freeways, both of which have displaced communities of color, providing convenient ways for elite and middle-class Los Angeles to avoid South Central altogether, while continuing to impact the communities around them with the pollutant byproducts of traffic congestion.

Watching as personalized front yards, business names in new languages, and entire neighborhoods entered the screen of my passenger window, I read the lives of LA.



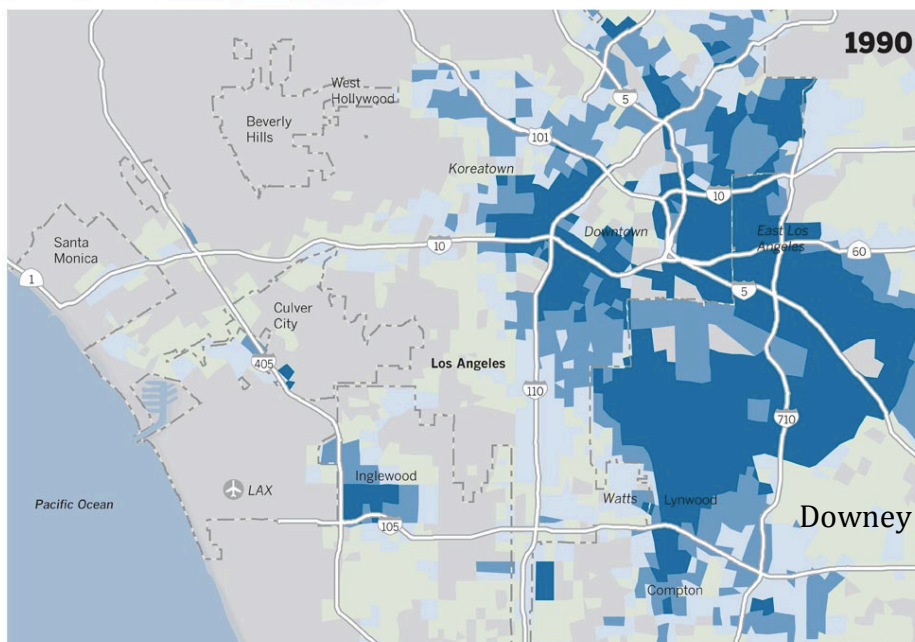
But if you're going to wander around Los Angeles, you'll need some maps. The blue point shows the final location of the family restaurant, in what is now called South Los Angeles. Though he had already died, my mother says that the relationships my father built with the community around their business are what spared our restaurant in 1992, from what geographer Edward Soja calls the "Justice Riots" after the acquittal of four police officers charged for the beating of Rodney King, represented by the yellow point at the "epicenter" of Florence and Normandie Avenues. On the other side of "South Central (Ave)," the red point marks the Delgado Family Home, at the intersections of the 710 and the 105, since the completion of the latter in 1993, whose trajectory luckily did not creep farther north and force us to move. In 1994, our house shook during the Northridge Earthquake, but its foundation held. In 1995, the LA River breached its concrete walls and our street was flooded for days. This is Lynwood, CA, my Los Angeles.



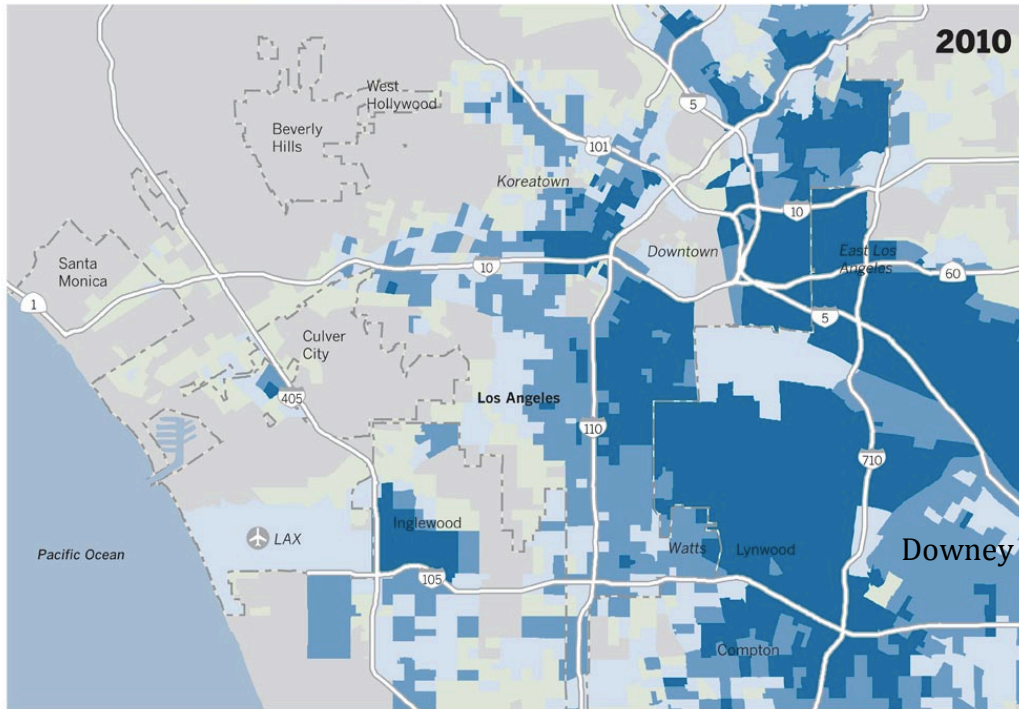
What exactly ‘Los Angeles’ refers to is fluid, overlapping, and depends on complex levels of context. The City of Los Angeles, as outlined in the map, extends into the San Fernando Valley (“the Valley”), which many might deny is even part of “LA.” Yet, iconic (some stereotypically so) images of Los Angeles often include Beverly Hills, and South Central LA areas like Compton, both of which extend beyond LA city limits. Highlighted in yellow on the map above, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, and the wealthy enclave of Southbay neighborhoods like Rancho Palos Verdes have all fiercely resisted incorporation into the larger city of Los Angeles, intent on preserving their preferred hillside lifestyle, even if entire communities of color are left in their wake. In the 1950’s, Beverly Hills battled multiple plans for a freeway connecting the 405 to the 101, instead forcing the construction of what would later become Interstate 10 along Olympic Boulevard, ripping through communities of color instead of the mansions near the hills.

Lynwood is technically not part of the City of Los Angeles; it is its own municipality, the City of Lynwood, within Los Angeles County. Lynwood is also part of the overlapping, semi-official neighborhoods called South Central Los Angeles and Southeast Los Angeles. South Central Los Angeles was originally named for “the black community that flourished along South Central Avenue from the 1920s to 1940s” (Gold and Braxton), now including areas on both sides of LA city limits. As the Black community moved westward, redlining, disenfranchisement, and displacement caused by freeway construction (of both the 110 and the 105) brought to South Central Los Angeles a stereotypical image of violence and crime. So much so, that in 2003, the Los Angeles City Council unanimously voted to change the name to simply “South Los Angeles” (Gold and Braxton), in an attempt to rid it of its racist stigma. Southeast Los Angeles refers to cities farther to the east, many of which have experienced a dynamic demographic shift in recent decades. Where cities like Downey, Bellflower, and Lakewood were predominately White in 1990, by 2010, a large influx of Latinos changed the landscape of the area.

ASIANS 1990 | ASIANS 2010 | BLACKS 1990 | BLACKS 2010 | WHITES 1990 | WHITES 2010 | LATINOS 1990 | LATINOS 2010



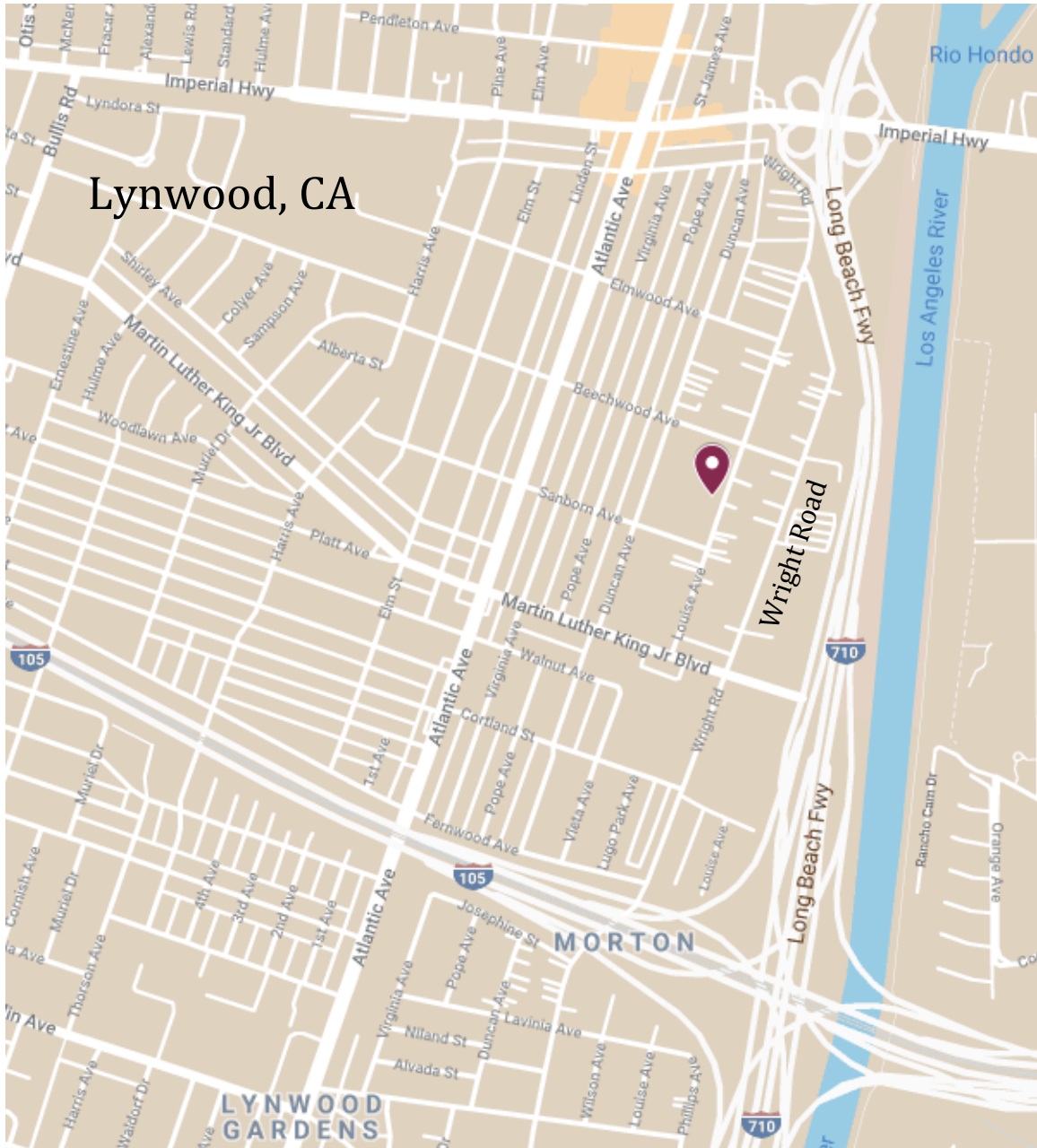
Sources: Census Bureau, ESRI
Credits: Graphic by Paul Duginski, data analysis by Sandra Poindexter. Programming by Anthony Pesce.
Published: April 27, 2012



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A River Runs Through It

El Niño, an irregularly cyclical weather pattern of alternating drought and intense storms with heavy rain, ravaged Southern California in 1997 and 1998, causing floods in many parts of the region; but my mother and I estimate the LA River’s breach near our house occurred in 1995 because my sister, Kathy, was still attending Pius High School. As I remembered watching the water from the LA River steadily rising towards the top of the three steps that lifted our home off the ground, I searched for corroboration of the date. Not to the LA Times, nor in the archival nightly news footage, did it seem noteworthy that, in 1995, floods caused by tremendous rainfall threatened the houses of those living along the LA River in Lynwood and surrounding low-income areas. On the other hand, the danger to the foothills of Malibu, Glendale, and other hilly, mudslide-prone areas was well documented.



Despite the renovation of flood preventive measures after the brutal rains of the late 1990s, eleven years after the flood that threatened our home, the City of Lynwood's 2006 strategic plan outlines the continuing flood dangers:

The Corps of Engineers has recently completed the expansion and elevation of the Los Angeles River. The current flooding after these improvements is a small area of Wright Road and in the industrial area north of the I-105 Freeway and west of the Long Beach

Freeway [710 Freeway]. *Flooding at these locations will occur when the main gates to the Los Angeles River are closed.* This will occur when water levels are elevated in the river and are designed to prevent back flows into the City of Lynwood (emphasis added).

The City's own strategic plan does not account for the damage done to the communities who would bear the brunt of a flood, when the main floodgates are closed in order to save the larger city. Pair the lack of press coverage with the city's own apathy towards "a small section of Wright Road" (a street with a peculiar mix of industrial complexes, homes, and a continuation high school, adjacent to my residential street, which also includes an elementary school) and as a result, many experiences, stories, and histories are erased. Our family history about the time it flooded and we almost lost everything exists only in the stories remembered and told at family gatherings. The stories we tell shape the reality around us. Thus, this project is foremost an exploration of everyday histories in Los Angeles, during the 1990s and into the first two decades of the twenty-first century, reading collective storytelling as hopeful worldbuilding against the grain of history, leaving indelible marks on audiences through *convivencia* and collective meaning making.

It All Comes Together in Los Angeles

In 1989, Edward Soja, one of the founders of the LA School of urban studies and longtime 'reader' of Los Angeles, played on the then masthead of the LA Times for the title to a chapter within his book *Postmodern Geographies* that proclaimed how "the highly varied outcomes of crisis-generated urban restructuring" brought together in Los Angeles the same conditions found in other cities like Detroit, San Jose, Singapore, and São Paulo (*My Los Angeles* 30). "No other urban region in the industrial world was experiencing such an intensive (and

seemingly paradoxical) combination of both extensive industrial decline and rapid industrial growth. Nowhere else was there a clearer exemplification of the emerging post-Fordist, flexible, and globalized New Economy” (30-1). Indeed, according to Soja, the urban, national, and international crises of the 1960s and 1970s caused the urban restructuring of later decades, making the 1965 Watts Riots a turning point in his theorization of *crises-generated urban restructuring* (63), marking “the end of the long postwar economic boom in the advanced industrial countries and the start of a diverse series of attempts to create a new form of industrial capitalism capable of restoring sustainable economic growth while maintaining sufficient social control to prevent renewed social unrest” (243). Thus, LA was a composite, a “revealing site and situation for understanding the changing political economy of contemporary urbanism everywhere” (64). Partially because of simultaneous industrial decline with rapid industrial growth in newer industries, such as technology and telecommunications, Los Angeles housed within itself many different cities, each with their own distinct narrative.

In 2014, only one year before his death, Soja reexamines his earlier arguments in the collection *My Los Angeles*, often moving quickly between personal reflections and extensive argumentation about the ways in which Los Angeles, as a region, acts as a prism of urbanity. In particular, Soja clarifies that he was “more interested in learning *from* Los Angeles than *about* Los Angeles” (25). Using Soja’s notion that urbanity, itself, comes together in Los Angeles, I reject the choice between learning about LA and learning *with* Los Angeles. If the stories we tell influence the reality around us, then generating new histories about Los Angeles has an indelible effect, transforming the place itself, transcending previous spatial limits. Thus, this project has two main aims: learning *about* and learning *with*. Firstly, I explore how the different texts rectify so-called official history about the region and its inhabitants, specifically retrofitting the

communal memory left intact after colonization. Secondly, I examine how the act of collective meaning-making alters the possibilities for reality, leaving indelible marks on the future by altering the past.

A particular image of Los Angeles has been burned into the popular imagination. Broadcast locally, nationally, and worldwide through film, television, song, and official history, this representation features iconic palm trees, blonde surfers, and apocalyptic images of the cities' destruction. Los Angeles is often stereotyped as superficial, land of celebrities and plastic personalities. But many different forms of LA exist. As the daughter of Mexican immigrants living in South Central, I have known for a long time that these popular images told an incomplete representation of the cultural richness alive in Los Angeles. While a representation will never be able to capture the entirety of its subject, I still wonder how these mainstream representations mirror the way that so-called official histories have left out everyday Angelenxs¹ experiences. To that effect, this project is concerned with uncovering some of the ways in which cultural production and everyday cultural practice in 1990's Los Angeles resists the effects of neoliberal policies, through the building of alternative worlds that exist outside of capitalist categorization.

This exploration of 1990's Los Angeles is not simply a personal project. At the turn of a century, many anxieties were heightened in this decade, anxieties tied to the possibility of a new uncontrollable era of power: one where machines would act unpredictably and where minorities were self-aware of their imminent majorities, particularly Latinos. Fears of Y2K threatened mass technological chaos with the coming millennium, rap and a "Latin" wave dominated the music charts, and the Internet was changing the nature of global communication.

¹ A note about language: 'x' will be used at the end of gendered nouns throughout this project in order to mitigate the required reference to a binary gender designation system.

Reaganomics – the name given to President Ronald Reagan’s conservative economic policies – had recently cut public welfare programs, increased tax cuts, and pushed market deregulation. Where Soja had previously defined the phrase *crises-generated restructuring* in response to the 1965 Watts Riots, which erupted after years of discrimination, redlining, and the unwarranted seizure of a Black motorist, the 1992 LA Uprising began in a similar fashion, with economic inequality, social polarization, the downturn of the finance and investment industry, and the beating of a Black motorist by LAPD officers. The turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s catalyzed subsequent urban reconfiguring; neoliberal economic policies, which pushed for market deregulation, themselves exacerbated inequality, so that the 1992 LA Uprising highlights a “shift from crises-generated restructuring to restructuring-generated crises” (Soja 180). Similar to how the 1965 Watts Riot marked a turning point in industrial capitalism, Soja also explains how, inversely, “the uprising and riots of 1992 marked a turning point for labor and the working poor in Los Angeles, stimulating a growing recognition that government was unlikely to respond effectively and that new place-based grassroots methods and strategies were needed in the struggles for greater social and economic justice” (Soja 274). Soja orders his exploration of Los Angeles around explosive events with explosive, paradigm-shifting results: the 1965 Watts Riots, the 1992 LA Uprising, and Occupy LA, beginning in 2011. This present project, on the other hand, resides in the lee of the everyday, trading large-scale events for the reality-altering possibilities of collective meaning-making that changes history writ-large by telling collectively contextualized stories. Just as there is collective trauma associated with restructuring-generated crises, there exist also strategies of survival through communion.

In the first half of my project, I examine how two literary texts, *The Rag Doll Plagues* and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, build collective meaning-making experiences, “calling for a

self-reflexive reading practice that perceives the seductions of the real and the authentic in narratives of self, community, and nation and the possibility that radical truths may be found in the most outrageous of fictions” (Retman 29), through their combination of documentary and exaggeration. For Alejandro Morales’ *Plagues*, La Mona, a highly contagious gaseous cancer, represents the colonial and capitalist exploitation of people and the land, resurfacing at random and bringing with it the waste and death so-called official history tries to hide from the past. Able to access multiple dimensions of time and space at once, ancestral computer ghosts guide the protagonists, echoing the Internet’s ability to connect people in conversation across vastly different contexts. The ineffective medical quarantines against La Mona of the first chapter become a police-imposed curfew in the wake of the Uprising after the beating of Rodney King, as described in interview vignettes from Anna Deaveare Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. Where *Plagues* explicitly creates a future in 2099 in social turmoil after a cure to the plague is found in the blood of Mexico-City-Mexicans, *Twilight* simultaneously documents and exaggerates the social upheaval during the LA Uprising in 1992, which occurred due to, in part, the widespread airtime of the videotape of the beating George Holliday filmed from his apartment balcony. Shaping reality through their telling of alternative stories, both dialogic texts engage the reader in collective reading practices, highlighting the nebulous distinction between history and narrative.

In the second half of the project, I explore how contemporary collective meaning-making rooted in historical context simultaneously rectifies history while also leaving indelible marks by creating new possibilities. A contemporary artist based in Los Angeles, Guadalupe Rosales curates the public Instagram archive, #veteranasandrucas, which, in Chapter 3, I argue is an example of digital *convivencia*—what Martha Gonzalez calls the act of collective *living with*—

leaving its mark both on history and on personal memory and identity. Modernist rhetoric of the 1950's that equated freeways with freedom stands in the shadows of Rosales' art exhibits, which showcase cruising, a criminalized underground car culture and social scene. Both within the walls of museums, and often outside, where classic car clubs show off their latest rebuild, Rosales facilitates the remembrance of everyday pass-times that highlight the heavy cost some communities had to pay for LA's vast freeways, in contrast to romanticized visions of wide open Los Angeles. Similarly, in Chapter 4, the Ovarian Psycos-Cycle Brigade (OPC)—an all women-of-color bicycle club from East Los Angeles—tell their personal stories in order to heal their own trauma while also unlearning colonial ways of knowing, prioritizing collective action to protect, serve, and heal their communities—all while on bikes. OPC organizes mass bike rides, usually centering and celebrating women and non-binary people, using their numbers to redirect traffic, override traffic lights, and, when necessary, disperse in hundreds of different ways; no LAPD 'ghetto bird' could ever keep up in a street chase on hundreds of wheels. OPC take up the space around them, refusing to be erased or ignored, refusing the representations that others force onto them. Together, Chapters 3 and 4 reject hackneyed notions of Los Angeles as blonde celebrities or fantastical Autopia, instead learning about the everyday lives held within in order to shape a new Los Angeles reality through collective narrative.

Though chapter two revolves around the large-scale events of the LA Uprising in 1992, rather than focus on the event directly, the chapter is more concerned with the lives around it, the differences in how everyday people experienced seeing the King beating, discrimination, and inequality that led to the Uprising.

Always a field of opposites, from utopian and dystopian visions to its combination of intensified deindustrialization and reindustrialization, LA saw new tensions arising from its liberal ascendance and deepening socioeconomic inequalities, leading to what can be considered the first major explosion of a new era of urban politics in the Justice Riots of

1992... generated not so much by the same old race-related upheavals or class-generated protests of the past as by more eclectic expressions of anger and frustration over the injustices of the New Economy, the uneven impact of globalization, and the distorted geographies they had produced—described earlier as a shift from a long period of crisis-generated restructuring to the onset of restructuring-generated crises. (Soja 324)

The shift in causation from crises to restructuring, as Soja notes, suggests that the ordinary experiences of people living in state-sponsored precarity are indicative of the crisis, itself, and therefore not extraneous to economic, industrial, and urban infrastructure shifts.

The LA Uprising—or what Soja calls the Justice Riots—of 1992 began when a verdict ran through Los Angeles on April 29, acquitting three of the four police officers charged with the beating of black motorist, Rodney King on March 1, 1991. South Los Angeles, in particular, was furious; the verdict came on the heels of the announcement that a Korean shopowner would simply be sentenced to community service, probation, and a \$500 fine as punishment for shooting Latasha Harlins, a Black teenager, in the back of the head². The anger that communities of color felt at injustice—both of the trials and of racial and economic disparity—ignited in South LA, as liquor stores and corporate businesses were burned and looted for six days. While Soja focuses on how the 1992 Justice Riots marked the shift of the new economy, Chapter two, “Recreating the Real | *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*,” instead searches for meaning within the interview transcripts of over 300 people close to the events of the Uprising, as documented in Anna Deaveare Smith’s play, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. By reading the mediated testimony of Josie Morales, a witness to the beating who wanted to testify against the police officers for starting the attack, and Twilight Bey, the architect of the gang truce, I argue that personal experiences, weaved together in collective storytelling can both rectify history and create the possibilities for a new world. The indelible practices of hope that make up worldbuilding—the

² For an in depth study of Harlin’s murder, see Brenda E. Stevenson’s *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins: Justice, Gender, and the Origins of the LA Riots* (2013).

creation of new worlds through collective storytelling—in the following chapters provide a framework for simultaneously learning about the other LAs, the everyday Angelenxs, while also learning with them, in order to apply their collective narrative practice to other contexts.

As the War on Drugs—which disproportionately targeted communities of color—slowly began to subside, in part, after the heightened racial tensions following the LAPD beating of Rodney King and the subsequent Los Angeles Uprising, white America continued to resent and fear difference. Such suspicion readied the stage for California Proposition 187 in 1994, which sought to restrict undocumented people from accessing public services, such as education, healthcare, and emergency services (Gonzalez 267). While the proposition was later overturned by the California Supreme Court, a majority of voters had approved it, highlighting the contradictions in the US’s economic need to exploit people of color for cheap labor and its racist desires for white enclaves³. Although the 1990s, after the initial recession, were a time of market stability, propositions in California continued to target immigrants and communities of color. Proposition 209 in 1996 outlawed affirmative action in college admissions, under the guise of equality. In 1998, Proposition 227, nicknamed the “English in Public Schools” Initiative, eliminated bilingual education, resulting in the majority of “Limited English Proficient” students taking their non-language arts classes completely in English, rather than in a combination of English and their home language. This was the political backdrop in California behind the worldbuilding practices in the everyday lives of communities of color in Los Angeles.

In a current period where the inequitable and damaging effects of 1980 and 1990s neoliberalism are increasingly becoming clear through policies such as the so-called Muslim Ban (barring citizens of certain Muslim nations from entering the US), defunding or privatization of

³ While this was a proposition up for votes in California, it has long been held that as California goes, so does the nation, mostly because California is such a large economy that it can command economic deference from other states.

public services, family separation and denial of asylum on the southern border, it is all the more important to understand how (co)existence-as-resistance frameworks drive 1990's practices of hope and worldbuilding in Los Angeles, so that they may be applied in the present, in other urban cities. Though the aforementioned policies may have been declared on a particular day in current memory, they exist within a much longer genealogy of colonial exploitation, racial capitalism, and cisheteropatriarchy. As such, these policies are related to histories of the criminalization of communities of color by the State, normalized gender-based abuse and harassment, increasing economic inequality, and freeways' displacement and disease.

In a chapter titled, "Taking Los Angeles Apart," Soja uses a short story by Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, to demonstrate how "it all comes together in LA." Stumbling upon a remarkable sight in a friend's cellar, the protagonist in "The Aleph" finds himself in "a space that appears to contain all other spaces, the only place on earth where all places exist together" (Soja 83). Such is Los Angeles. The neighborhoods that seem miles apart are simultaneously interconnected across time and space: East LA bleeds into Koreatown, 'gente-fying' Southeast LA, and the San Gabriel Valley, where strip malls hold postmodern 'Chinatowns' catering to international tourists. A place where all places co-exist at once, Los Angeles eschews "a temporal narrative, for it generates so many conflicting images, confounding historicization, always seeming to stretch laterally instead of unfolding sequentially... limitless and constantly in motion, never still enough to encompass, too filled with "other spaces" to be informatively described" (Soja 84). A chronological reading of history might consider the 1990s as an era wholly separate from the present, or even from the 2000s. Learning with Los Angeles, however, encourages a relational view of time and space: instead of considering people, neighborhoods, even moments in time as distinct events, seeing them as subjects with a dense web of social and

historical contextualization. Approaching all spaces as if they were the Aleph, where time and space exist all at once, allows for the contextualization of current state policies of separation and xenophobia within the US's long history of systemic white supremacy. Thus, reading Los Angeles as the Aleph simultaneously anchors current state repression within a long genealogy of both oppression and resilience, filling in the crevices of so-called official history while also compiling strategies for survival and resistance.

Embedded in a Historical Context

To live is to wrestle with despair yet never to allow despair to have the last word.

Cornel West

This project, *Indelible Practices of Hope*, and the subjects of its study, are part of a much longer genealogy of discourses about solidarity, resistance, state oppression, and equity. While the through-lines of resistance and the importance of the historical contextualization of colonial exploitation run through all of the texts foundational to this project, so does the celebration of solidarity in an emphatic refusal of capitalist individualism. Taking a relational approach, using Los Angeles as the place where it all comes together, I want to quickly summarize the long history of women-of-color organizing, healing, and theorizing that informs this project and enables me to read its subjects as exemplary practices of hopeful worldbuilding.

In the vignette titled “Prisoner of Hope” in the 2001 *Twilight: Los Angeles* film adaptation, Cornel West (as portrayed by Anna Deaveare Smith) describes his theory about hope, developed over years but particularly in *Restructuring Hope: Conversations on the Future of Black America*, West's 1997 collection of interviews with influential Black thinkers and intellectuals. Defining the concept as going “beyond the evidence” of history and attempting to

“create new possibilities based on visions that become contagious that will allow us to engage in heroic actions always against the odds, no guarantee whatsoever” (Smith 1:10:09), West anchors hope within a courageous vision of a better world. As opposed to the “blood-drenched hope” that sustains this courage against the powers that be, West describes optimism as “the role of the spectator who surveys the evidence in order to infer that things are going to get better” despite that the “dominant tendencies of our day are unregulated global capitalism, racial balkanization, social breakdown, and individual depression” (xii). Where optimism is grounded in a passive understanding of history’s influence on notions of reality, hope, on the other hand, “enacts the stance of the participant who actively struggles against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair” (West xii). Thus, the “courage to be impatient with evil and patient with people” quite literally creates multiple planes of reality according to distinct historical points of departure, requiring that ‘prisoners of hope’ “speak [their] fallible truths, expose the vicious lies, and bear [their] imperfect witness” (xii). What West articulates is a kind of dialogic hope that is in conversation with the relations between the individual stories that make up the reality that we sense. Where speculative fiction may require of its readers the suspension of disbelief, West’s hope calls for a suspension of *belief*, a seemingly illogical rejection of what others claim is epistemologically given. Hope is therefore both rooted in the erasures and crevices within so-called official history, while also departing from it, truth-telling a composite story of imperfect witness.

A member of the Black Liberation Army, Assata Shakur stands tall as a visionary who dedicated her life to organizing collectively against racial and gender-based injustice. Some activist organizers (such as the Ovarian Psycho-Cycles Brigade from Chapter Four), consider Shakur’s autobiography required reading for understanding how to organize against state

violence, with her experience serving as a model for women-of-color in wide contexts. At the end of “To My People,” a radio message broadcasted from her prison cell, before the verse now known as ‘Assata’s Prayer,’ Shakur reminds her community how “every revolution in history has been accomplished by actions, although words are necessary” (52), to give shape to those actions. It is this principle that undergirds the theory of worldbuilding – the collective narrative strategies that create ways of being in the world, all tied to distinct historical and cultural contexts. Shakur’s words are rooted in a mutual agreement to care for each other and assist each other in resisting oppression. Foregrounding solidarity between women of color, and other oppressed peoples, ‘Assata’s Prayer’ serves as a representation of the words that guided her actions of solidarity against oppression, inspired many later activists, and built Shakur’s legacy:

It is our duty to fight for our freedom.
It is our duty to win.
We must love each other and support each other.
We have nothing to lose but our chains.

These words simultaneously promote actions of dissent and of care, suggesting that anticapitalist mutual solidarity is a form of dissent. Further, the last line—we have nothing to lose but our chains—makes clear that Assata’s Prayer is not a vision of immediate or even eventual utopia but a dialectical one that changes and must be built and rebuilt, thus requiring new strategies to write collectively. Granted political asylum and exiled in Cuba since her escape from prison, Shakur’s text underscores how revolution – the literal unmaking and remaking of an alternative world – cannot be done solely by actions, and requires collective words.

Similarly, *convivencia*, what musician and Chicana studies scholar Martha Gonzalez defines as the “deliberate act of being with each other as community” “is a social, moral, and musical aesthetic” of Gonzalez’s collective music practice” (270). I use Gonzalez’s term to importantly signal how the “reconceptualization of music,” and I argue, other participatory forms

of narrative, as an activity rooted in *convivencia* is an important disruption in how we think of history and storytelling in our present age, with the aim “to bring focus on relationships and process rather than sounds, outcomes, or product” (270). Gonzalez’s use of *convivencia*—living with—serves as a useful way for understanding the processes of collective meaning-making that connect the texts I study in this project into texts of indelible practices of hopeful worldbuilding.

The dialectical process, as suggested by the last line of ‘Assata’s Prayer’, West’s ‘infallible truths,’ and Gonzalez’s collective meaning-making, points toward the difficulty of knowing the other, especially given how ‘we have nothing to lose’ and thus, are always up against the odds, with no guarantee whatsoever of reaching any ideal. Despite the missteps that might arise, Shakur’s vision of solidarity and West’s patient witness mirror the power that Dorinne Kondo sees in Anna Deaveare Smith’s acting method of inhabiting the speaking patterns and demeanor of her subjects which “stages the *(im)possibility* of knowing the other and of realizing a pastoral, power-free community in the multiracial nation-state” (100). Using Smith’s method as an example for the 2018 book *Worldmaking: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity*, Kondo underscores that while Smith’s work is often misread through a liberal humanist lens that allows Smith to inhabit other identities through the common identity of humanity, Smith herself wishes to highlight the gap between her identity as an actor and the identity of the subject of her acting (Kondo 105). This gap between actor and subject, and more importantly, Smith’s act of her reaching across towards intimate understanding of her subject, the bridging of the gap, mirrors the necessary reaching towards that undergirds Shakur’s declaration of solidarity. Thus, the relationality that Shakur proposes and that Kondo reads onto Smith’s work also situates itself as a destination not yet reached.

Shakur, West's, and Kondo's theories of relationality call for a process of identity, of negotiating one's narrative within and in response to others' personal histories. Such a dialectical process of relations can be, as Kondo says, "quotidian," without "automatically conjuring the divine" (29). Thus, it is precisely the relationality of everyday life that Kondo argues is captured by the dialogue within a work of theater, recreating the dialectical back and forth of affecting and being affected (2). Tracking theater and ethnography together, Kondo notes how the dialogue of theater, with its "attention to the senses, embodiment, and affect as relationality," spotlights "the collaborative intersubjectivity of artistic and scholarly production, as does anthropology's emphasis on collaborative meaning-making and the world beyond the text" (2). Using Kondo's theories of theater's potential for worldmaking, I argue that it is not only limited to theater, as Kondo argues, but that certain aspects of novels, films, cultural practice, and even social media can perform "the dialogic relationality of social life." After all, "as theater artists are creating their art, they are also making and unmaking race" (2), so too do narratives that invite collective rewriting of history. Thus, where Kondo is theorizing race as performative, I make use of her argument about how the arts make and unmake race, in order to apply it to how different forms of the arts are able to make and unmake realities, themselves.

Alongside Kondo's study of the performative's relationship to race, I also borrow from José Esteban Muñoz's concept of queer worldmaking, in order to elaborate my examination of the multiple iterations of what I call hopeful worldbuilding. In the last chapter, "Latina Performance and Queer Worldmaking," of his 1999 work *Disidentifications: Queers Of Color And The Performance of Politics*, Muñoz describes the mechanisms of queer worldmaking, or, that which "willfully disavows that which majoritarian culture has decreed as the 'real'" (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196). Because "minoritarian performance labors to make worlds—worlds of

transformative politics and possibilities, ... the concept of worldmaking delineates the ways in which performances—both theatrical and everyday rituals—have the ability to establish alternate views of the world” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 195). Thus, everyday practices do more than present alternative vistas or perspectives; “they are oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of ‘truth’ that subjugate minoritarian people” and simultaneously propose “oppositional counterpublics... enabled by visions, “worldviews,” that reshape as they deconstruct reality” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 195-6). These ‘counter publics’ “are the aftermath of minoritarian performance” and have the ability to affect participants’ place in time and space, creating worlds by “*transport[ing]* the performer *and* the spectator to a vantage point where transformation and politics are imaginable” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196, emphasis in original). Beyond performance, I use Muñoz’s concept of worldmaking to describe the ways in which literature, film, theater, and cultural practice “produce these vantage points by slicing into the façade of the real that is the majoritarian public sphere” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196) thus enacting worldbuilding: the collective remaking of the world through hopeful narrative practices.

“Manifest through strategies of iteration and *reiteration*” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196) worldbuilding exists in the gaps between familiar and variation, me and you (other), hope and optimism. “*This reiteration builds worlds*” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196, emphasis in original). Inhabiting the gap between personal histories and collective stories, honoring the past while disavowing the present, inviting iteration while constantly evolving, worldbuilding “establishes the groundwork for *potential* oppositional counterpublics” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196). The power of words can only transport reality to alternative worlds when the writing is collective and relational. Thus, worldbuilding must always be in search of a destination that is everywhere and unreachable: the gaps between histories, between different moments in space and time.

Recognizing that both the past and the future are created in the present, Muñoz's concept of queer worldmaking urges readers to "think and feel a then and there," instead of surrendering to the "here and now's totalizing rendering of reality" in order to "dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds" (Muñoz *Cruising* 1). Hopeful worldbuilding narrative practices are thus rooted in a thorough historical and social context that corroborates other stories of colonial trauma; beyond that, through the process of collective storytelling, worldbuilding navigates the valleys between multiple narratives, stitching together an evolving and expanding quilt of 'imperfect witness'.

This quest for an unreachable destination produces alternative forms of reality, each with their own contextualizing narrative. Likewise, in her 1997 exploration of the "alternative stories we ought to and can write about the relationship among power, knowledge, and experience" (23), *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon explores the relationship between haunting and the "intermingling of fact, fiction, and desire as it shapes personal and social memory" (24). Gordon, mostly concerned with uncovering what the ghost says "as it speaks, barely, in the interstices of the visible and the invisible," is thus troubled by the "contrast between conceptual or analytical descriptions of social systems and their far more diffused and delicate effects" (23-4). Because "haunting occurs on the terrain situated between our ability to conclusively describe the logic of Capitalism or State Terror, for example, and the various experiences of this logic, experiences that are more often than not partial, coded, symptomatic, contradictory, ambiguous" (24), Gordon underscores the importance of collective memory to be rooted in the material conditions of those in the interstices of power. Therefore, at the heart of haunting, is our individual story of relations, for "we are part of the story...: the ghost must speak *to me* in some way sometimes similar to, sometimes distinct from how it may be

speaking to the others” (Gordon 24, emphasis in original). Thus, the dialectical process of simultaneously moving toward and away from the worldmaking destination creates a sort of recognition of a world that is both familiar, yet can never really exist, because it is dialogic and related to the telling of individual stories as they continuously inform each other.

In keeping with Avery Gordon’s theorization, each of the texts in this study seeks to haunt its readers to “make choices within those spiraling determinations that make the present waver” because “to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects” (Gordon 190). The haunting of social contextualization that Gordon describes is precisely what enables Morales, Smith, Rosales, and OPC to create new alternative realities in their current moment. In *The Rag Doll Plagues*, for example, the novel’s use of metafiction satirizes the uncritical romanticization of hybridization, highlighting the protagonist’s reading practices, which, in conjunction with the metafiction that disrupts the distinction between narrative and reality, serves to spotlight readers’ own reading practices and provides a framework for reading critically and contextually. Similarly, in *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Smith’s facilitation of a collective story uncovers the discomfort that lies in the interstices of racial discussions, as Smith’s cross-racial performances exaggerate, juxtapose, and manipulate stereotypes, exploring how they manifest uniquely in individual lives. Where Smith weaves together a collective story in the testimonies of her participants, Guadalupe Rosales harnesses Instagram to curate public digital archives celebrating the 1990s Party Crew and lowrider car scene, with #veteranasandruucas focusing on women in Latinx neighborhoods in LA. In her 2018 book, *Map Pointz: A Collective Memory*, Rosales discusses the process of her digital convivencia – living with – that brought people together in the collective recollection of their youthful strategies for survival, memories knocked loose while perusing Rosales’ collection of others’ ephemera from the 1990s. Like Rosales, members of the

Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade (OPC) are haunted by relics of the past; though Rosales digs into 1990s strategies of surviving and thriving, OPC prioritize the in situ truth-telling of personal trauma, so that the collective trauma of colonialism and cisheteropatriarchy can be healed. Rejecting the representations thrust upon them, such as the virgin-whore dichotomy that threatens to limit their autonomy, OPC weave together their individual stories of trauma, simultaneously filling in the crevices of colonial legacies of oppression while collectively attending to their needs for healing and growth.

In the cases of these texts, the haunting recognition described by Gordon manifests in the form of a narrative world made up of personal stories that are both familiar and unreachable. Thus, the haunting that Gordon describes, which is rooted in both an understanding of social and historical contexts as they affect our own narratives, also brings with it an alternative way of sensing. Where, for Gordon, haunting “is a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (63), Gloria Anzaldúa, author of the perennial classic *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, describes a similar concept in ‘la facultad,’ “the learned capacity to read, renovate, and make signs on behalf of the dispossessed” (61); together, these concepts shed light on the collective narrative practices needed to ‘read between the lines.’ The ability to “see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (Anzaldúa 61) and act according to la facultad is borne out of the experience of women of color who learned to navigate racial and heteropatriarchal systems, inhabiting “an ‘outsider/within’ identity that guides movement of being according to an ethical commitment to equalize power between social constituencies” (Sandoval 61). Thus, worldbuilding – the collaborative remaking of the world through hopeful narrative strategy informed by haunting and la facultad – can exist only in relation between different subjects. In other words, the way that words and narration

shape the way we envision our world can only enact hopeful worldbuilding if the narration is collective, embedded in a deep relational context of reading beyond, and attends to the gaps between different realities, creating counterpublics against and beyond majoritarian epistemologies.

Chela Sandoval employs the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Hill Collins, and other women of color thinkers, theorizing her metaphor of the automobile's clutch as illustrative of women of color's experience of being the "outsider/within," or what Anzaldúa calls weaving "between and among" oppositional ideologies and sketching a new topographical space, where multiple consciousness can be accessed. Describing the differential consciousness as "the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power" (58), Sandoval theorizes a dialectical process of oppositional consciousnesses, each constantly shifting gears in relation with each other. Defining differential consciousness as the medium "through which the equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness become effectively converted, lifted out of their earlier, modernist, and hegemonic activity," Sandoval thus stresses the importance and utility of a flexible approach. Moreover, this flexibility compounds possibility, for "when enacted in dialectical relation to one another and not as separated ideologies, each oppositional mode of consciousness, each ideology-praxis, is transformed into tactical weaponry for intervening in shifting currents of power" (58). Thus, Sandoval's theory of "differential consciousness" can be useful for understanding how worldbuilding harnesses the simultaneous gap and familiarity of the "outsider/within," both in terms of the reckoning of multiple personal histories and in the multivalent forms that can elicit transformative visions of the world through collective meaning-making.

I utilize the meaning-in-process forms of the differential consciousness that moves through different oppositional modes, Gordon's social haunting, Muñoz's remaking of the past in the present, West's imperfect witness, and Gonzalez's *convivencia*, as the methods that instruct this project's movement between and amongst the 1990's and the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Like Guadalupe Rosales, who, in her curation of 1990s party crew and car culture, blends the twentieth century into the present while simultaneously bridging gaps of the past, I imagine myself at the head of an immense set of turntables, mixing together elements of the 1990s, the present, in between, and beyond. Just as the Instagram archives facilitate differential consciousness, the "outsider/within," and theory in the flesh by weaving and unweaving individual stories in a collective process, this project aims to similarly use DJ's crew methods of beat juggling, the collective process of making new music out of old beats. The records on the table cannot be counted, but they include past, present, and future silences, minoritarian and majoritarian accounts, new languages and epistemologies, and impossible questions. Like Sandoval's differential consciousness, worldbuilding, the collaborative remaking of the world through narrative strategy, includes both the validation in historical trauma long-erased and the gaps that exist between different versions of the self, and thus takes different forms at different times. If the stories we tell shape the way we see the world, then I argue that collective narratives change reality, at least in the way it is perceived. If the stories we tell shape the reality around us, then creating historical narratives together is simultaneously an act of *convivencia* and the co-construction of meaning, the process of which changes each time. The different subjects of the following chapters take different approaches to what I call indelible practices of hopeful worldbuilding—the collective meaning-making that makes possible multiple realities possible at once.

Chapter one, “A Dare to Unravel Colonial Complicity: The Challenge of Metafiction in Alejandro Morales’ *The Rag Doll Plagues*,” follows Alejandro Morales’ use of historiographic metafiction in order to critique neoliberal reading practices that reduce characters of color to multicultural props (Melamed 3), while presenting a challenge to the reader to assess their own reading practices. In 2099, Gregory Revueltas, protagonist of *The Rag Doll Plagues*, works as the Medical Director for the Los Angeles to Mexico City (LAMEX) region of the Triple Alliance, the NAFTA-on-steroids capitalist conglomerate that has replaced North America’s separate nations. As plagues spring up throughout the region, Gregory begins a process of understanding history that allows him to find the knowledge necessary to quell the environmental cancers. Gregory searches the historical and fictional volumes in his grandfather’s library, discovering little difference “in this oppositional binary that resisted separation.” Reading his grandfather’s journals allows Gregory to interact with the computer ghosts of his ancestors, whose written descriptions have been uploaded to a massive supercomputer, allowing them to traverse time and space to assist their descendant in treating the plague, recognizing the plagues’ tie to colonial exploitation.

Freeways were hailed as a sign of modernity in the 20th century, all the while decimating homes, neighborhoods, and lungs; in 2099 they have updated to computer superhighways capable of transporting select vehicles from Los Angeles to Mexico City in minutes. Francisco Lomeli, Maria Herrera-Sobek, Antonio C. Marquez, and Morales, himself, have described his writing as the intrahistory ignored by historians. Beyond reimagining history, I explore how metafiction and satire in *The Rag Doll Plagues* present a postmodern metafictional dare, overlaying an ontological game for the reader on top of the challenge the protagonist faces; Gregory’s process of historical understanding facilitates the same process for readers, revealing

official histories as constructed narratives. Analyzing Gregory's reading practices in conjunction with the metafiction that disrupts the distinction between text and reality, I argue that the form of Morales' novel spotlights our own reading practices and provides a framework for reading critically. By daring readers to recognize the novel's constructedness, *Plagues* urges readers to trace inconsistencies in official histories, thus unraveling their own complicity in the aftereffects of colonialism, and joining a larger conversation that blurs the distinction between text and history.

Similarly, chapter two explores how the form of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* proposes reading practices embedded in historical contextualization. "Recreating the Real | *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*" asks, "Where does official history end and personal narrative begin?" Practically anyone in the US during the 1990s saw the footage of LAPD officers beating Rodney King; indeed, the perspective that George Holliday captured on film from his apartment balcony became an undeniable fulcrum towards the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising, firmly wrenching itself onto the front page of newspapers nationwide. When a jury failed to convict the four officers charged, South Los Angeles erupted. King was beaten off of the 210 Foothill Freeway in the San Fernando Valley, but all of LA was shut down for days as communities processed their collective trauma and grief.

Shifting between and 'mixing' Anna Deaveare Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (both the 1993 text and 2001 PBS film adaptation) and newspaper coverage of the event, Chapter 2 explores the generative relationship between personal narrative and so-called official history. Made up of interviews with people close to the events of the Los Angeles Uprising, the form of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, itself, muddles the difference between life and literature, deliberately providing a multiplicity of stories and eschewing a singular, cohesive narrative. By

reading *Twilight* against official coverage of the 1992 LA Uprising, I focus on the radical worldbuilding narrative strategies within the interview transcripts as potential ruptures that reach across the gaps and create liminal spaces within official history where new narrations are possible.

The second half of *Indelible Practice of Hope* leaves traditional texts behind to analyze cultural practice as cultural production. Chapter three, “This Bridge Called Instagram: Guadalupe Rosales, #veteranasandrucas, and Collective Worldbuilding,” argues that Rosales’ 2018 print book, *Map Pointz: A Collective Memory*, in addition to inviting new reading practices for its hybrid genre, documents the process by which the artist produced a framework for digital convivencia. While exploring what lay beyond her native East Los Angeles, Rosales began soliciting photos for a digital collection of ephemera from the 1990s party crew scene, Whittier Ave’s car cruising culture, and other photos of people living in what we, ourselves, back then would call ‘the hood.’ What began as an Instagram account to connect with memories and time past, #veteranasandrucas (and later #mappointz) exploded with submissions, becoming a digital archive of cultural histories that many were aching to preserve. Rosales tapped a nerve. Now her art, both in digital forms and in public exhibits, always foregrounds the collective remembering that allowed for the rewriting of history to include communities criminalized by the state. Rosales’ work reclaims histories of the streets and the strategies of survival that were targeted and outlawed, while also refusing recycled representations by using Instagram as medium and material to produce Chicaxfuturist art that blends the distinction between then and now. By anchoring her work in the collective meaning-making that occurred through the digital platform Instagram, Rosales rectifies Los Angeles history, by adding into public consciousness the everyday lives of Angelenxs that official state forces rather erase, simultaneously providing a

framework for how to learn *with* Los Angeles, allowing the city—and its participants—to shape the alternative archive.

Connecting practices from the 1990s to those in the twenty-first century, chapter four, “‘Oppression exists, but not here’” | The Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade and the Importance of Storytelling,” reads the work of a Xicana and Womxn-of-color bicycle brigade from Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles, as resistance frameworks built via practices of hope. Members of the all-womxn-of-color Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade (OPC) don’t care what you think about them—they’re riding bicycles and writing their own story. Taking back the streets of LA on two-wheeled ‘steel horses,’ OPC strategically employ a differential consciousness approach to creating Los Angeles in their own vision; attending to its varied needs, OPC organizes community efforts that range from Luna Bike Rides every full moon, to Survival Arts workshops for self-defense, and supply-donation rallies for those living houseless in Los Angeles. Telling stories and taking up space, OPC simultaneously reject restrictive gender roles and modernist myths of freeway freedom, opting instead for communal bike rides to heal spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

The OVAS (short for both Ovarian Psychos and ‘One Very Angry Squad’) battle against gentrification and patriarchal violence, developing East LA for the residents of the community and framing their work with ‘Feminist Ideals, Indigenous Understandings, and an Urban/Hood Mentality.’ Reading OPC’s Xicana feminist praxis as shown in the documentary *Ovarian Psychos* (2016) as a form of self-representation, Chapter 4 examines how critical theories of hope inflect urban community organizing in the 21st century, inverting the verticality of ghettobirds (police helicopters) and gentrification—hauntings of colonial pasts—by weaving networks of militant solidarity. By narrating their work as part of a long history of resistance, OPC’s cultural and

rhetorical practices challenge the oppressive norms of official history while simultaneously fashioning new possibilities for reality in Los Angeles. Writing themselves into the space around them, the OVAS develop a critical theory of hope—on their bikes.

The 1990s are then and now, as we construct them in so-called official history and in separate memories. The first half of this project examines texts that provide their own reading practices and how their hybrid genres (of both documentary and exaggeration) challenge readers to historically contextualize their position in history. While the first half expresses *convivencia* through collective reading practices, the second half explores the multivalent possibilities of co-constructing meaning. Guadalupe Rosales and her work both teaches about Los Angeles and how to learn from Los Angeles, through her collective memory and historical rectification projects, while also presenting a framework for digital *convivencia* and collective worldbuilding. Lastly, the Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade (OPC) similarly ground their collective meaning-making in *convivencia* and solidarity, turning their digital connections in the taking of space in Los Angeles. As they block busy intersections so everyone on mass rides can stick together though traffic lights, OPC seems to challenge their viewers: “Whose Streets? Our Streets!” In a community that has been incarcerated, murdered, and ignored by systemic racism, OPC take space in order to leave their indelible marks.

Indelible Practices of Hope: Worldbuilding 1990s Los Angeles explores the ontological implications of one generation’s cultural practice for communities of color in a diverse urban hub. Embedded in a long historical analysis, worldbuilding—the hopeful envisioning of new worlds—reads narrative strategies as practices of hope to make decolonial visions a reality. Defining hope as the creation of new possibilities, my research weaves together an analysis of literature, new media, and cultural praxis, showing how shared strategies of worldbuilding

connect seemingly disparate forms of cultural production. Using literature, theater, film, and Instagram, my project links the political conditions of the 1990s to their iterations in the 21st century. Thus, my research brings together literary, media and technology studies, through ethnographic and cultural studies analysis lenses, which allows for a thorough understanding of the social, historical, and political power dynamics that shape and are shaped by the representation of people of color. By bringing together multiple facets of Los Angeles-based cultural production to demonstrate the generative practices of everyday Angelenxs, my research builds upon critical ethnic studies, connecting communities across socially-constructed identities in the critical praxis of theories of hope.

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A Dare to Unravel Colonial Complicity:

The Challenge of Metafiction in Alejandro Morales' *The Rag Doll Plagues*

It seems fitting that an exploration of Los Angeles in the 1990's begins first by exploring the space between LA and Mexico City in 2099. A thousand years in the future, the same incomplete stories of colonial history haunt descendants. Such is the setting for *The Rag Doll Plagues*, Alejandro Morales' 1992 novel, which reimagines colonization in three different time periods, pre-independence Mexico, 1970's Los Angeles, and the futuristic borderlands of LAMEX, the region from Los Angeles to Mexico City in 2099. The three books that make up the novel follow a medical doctor, each named Gregory, as he deals with both a rapidly changing world and a gaseous-cancerous plague that wreaks havoc on the population. Called La Mona, these plagues cross the barriers of time and space to infect humans, turning them into doll-like sacks of blood. The three iterations of Gregory, each a descendant of the other, battles the plague, with assistance from unchronological ancestral apparitions, bending the limits of time and narrative. In each book, Gregory finds the cure to La Mona among the results of hybridization, such as the combination of Indigenous and Western medicine and, in the last book, even through the quite literal mixing of blood. Thus, *The Rag Doll Plagues* may be read on the surface to be a celebration of José Vasconcelos' *la raza cósmica*, his proclamation that Latin America would be the site of the next hegemonic race, a process of evolution through the *mestizaje* (mixing) of the 'superior' Iberian intellect with Indigenous peoples of the continent—a cosmic race by virtue of amalgamation. I argue, however, that the novel's use of metafiction satirizes the uncritical romanticization of hybridization; more importantly, by highlighting Gregory III's reading practices in conjunction with the metafiction that disrupts the distinction

between narrative and reality, I argue that the form of Morales' novel serves to spotlight our own reading practices and provides a framework for reading critically.

A Chicanafuturist text, *The Rag Doll Plagues* by Alejandro Morales weaves a reanimation of the past together with a reconfiguration of the future, in order to provide a framework for critical reading in the present. *Plagues'* radical worldbuilding narrative strategies challenge audience members to recognize their complicity in neo-colonialism, particularly through the use of metafiction to facilitate the reader's explicit mirroring of the protagonists' quest for the historical understanding and knowledge found in books. Beyond reimagining history, I explore how metafiction and satire in *The Rag Doll Plagues* present a postmodern metafictional game, overlaying an ontological game for the reader on top of the challenge the protagonist faces. Analyzing the protagonists' reading practices in conjunction with the metafiction that disrupts the distinction between text and reality, I argue that the form of Morales' novel spotlights our own reading practices and provides a framework for reading critically.

Embedded in a long historical analysis based in theory in the flesh, worldbuilding—the hopeful envisioning of new worlds—uses narrative strategies as practices of hope to make decolonial visions a reality. These narrative and speculative futurisms allow for the present to come into conversation with the past, thus altering and envisioning the future. Worldbuilding, itself, is a term synonymous with fiction writing, science fiction in particular, referring to the creation of fictional worlds and universes as settings for narratives. Throughout *Indelible Practices of Hope*, I examine how worldbuilding can be used as a hopeful narrative strategy that envisions possibilities beyond the real; creating worlds, storytelling leaves indelible marks.

Chicanxfuturism and Hopeful Worldbuilding

Catherine S. Ramírez defines Chicanafuturism as “cultural production that attends to cultural formations resulting from new and everyday technologies (including their detritus); that excavates, creates, and alters narratives of identity, technology, and the future; that interrogates the promises of science and technology; and that redefines humanism and the human” (“Deua Ex Machina” 77-78). A work of speculative and science fiction, *Plagues* reconfigures critiques of (neo)colonial capitalism into monstrous plagues borne from the exploitation of both people and the earth. In their edited dossiers on Latin@ speculative fiction for *Aztlán - A Journal of Chicano Studies* (what would become the already seminal collection *Altermundos: Latin@ Speculative Literature, Film, and Popular Culture*), Cathryn Josefina Merla-Watson and B.V. Olguin describe how Chicanxfuturism’s monsters “are more than just superstitious or naive figments of the “primitive” imagination: they are sophisticated articulations of how late capitalism and neoliberal globalization brutally and palpably exert force upon the lives of Chican@s and Latin@s” (“From the Horrific” 147).). Although it may fit the typical Chicano quest narrative—where “the male protagonist searches for self; faces physical, psychological, and spiritual challenges; receives aid from mentors and guides; and ultimate though battered, not only survives but prevails and is able to contribute his wisdom a actualization to his community” (Garay 142)—*The Rag Doll Plagues* formally upends generic expectations, through the use of metafiction.

Francisco Lomeli, Maria Herrera-Sobek, Antonio Márquez, and Morales, himself, have explored his writing as the intrahistory ignored by historians. For Morales, relearning the process of remembering is of utmost importance, especially because “the barrio, Montebello offered themselves as a chronotope, a real and figurative crossroads of time, history, space, and the folk I

loved” (“Dynamic Identities” 14). Thus, the barrio, semiotically a signifier of both the residents and the physical space of Montebello, requires a new mode of thinking “that is open to ... a continual return to events, to their re-elaboration and revision.... retelling, re-citing and re-siting of what passes for historical and cultural knowledge” (Chambers 2). Dean Franco describes *Plagues* approach as “emplotting history (that is, giving it a narrative thread)” (Franco 380), acting as historiographic metafiction where “[t]he reader is forced to acknowledge not only the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also both the value and the limitation of that inescapably discursive form of knowledge” (Hutcheon 8). Describing it as a ‘transhistorical fiction,’ Antonio C. Márquez traces the convergences between literary and ‘worldly’ history in *The Rag Doll Plagues* and describes how the novel “seeks an intellectual engagement in the creation of the text” (82). Beyond reimagining history, I explore how metafiction and satire in *The Rag Doll Plagues* present a postmodern metafictional game, overlaying an ontological game for the reader on top of the challenge the protagonist faces; Gregory’s process of historical understanding facilitates the same process for readers, revealing official histories as constructed narratives. The almost-familiarity between the protagonists of the three books, in addition to the association between protagonist and reader, highlights the gaps that exist between different personal narratives, a worldbuilding destination both familiar and unrecognizable. Analyzing Gregory’s reading practices in conjunction with the metafiction that disrupts the distinction between text and reality, I argue that the form of Morales’ novel spotlights our own reading practices and provides a framework for reading critically. As such, this metafictional address of the reader enacts hopeful worldbuilding to create the possibility of reading the novel as a theoretical framework for reading oneself into history.

A quick summary of the novel is in order, before I describe the theoretical framework I use to arrive at my reading of the protagonist as a proxy for the reader. The first book follows Gregorio, a Spanish doctor sent by the King in the late eighteenth century to reduce the number of plagues that currently ravage the population of the Mexican colony, turning Indigenous communities and Europeans, alike, into slowly disintegrating sacks of blood. In their search to cure the plague, Gregorio learns about *curanderismo*, the native methods of healing, from his host, Father Jude. Abandoning his initial xenophobia, Gregorio finds that the partnership of Spanish medicine with ‘provincial’ indigenous knowledge provides the foundation necessary to counteract the plague, through the relatively simple mechanisms of salves and amputations. These procedures, however, only serve to extend life; there is no cure for La Mona. As Gregorio decides never to return to Spain, the Viceroy’s Indigenous mistress, Marisela, contracts La Mona and Gregorio is tasked with extending her life, if only long enough for her pregnancy to come to term. Moments after Gregorio places the newborn baby mestiza on Marisela’s chest, Gregorio notes that the plague seems to subside. Gregorio holds the baby girl that he has agreed to raise, and declares mestizaje the future of Mexico (Morales *Plagues* 66), echoing Vasconcelos’ proclamation that Latin America, and Mexico, in particular, is inherently a mixed-race nation.

The second book follows Gregory Revueltas, who grew up near the Simons Brick Company in Santa Ana, California, and now treats gunshot wounds in an underfunded barrio hospital in the 1970s. In this book, La Mona is conflated with AIDS, and Gregory’s lover Sandra, a hemophiliac who received blood transfusions from the entire barrio, contracts it. Book two differs greatly from book one in terms of style; Gregorio’s earlier blunt medical tone is replaced here by Gregory’s romantic odes to his lover as she nears her death. Facing complete ostracization because of her condition, Gregory and Sandra’s search for a cure takes them to

Mexico, where they find that the best understanding of the disease requires both indigenous spiritual knowledge and Western medicine. Again, *mestizaje*, specifically epistemological *mestizaje*, figures as reclamation of the past and the future, simultaneously.

The third part of the novel, “LAMEX,” takes place in a future where The Triple Alliance, a capitalist conglomerate, has replaced the separate nations of Mexico, Canada, and the United States. Gone also are traditional cities—instead there are Low-, Middle-, and Higher-Life Existence areas: towns set up around penitentiaries, middle class suburbia, and elite gated enclaves (mostly Anglos despite the combining of nations), respectively. Published as Mexico, Canada, and the US prepared for NAFTA, book three extends the neoliberal policies of the trade agreement to undo nations, themselves, into a capitalist conglomerate.

Grandson to Gregory from book two and Medical Director for the entire region from Los Angeles to Mexico City (LAMEX), book three’s protagonist, battles La Mona as it strikes suddenly and terribly. In a search for knowledge as he treats patients in both the most exclusive Higher Life Existences and the poorest communities that live on the literal ash heap of history, Gregory performs his own clandestine experiments based on the knowledge he gains from reading his Grandfather’s books. Gregory realizes that the blood of Mexico City Mexicans, living under pollution for decades, has mutated to cure La Mona—with a simple blood transfusion, La Mona’s destruction of the body ceases immediately. Soon, mass immigration from Mexico City responds to the demand for mutated blood, and blood enslavement camps owned by pharmaceutical companies spread across the Triple Alliance. To ensure constant access to the curative sanguine elixir, Anglos pay to keep Mexico City Mexicans with them all times. Where *mestizaje* in earlier forms resulted in heterosexual reproduction and epistemological *mestizaje*, here it becomes the literal mixing of blood. Gregory ends the book by

contextualizing the blood transfusions in terms of historical trauma borne by the descendants from Aztlán, the fabled homeland of the Aztecs, ultimately praising blood enslavement as the return of blood back to its rightful land, flowing in the veins of the Anglo residents across the Triple Alliance.

Where Gregorio and Gregory II use writing as a method for understanding things, Gregory III envisions himself as a passive reader, regarding the books he read as curiosities, old stories without any valence in his life. In *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, critical race scholar Jodi Melamed explains how ‘liberal multicultural reading practices,’ a result of a state-sanctioned control on discourses about race, reduce racial difference to mere characters on a page. Melamed also highlights the ways that novels have formally resisted this reductive gaze, providing a survey of how literature both creates and is created by racial narratives. By examining how Gregory describes his relationship to reading and writing, I show how Gregory III, the protagonist of the third book of the novel, exemplifies Melamed’s ‘liberal multicultural reader’.

After establishing Gregory as a ‘liberal reader’ according to Melamed’s definition, I explore how the metafiction allows the novel to interrupt readers’ plane of reality, underscoring the generative relationship between history and narrative. Lastly, I analyze Gregory’s liberal multicultural lauding of ‘blood enslavement’ as a solution to colonialism, as the novel’s playful ‘dare’ of the reader. While Mexican blood has mutated to resist the dangerous plague, and now runs, as Gregory says, in the veins of everyone in what used to be *Aztlán*, blood farms could only be read as an equitable solution to colonialism through the liberal multicultural reading practices Gregory performs. The process of the reader discovering the generative connection between fiction and official history is overlaid on top of the process of Gregory III discovering the strong,

generative connection between history and literature. In other words, Gregory's process towards an understanding of history facilitates the same process for the reader and renders the novel what Sonnet Retman calls a hybrid text—both satire and documentary. Thus, the novel plays a trick on the reader: to recognize the terrible nature and inhumanity of blood enslavement, readers must also recognize Gregory's liberal multicultural reading practices as their own and thus, recognize their own complicity in the narratives about (neo)colonialism. As a Chicanafuturist text, *Plagues*' narrative strategies point to liminal spaces in the historical narratives.

Representation under Racial Capitalism

In conversation with Cedric Robinson's concept of racial capitalism and Michael Omi and Howard Winant's discussion of racial formations in the United States, critical race scholar Jodi Melamed elaborates a genealogy of race matters in the United States into three "successive official or state-recognized U.S. antiracisms: racial liberalism (1940s to 1960s), liberal multiculturalism (1980s to 1990s), and neoliberal multiculturalism (2000s)." By restricting what can count as acceptable discourse about race, these antiracisms have "functioned as unifying discourses for U.S. state, society, and global ascendancy and as material forces for postwar global capitalist expansion" (Melamed1). Specifically, these official anti-racisms worked to obscure how "[a]s a material force, . . . racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism" (Robinson 2). In other words, for Robinson, there is no difference between racialism and capitalism, as the former has imbued the latter. Further, Robinson uses the term 'racial capitalism' to "refer to the subsequent structure as a historical agency" (2) that works to erase the evidence of how race, despite being a social construct, is a main organizing principle for capitalist exploitation. Central to Melamed's argument is the importance of literary

studies for disseminating this restrictive discourse around race, which resulted from the postwar use of literature as a means for Americans to know ‘difference’ and the ‘Other’, and thus, reducing communities of color to pages in a book. Connecting the different exploitations of racialization, Melamed’s work exemplifies that historical representation cannot be without a political critique borne out of racial capitalism.

In what Melamed calls Liberal Multiculturalism, literature “was bound to a master narrative about the civil rights movement that described the triumph of formerly oppressed minorities (symbolically African Americans) in defeating racism and gaining individual fulfillment and group dignity through full inclusion in American democracy” (36-7). In correlation with discourse about equity moving away from ‘civil rights’ as material descriptors such as race were replaced with ephemeral descriptors such as ‘difference,’ ‘diversity’, and ‘gaining voice,’ race novels served as sources for “information retrieval” about the other. One goal that multicultural literature inherited from protest novels from the interwar period was of “culture as property”: it was able to operate as a passive receptacle of knowledge for the multicultural reader while also simultaneously functioning to show the reader’s general appreciation of ‘diversity’ (Melamed 3). As in all of Melamed’s phases, (white) liberal multicultural readers used literature to ‘get to know the other’, allowing them to “legitimize their managerial-class position” in an increasingly globalizing world. “As multicultural literary canons became emblematic of the post–civil rights era, reading then became a rite of passage for white students, a means for them to honor and participate in (the spirit of) antiracist activism as consumers in a way that did not antagonize but furthered racial capitalism” (Melamed 37). Melamed’s exploration of how liberal multicultural reading practices resulted in a reductive discourse about race and difference will provide a framework for understanding Gregory,

Plagues' protagonist, as *the* liberal multicultural reader of history, who fails to contextualize history into the rubric of racial capitalism.

Although the novel is divided into three books, each following an eponymous medical doctor, this article will focus on the protagonist of the third book, to be referred to as 'Gregory III' where necessary. There is a certain sense of *deja lu* (already read) inherent to the novel, where each protagonist deals with similar problems, building the sense of a relational connection between the three protagonists across time and space, allowing one to more or less describe the three. Though, as mentioned earlier, of the three protagonists, Gregory III is the only one who doesn't see himself as a writer, but only as a (passive) reader. In a time where all reading is done on celluloid screens, books are silly relics of the past, and emotions have been trained out of humans, Gregory's only possibility for access to his grandfather's world is through the paper library he left behind. For Gregory, a search for lost emotions in his grandfather's books becomes a quest to understand the relational nature of history. Gregory's strong connection to his grandfather's books offers a convenient excuse for getting to know the Other via literature—there is literally no 'Other' left!

Gregory III, who exists in a future dominated by neoliberal sovereignty, where corporations have overpowered traditional notions of borders and nations, allows for a speculative continuation of Melamed's framework in 2099. As the Medical Director for the entire region of LAMEX, Gregory lives comfortably among the elite. Belonging to the same kind of managerial class that administered order over a racialized underclass that Melamed describes in "Neoliberal Multiculturalism," Gregory exerts his neoliberal subjectivity every time he retreats to his estate in Hemet, contributes knowledge to the vast computer banks that selectively house all available knowledge, or uses the computer travelways that take him between Los

Angeles and Mexico City in a matter of seconds, all while millions crowd the penal-colonies-turned-towns known as Lower Life Existences. As a liberal multicultural reader, Gregory's relationship to books is his relationship to the past, to history. When he is not travelling to the sites of newly discovered gaseous plagues rising from our waste, Gregory often has the privilege to read books and enjoy life at his leisure, which prompts him to ponder what history was like before the Triple Alliance.

I read *The Rag Doll Plagues* as an example of what Melamed calls "a race-radical literary practice whose signifying acts powerfully called forth antiracist visions at odds with racial liberalism's settlements" (77). The "racial-liberal reading practices" that Gregory performs "make racial liberalism visible as a mode of racial regulation that ironically operates through the very mechanisms of its antiracist "solutions," including processes of sympathetic identification and white desire for a racially inclusive [homogenous] American nationalism (Melamed 77). Further, *Plagues* "constructs an imaginative exercise for its implied reader" and "[u]sing metafictional address, the novel predicts that the force of racial-liberal reading practices will cause the novel to be misread by its white liberal readers" as allegorical instead of satirical. *Plagues* "rhetorically dares its own readers to go against such reading practices, to "get the handle to the joke" of their own ideological confinement" (Melamed 77). Similarly, I use Sonnet Retman's exploration of a hybrid genre of both satire and documentary that "genre created a common discourse of moral truth-telling aimed at the patriotic and economic production of the folk in populist narratives promoted by the New Deal nation-state and corporate capitalism" (4). *Plagues*, like both modernist burlesque and signifying ethnography – two formations of Retman's hybrid texts – "inhabit that which they mean to critique, using exaggeration, irony, and reversal to reveal the performative dimensions of the object of their scrutiny. Each form makes

its readers aware of their own press for the authentic. By way of their complicity critiques, modernist burlesque and signifying ethnography offer their readers a resistant reading practice” (4-5). Using Melamed’s and Retman’s respective arguments as a point of reference, this article will explore metafiction, analyzing Gregory III’s own reading practices according to the multicultural ethics of reading protocols that shape the interpretation of the past.

Reading As Fetish

Living in his grandfather’s house in Hemet, California, Gregory divides his time between three things: reading from his Grandfather’s inherited library, spending time with his life and work partner, Gabi Chung, and working to cure sudden resurgences of the plague. Gabi is Gregory’s companion in life, but she is also Assistant Director of the LAMEX Medical Directorate—if Gregory was ever to lose his job, Gabi would replace him. Although they share a life and a profession, Gabi cannot make sense of Gregory’s search to understand his grandfather’s past and considers papers books relics of a less-developed, less-knowledgeable time. Gabi’s incredulity at Gregory’s favorite intellectual pastime is due to her quite literal embodiment of the future of their field: part of her arm has been replaced with a computerized prosthetic that allows her to perform complicated medical tests within seconds; she represents the future—a future in which Gregory cannot see himself. Her “hideous arm” (Morales *Plagues* 147) is a reminder of the decision that looms over Gregory—he has one year to agree to the bioengineering program or suffer certain demotion, or termination. Gregory’s reverence for books is inversely correlated to the “postmodern fear of technology,” which “threatens [his] ability to theorize the present” (Olguin 219). Caught between worlds, Gregory resists the computer appendage while “mother earth transforms into an angel of death who from her womb

metes out fatal destruction...and cataclysmic effects to which modern technology has no answer” (López-Lozano 124). Catherine S. Ramírez’s re-casting of the cyborg to center women-of-color reads the subjects in writings by Gloria Anzaldúa and Octavia Butler as cyborgs who “interrogate the stability of social categories” (“Cyborg Feminism” 394). As such, Gregory’s resistance to and triumph over technology makes him a Latin@ quasi-cyborg, “lead[ing] the way out of the dystopian postmodern morass by either becoming machines or mastering them” (Olguin 220). Rejecting the homogenizing tactics of the capitalist conglomerate, Gregory’s fetish for books is driven by their use as a technology to access emotion and restore his humanity. Something that began as an indulgent novelty for Gregory, reading becomes a solitary fetish, a window into a world with feeling.

Semiotician Thomas A Sebeok notes how, in 1760, writers on anthropology “began using fetish in the wider sense of an inanimate object being worshipped by ‘savages’ on account of its supposed inherent magical powers, or as its animation by a spirit” (51). Drawn to an act that no one around him understands, Gregory is alone in his desire for emotions, in his reverence the human bonding described in paper books. Maria Herrera-Sobek characterizes Gregory’s “urge to know” as a primal sexual desire, using Freud to describe *Plagues* as an “empistemophilic” project (106). Indeed, Gregory himself describes reading as a “fetish [he] enjoy[s] without shame” (Morales *Plagues* 142). Further, when Gregory initially searches books for clues as to how to regain human emotions, both the pain and the joy he finds in the books are decoupled from intersectional or material-economic analyses about the characters in his grandfather’s writings. The distance between pleasure and social context in Gregory’s historical readings mirrors the classic Marxist notion of commodity fetishism: “...the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection

with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this” (Marx 165). Communications scholar Sut Jhally, adapted this notion in terms of semiotics, arguing that "fetishism consists of seeing the meaning of things as an inherent part of their physical existence when in fact that meaning is created by their integration into a system of meaning" (29). Thus, like Melamed’s liberal multicultural reader, Gregory is drawn to books as physical representations of emotions, without contextualizing the social relations from which they emerge.

Gregory seeks within his grandfather’s books an easy sense of pleasurable wholeness, jettisoning the difficult social contexts that allowed for and created the emotions Gregory desires. Most literally, Gregory is often aroused reading his grandfather’s novels, particularly one about a French artist who traveled to Japan and engages in orgies with various Asian men, reducing them all to “shiny, engorged penises” (Morales *Plagues* 142). In contrast to Gregory’s repulsion to Gabi’s computer-appendage, he “placed the cool, almost living skin-like paper to [his] lips and desired the people who resided in Grandfather Gregory’s novel” (Morales *Plagues* 142). The books in Gregory’s library serve as a foil to Gabi, his romantic partner and intellectual interlocutor. More literally, books serve as Gabi’s sexual foil when his “grandfather’s account of love and art in Japan was pushed aside by Gabi’s vagina” (Morales *Plagues* 147). Gregory’s book fetish and his quest for full humanity through emotions stand in opposition to his social position and relationships, causing conflict that threatens the relationships.

Causing a rift with Gabi, one of Gregory’s foremost conflicts is a search both for emotions and a way to make sense of them. After being demoted for performing his secret transfusion experiments, “vaguely familiar ideas, emotions and motivations broke” into his thinking, “and now they surfaced, driving [him] to seek relationships that at one time [he]

refused to cultivate” (Morales *Plagues* 196). Although Gabi and Gregory’s relationship fades into their work, emotions flood forward when Gabi connects her computer arm to a massive power circuit and raises the voltage lever to maximum capacity, committing suicide. After months of hard work of defeating the worst of the plagues, her body had rejected the computer appendage, requiring her to charge it more and more often or otherwise suffer burnt flesh. Adding insult to injury, the basic medicine and spiritual knowledge Gregory gleaned from his grandfather’s library enabled him to combat the plague. In the end, Gabi’s notion of ‘advanced knowledge and science’ had been shattered both by Gregory and by her burning arm. Worse still, she would never be Medical Director. As many scholars have noted and rightfully critiqued, Gabi remains a minor character, tasked impossibly with competing with cultural knowledge and history. Stephen Sohn has both reclaimed Gabi from being dismissed as the Asian model minority and provides a useful consideration of “the ways in which Morales’s deployment of speculative fiction skillfully reimagines how racial formations are reconsidered and reevaluated” (153), positing that her demise stands in distinction to the Mexico City Mexicans’ newly ‘elevated’ status. As Franco notes, “the computerized arm and the attachment to the objectifying mechanisms of Lamex society make it impossible for Gabi to understand how she participates in her own subjugation” (375)— especially when her death is best understood in relation to the novel’s requirement that “the secondary female character suffers horrifically, and suffering catalyzes each Gregory’s reevaluation of himself and his world” (Garay 142). Gabi’s death convinces Gregory more than ever that “in the written text, there exists an answer” (Morales *Plagues* 170) and the answer, he decides, is emotion.

Gregory’s reverence for the paper relics in his Grandfather’s library is ultimately a fetish he enjoys in solitude, desiring the full range of emotions as experienced by the characters. In

order to fulfill his sense of a fuller humanity, Gregory separates these emotions from their material conditions as described in the narrative, locating them, instead, with the physical nature of the book itself. Thus, books serve as a foil and antagonist to Gabi, who uncritically believes in the technological future of the Triple Alliance. In the end, Gregory's empistemophilic fetish becomes key in stopping the apocalyptic plague.

Metafiction and Authoring History

Whereas Gregory I and II both often narrated themselves as narrators, Gregory III experiences himself only passively reading his grandfather's paper books and does not recognize his account as one that he is constructing. Thus, posing Gregory as Melamed's 'liberal multicultural reader,' allows for the reading of the metafiction in the novel as a deliberate relationship between history and narrative, as opposed to dismissing it as postmodern oversaturation of symbols. In addition to highlighting *Plagues* as a construction, the different forms of metafiction in this novel also initiate an important connection between the form of the novel and the content it might hold (specifically, critiques of (neo)colonialism), which hails the reader as a character of the novel, complicit in its reality. The metafiction, which leads the reader to undo the novel, also simultaneously undoes a liberal multicultural understanding of racial progress, a chronological conception of history. Many other postmodern novels similarly foreground their construction, such as the quintessential postmodern text, *The Crying of Lot 49*. Pynchon's novel, although replete with allusions to literary and musical artists, presents the reader with a case for the constructedness of the novel, but does not necessarily confront the reader with their own complicity in the aftereffects of colonialism.

Plagues develops a relational, a linear sense of history by following a similar protagonist through a symmetrical plot line. “I returned to Mexico City These events of good fortune gradually developed strong positive sensory communication pressures indicating to me that I had no choice, that the events had planned in themselves there [sic] occurrence, that they had recognized that our coming together in a precise time and place was *symmetrically correct*” (Morales *Plagues* 134, emphasis mine). In the novel, all planes of time and space occurs all at once, where the protagonists live multiple iterations of the same life, concurrently influencing each other through the flow of activity. Small inconsistencies peek through between the symmetry, signaling a sense of re-seeing and re-telling history. “Not surprisingly, then, the feeling of *déjà vu*, *déjà vecu*, is frequently experienced by the characters in part three (as is the *déjà lu* effect exploited to make the reader connect episodes and make certain inferences)” (Márquez 90). As the protagonists constantly experience both *déjà vu* and *deja vecu*, so does the literal reader. This explicit connection between the protagonists’ and a reader’s experience is one way that the novel confuses the limit between the reality of the reader and the reality within the novel, thus foregrounding the generative connection between narrative and history, epistemology and ontology, reader and writer.

Within *The Rag Doll Plagues*, there also exists the novel *The Rag Doll Plagues*, described as being 400 pages long. Morales’ novel, on the other hand, ends at 200 pages. These small digressions are part of the metafiction the novel employs to highlight its own constructedness. However, leaving it at that would allow readers an easy opportunity to dismiss the critique of liberal reading practices as a simple narrative. As opposed to metafictional direct address of the reader, this mentioning of the novel’s title places the title *within* the novel and therefore undoes the separation of reality between reader and read: the reader becomes a

character in the novel, and the novel's characters enter the purview of the reader's reality. If the metafiction in *Plagues* is attempting to reveal how the reader is a writer of the larger historical narrative, then the metafiction works to envelop the reader in this literary world, where they become a character, a narrator, and an author in the "'novels of history'" (Morales *Plagues* 148).

The ontological challenge presented by the metafictional reference to the title of the book also allows for a larger exploration of the generative link between literature and history. Beyond the original juxtaposition of Gregory's grandfather's book and the novel the reader holds in their hands, both of which are records of history, Gregory finds the answer to his puzzle in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, often considered the first science-fiction novel that considers the limits of science, what it means to be human, and what it means to create life. Where Dr. Frankenstein creates something that exceeds his control, so too do Gregory's curative blood transfusions threaten to destabilize the social structure of the Triple Alliance. Though Gregory eventually finds the necessary advice within a novel, he first "grasps" his "inability to discern fact from fiction" while himself reading *The Rag Doll Plagues* (159), creating an experiential expectation between protagonist and reader. Although the expectation is set that the reader also experience a confusion of reality in reading the novel, Gregory himself does not fulfill the expectation. Though Gregory conceptually understands that history is but a narrative, he still attempts to discern fact from fiction, ultimately reproducing neoliberal neocolonial narratives.

The appearance of unchronological apparitions – "computer ghosts" – that interact with and affect people's actions across different time periods in the novel suggests that time and history are relational, a recursive narrative existing all at once and turning on itself. Each seemingly random time and place that the plague hits, the cavalry arrives from different

moments in time to assist in the familiar battle. “Grandfather Gregory and Papá Damián continuously pursued a better past. They understood that we created the past and not the future in the present. Now, I too, strove for a better past” (Morales *Plagues* 141-2). Under a progressive conception of history, the focus is on future events. However, as Gregory points out, we create the past through *present* storytelling about the past, our understanding of which affects the future we seek. In turn, both the future and the past are always constantly being created. However, while *Plagues* highlights the relationships of influence between the historical and the literary, “historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction” (Hutcheon 4). Thus, the dialectical process of the production of history is explained away in book three, where supercomputers, through their creations of unchronological apparitions, allow for the past to literally exist in the present resulting in literal interaction between different time periods. For the mechanics of the novel, uploading writing from the past into the vast supercomputers that hold all modern knowledge creates these apparitions. “Into the computer in which he created his fiction and introduced his self-description, I computerized my reports. My history and my fiction simultaneously dwelt with him, not knowing for sure who had control of the vast knowledge banks at our command” (Morales *Plagues* 142). Although in *Rag Doll Plagues*, the knowledge of the past and of the present exists in tandem, through the mediation of a supercomputer, the computer ghosts’ ability to interact with other time periods requires a relational history where each Gregory faces similar challenges.

The computer ghosts that Gregory encounters throughout represent the metafictional aspects of the novel signaling the indiscernible difference between history and narrative. Avery Gordon describes how “[t]he ghost makes itself known to us through haunting and pulls us

affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as a recognition” (63). In conjunction with the relational and alinear timeline that historiographic metafiction creates in *Plagues*, the computer ghosts remind readers that “haunting recognition is a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (Gordon 63). The novel’s use of metafiction, connects realities across time and space both within and outside the novel, creating an experiential association with the protagonists, particularly in book three. Thus, *The Rag Doll Plagues* seeks to haunt its readers to “make choices within those spiraling determinations that make the present waver” because to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects (Gordon 190). *Plagues* invites this haunting recognition using strategies similar to what Sonnet Retman calls hybrid genre of satire and documentary. Indeed, *Plagues* combines aspects of both of the variations of the hybrid genre: like ‘modernist burlesque,’ it “implicates the performing protagonist and his multiple audiences in the perpetuation of insidious nationalist dramas,” as we will see in subsequent sections; *Plagues* concurrently exemplifies ‘signifying ethnography’ as it “implicates the ethnographer and the reader in the activity of searching for ‘the authentic’” (Retman 5), as I have shown in this section outlining how *Plagues* uses metafiction to blur categories of reality, placing itself within the same plane of reality as the reader. “Enjoining their readers to ask, “How was it we were caught?,”’ like the modernist satires of Retman’s study, *Plagues* “call[s] for a self-reflexive reading practice that perceives the seductions of the real and the authentic in narratives of self, community, and nation and the possibility that radical truths may be found in the most outrageous of fictions” (Retman 29). Blending historical fiction, with political satire, *The Rag Doll Plagues* uses metafiction to associate the protagonist and audience together, as readers, in order to set forth reading practices, allowing for both the challenge of

complicity that Retman and Melamed describe, along with co-constructing a feeling of *convivencia* with other characters in the annals of history.

La Raza C3smica in the Absence of Borders

Literary critic, Manuel M. Mart3n-Rodr3guez, connects the dissymmetry between the three parts of the novel to the Nietzschean concept of the eternal return in order to underline that the “historical narration in *Plagues* is no longer the progressive chronological account of events that constituted *Brick People*, or even *Reto* [Morales’ earlier works]. What *Plagues* presents is a rhizomatic history, one in which we can enter or leave at any particular point, a history composed of flashes, greatly devoid of causality” (91). Mart3n-Rodr3guez goes on to connect this notion of history to the shifting focus in Chicana novels from “epistemology (what the truth is about the Chicano/a experience, how history can be rewritten to account for the suppressed Chicano/a point of view, etc.) to ontology (how to create a world or worlds)” (91). *Plagues* includes both of these sentiments, making ‘corrections’ to the official record writ large, and presenting an ontological challenge to the reader. If able to recognize the novel as existing in same plane of their reality, mere ‘readers’ (passive) become characters (active) within a historical narrative, where they understand their role in racial capitalism. This allows for the reader to become a narrator of history, a writer and changer of history, to imagine alternate planes of reality. To fail the ontological challenge is to ignore the generative link between literature and history and thus, through the eyes of a liberal multicultural reader, merely regard the novel as a closed work of fiction. As the ontological challenge requires readers to acknowledge their complicity in colonialism, the quintessential Chicana experience is banished altogether, paradoxically, through the use of symmetrical storylines to create a relational history.

This movement away from essentializing notions of the Chicax experience allows for a critique of Vasconcelos' *raza cósmica*, his idea that Latin Americans could usher in a 'universal' era of history.

Though critique of Jose Vasconcelos' *la raza cósmica* comes easily, the now excoriated theory of racial hybridization has continued to permeate conversations of Chicax subjectivity, due in part to his defense of cultural mixing. His writings from the 1920s were attractive as they recognized the danger in white supremacy manifesting itself as separation in the US (Stavans 26) as were his writings from the 1940s predicting that "Latin America as a whole would come to play a defining role in geopolitics. And the United States, always bullying its neighbors, would be brought to its knees, not through war but by means of natural evolution" (Stavans 40). According to Vasconcelos, "races appear and disappear in history according to a cyclical clock and ... the ecosystem in which they exist justifies one of them overwhelming the others" (Stavans 23). The next natural evolution in the colonial ecosystem, he posited, would be due to mestizaje, Latin America's (albeit violent and genocidal) strategy of integration that avoided the particular pitfalls of US racial isolation. As such, Vasconcelos entered the zeitgeist of the Chicax movement for liberation in the US in the 1960's and 70s as a means to espouse politics that valued racial hybridity. The popularity of the work as a rallying cry was due in part to the nationalistic sense of pride for *Aztlán* of many important and influential Chicano organizations. In contemporary times, the fruitful critique that Vasconcelos makes cannot substantiate his larger, problematic reading of Iberian colonization of Mexico and the Americas as necessary for the advancement of his cyclical racial ecosystem. Octavio Paz, another important icon in Mexican literary and intellectual history, remembers Vasconcelos as an educator who attracted people by "his conviction that self-knowledge as well as collective knowledge brings forth

change, [conceiving] of instruction as active participation” (Stavans 41). Thus, regardless of the content being widely accepted as problematic, Vasconcelos’ general concept of *la raza cósmica*, imbued by his notions of the collective need for and the inextricable nature of science, knowledge, and the arts, has animated an entire discourse of the Latin@ historical narrative.

That *The Rag Doll Plagues* satirizes *la raza cósmica* is only a response to the discourse about language purity and citizenship of the 1990s. Written in 1992, *Plagues* responds to the racially coded social controversies in California of the time, mainly, the xenophobic reaction to immigration, imagined largely to be from Mexico and Latin America. Martín-Rodríguez describes *Plagues* “as a transnationalistic text... about the re(b)ordering of the Americas” (89). While it’s true that the *herida abierta* that Anzaldúa describes no longer exists in *Plagues* as a physical, grating permeable barrier, it still exists in the sense that people of color continue to be regulated to the margins. Further, Gregory is incapable of reconciling the abusive history of maquiladoras with the way of life he knows now. He celebrates maquiladoras as reason for the abolishment of the border, negating the lack of a border as a radical upheaval of (neo)colonial systems.

All along what used to be the border between the United States and Mexico, the maquiladora concept flourished. About twenty years after the turn of the century, the border became stabilized and eventually abolished. Although the border area had a few Lower Life Existence concentrations like Chula Vista, now all people lived a Middle Life Existence. Everyone worked in the manufacturing industry and seemed to be content. Poverty, hunger, crime had been eliminated by jobs. I recalled Grandfather’s descriptions of how the Border Patrol tried to stop Mexican immigration into the United States and how the Immigration and Naturalization Service swept through Mexican neighborhoods arresting brown faced ‘illegal aliens.’ I laughed out loud at what time and history did. (Morales *Plagues* 151)

Even within this excerpt where Gregory recounts the magical benefits of maquiladoras, there exists a direction as to how to read Gregory’s account: “I laughed out loud at what time and history did.” As Gregory points out how history will rewrite itself out of existence, the reader can

also point out how maquiladoras were neither laughable nor liberating for those who worked in them. Gregory narrates the process of our purposeful amnesia, as racial history is rewritten to focus on economics, erasing the racial politics that permeate capitalism and created the situation in the first place. Reflecting the neoliberal multicultural moment, as Melamed defines it, Gregory's reading of the maquiladora corridor "provides a restricted sense of antiracist equality and codes U.S.-led global capitalist developments as beneficial" (139). In other words, Gregory's laughter at earlier racist tropes of the border suggest that such racial codes exist only in the past, whereas Gregory is simply incapable of connecting the past history with the development he credits to maquilas. As a result, the contradictions in Gregory's reading reveal the "work of neoliberal multiculturalism to represent a certain set of economic policies as multicultural rights, to portray the equality of the free market as the most fundamental expression of equality, and to make the diversity of goods, services, and capital flowing across national boundaries stand for the best manifestation of multiculturalism" (Melamed 139). Thus, while the border is indeed absent from the Triple Alliance conglomerate, Gregory lacks an anti-capitalist lens through which to view the history of the maquiladora corridor, thus remaining Melamed's liberal reader, who cannot make the connection between capitalism and racial exploitation.

While Gregory's later explanations about Mexican history undo the fantasy of maquiladora stability and equality, the novel also undoes the romantic dream, itself. Gregory describes Chula Vista, one of the Lower Life Existences (LLEs) on the maquiladora corridor:

[T]he sum of these LLE cities had the same history. Built around old prison facilities, most of the population consisted of the Lumpen, the criminals and dregs of our society. The failure of our nation's penitentiaries to rehabilitate people had created a one hundred percent recidivism. No matter the sentence, it was ... life in a penal colony.... Prison towns sprang up around the isolated penitentiaries. After ten years of bloody riots and just before the formation of the Triple Alliance, our country designated the prisons as self-governing LLEs. People found guilty of antisocial behavior that required separation from society were condemned to one of the nation's LLEs. (Morales *Plagues* 137)

Gregory's romantic assessment of the maquiladora corridor is undone with the information he provides about LLEs, only fifteen pages earlier. Mirroring both the Los Angeles Uprising of 1992 and the War on Drugs, Gregory describes how life in the Triple Alliance remains one of racial capitalism and mass incarceration, where ten years of "bloody riots" are necessary simply to achieve self-governance. Despite the lack of national borders, the (neo)colonial project is alive and well, with Mexicans accounting for 90% of the military and deploying to places like the Philippines, which had been razed in search of resources. In response to such inequality, and as a result of centuries of an uneven relationship where Mexico provided the labor for Canada and the US, the Triple Alliance military still provides upward mobility for Mexicans who send their pay back home to "enhance their Middle Life Existence" (Morales *Plagues* 144). Gregory explains it all away, though, by underscoring that the soldiers were not "dissatisfied with their life condition," especially since they now "possessed the most basic necessities of life that about thirty years past most Mexicans lacked. In the Americas and particularly in the countries of the Triple Alliance, hunger had been conquered and these soldiers were proof. ... They had access to the commodities and luxuries *we* enjoyed" (Morales *Plagues* 144). It's no surprise, then, that among the Canadian and United Statesians who make up the remaining 10%, the Military Officers and administrative personnel, there persisted "an attitude of apprehension" towards the Mexicans. Lastly, that the Mexican military members work to send their pay home mirrors the immigrant working in the US in the 21st century to send money back home to Mexico. The existence of such inequality between Higher, Middle, and Lower Life Existences prevents Morales' borderless zone from being a borderlands utopia.

Franco reminds us that "[p]ointedly, there is no mention of the word Chicano in book 3 and describes Gregory reading of his grandfather's archive as a process of "dialectically

expanding consciousness” in relation with and recognition of a cultural past that he was never able to claim fully in the first place” (382). However, Gregory’s use of “we” when describing the living conditions in Mexico reveals to the reader that he conceives of himself as United Statesian, which only serves to underscore the development of the neoliberal inequalities of the 21st century, despite his assertion that the “border had been stabilized” by the maquiladora industry. Gregory comes to consider himself part of a larger community only after completing the personal quest for knowledge by finding the cure for the plague, though his declaration that he is “transfigured into all those that have gone before me...my hopeful ever-surviving race” (Morales *Plagues* 200). Gregory III becomes a vehicle for the “ancient tear” the protagonist experiences at the end of each book, an identity theoretically incompatible with the celebration of (neo)colonial capitalist rhetorics of inclusionary markets. “To parody is not to destroy the past; in fact, to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it. And this is the postmodern paradox” (Hutcheon 6). Here, *Plagues* enacts this paradox through Gregory, who both romanticizes the past and its economic effects all the while providing the reader with evidence that contradicts the fantasy of a market solution to racism.

Morales’ novel demonstrates both sides of the shift in Chicana cultural production from epistemology to ontological imaginaries, creating the world in a Chicanafuturist vision. Such a focus on the creation of new ways of being satirizes Jose Vasconcelos’ notion of *la raza cósmica*, juxtaposing capitalist market inclusion to the reductive cultural history that animated Mexico’s national identity. As such, the myth of Gregory’s borderless utopia is undone, revealing Gregory as a racialized elite who identifies as United Statesian, and who reads capitalist exploitation as a harbinger of racial freedom.

Blood's Return to Aztlán

Secretly combining both new technology and the old knowledge and history found in his grandfather's books, Gregory uncovers a cure to the rampant gaseous cancers rampant across the region—Gregory discovers that the blood of Mexico City Mexicans has mutated to resist the cancerous plague. Acknowledging that this “thought originated in Grandfather Gregory's long forgotten histories” (Morales *Plagues* 195), Gregory contradicts and complicates his earlier (mis)reading of the history of maquiladora production centers, now connecting them to other points in a larger (neo)colonial history.

In the past, it was Mexican Indian blood that was sacrificed to the sun forces; it was Mexican blood that was spilled during the conquest; it was Mexican blood that ran during the genocide of campaign of the Spanish Colonial period; it was Mexican blood that stained the bayonets during the war of Independence and the Mexican Revolution of 1910; it was Mexican blood that provided the cheap labor to California during the first half of the 19th century and that now provided the massive labor force in the *maquiladora* factory belt; it was Mexican blood that provided the millions of men and women that constituted more than ninety percent of the Triple Alliance military forces. It was Mexican blood that guaranteed a cure and prevention from lung disorders. In a matter of time Mexican blood would run in all the population of the LAMEX corridor. Mexican blood would gain control of the land it lost almost two and fifty years ago. (Morales *Plagues* 195)

In this passage, Gregory does critique the *maquiladora* factory belt as a result of the violent history of conquest and colonialism, instead of the bringer of jobs and leveler of class. However, Gregory again undercuts this possible critique of the relationship between colonialism and capitalism, reveling in the idea that “Mexican blood would gain control of the land it lost almost two and fifty years ago.” Whereas earlier, Gregory considered the still-flourishing maquiladora belt as a provider of middle class existences, here he critiques it not in it of itself, but because it had been limited in scope to the borderlands. Despite a greater historical awareness, Gregory ultimately reifies the same progress narrative: that capitalism will be able to offer an equitable solution to racism and neocolonialism.

Gregory covers a lot of ground in this passage, summing up at least a thousand years of history. His focus coincides with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which prompted the United States to appropriate large parts of what is now the Southwest from Mexico, and reinforces Gregory's investment in the neoliberal state. As William Calvo-Quirós points out, blood itself is a signifier of capitalist exploitation: Karl Marx described capitalism's greed as a "vampire thirst for the living blood of labour" (367). Gregory's notion of linear progress ignores the very history it sets out to follow, ignoring the relationship between capitalism and colonialism and reinvesting in neoliberal exploitative diversity. Thus, while Gregory has access to his grandfather's books, his practice of reading only for information retrieval serves as a caution against stories decontextualized from their material conditions in racial capitalism.

Though Gregory does begin with a stereotypical description of indigenous sacrifice, signaling that history begins well before European influence, using the words 'Mexican Indian' to describe the peoples of Mesoamerica is not only an unchronological misnomer, but it also reveals Gregory's tendency to only understand the past within colonial frameworks. In fact, such blanket usage of 'Mexican' as a descriptor of pre-Colombian societies even seems to mirror the parlance of the current conservative trend to use 'Mexican' to refer to anyone colonized by the Spanish. Further still, that Gregory's timeline of bloodshed begins with the stereotypical notion of pre-Colombian violence suggests that any violence that took place before colonization is tantamount to the first action in a progressive line of Mexican bloodshed. Later, Gregory laments that the "urgent need to possess Mexican blood reached the point of absurdity," with some blood farms "insist[ing] on physical criteria: height, muscularity, facial looks, IQ test and age" for the Mexico City Mexicans (MCMs) under contract in their "breeder communities" (Morales *Plagues* 194), protecting the 'pedigree' of the blood and reinforcing racist stereotypes. Unable to

conceive of the possibility that reparations for colonization could never be borne by racial capitalism, Gregory's history satirizes essentializing notions of identity, such as *la raza cósmica*. Martín-Rodríguez notes how "Chicano/a nationalism (centered on the idea of Aztlán as the Chicano/a homeland) struggled to reterritorialize a deterritorialized people, but in doing so, it fixed that people in a static picture that suppressed or silenced most internal differences" (88). Gregory reifies colonial rhetorics of exploitation, again erasing the various indigenous communities ignored by references to a fabled Aztlán of the past, as has been noted Villalobos and Gamber. Where Gregory earlier had trouble reading the trauma and exploitation in the histories of the maquiladora belt, he now mistakenly reduces Mexica culture to blood, returning to colonial forms of knowing.

Three years later, Gregory, now "the first advisor to the Man-god of El Mar de Villas and the director of its political and paramilitary sectors of El Mar de Villas [sic]," describes the day of Gabi's suicide as "that day of losing a loved one and of gaining a whole people" (Morales *Plagues* 199). Although Gregory has become part of the Lower Life Existence where he first discovered the cure to La Mona, he still romanticizes the residents as representative of one entity—"mi raza." In keeping with liberal multicultural reading practices, ending his narration with identification with "*la raza*" paradoxically absolves Gregory of any concrete identification, and thus, any concrete accountability: "I am no longer me. I am transfigured into all those that have gone before me: my progenitors, my hopeful ever-surviving race. From the deepest part of my being there rushes to the surface of my almond shaped eyes an ancient tear" (Morales *Plagues* 200). Like Melamed's multicultural liberal reader, Gregory loses himself in a history that he himself has reconstructed, allowing him access to the 'ancient tear' with which he, himself, refuses to come to terms.

The process of the reader discovering the generative connection between fiction and official history is overlaid on top of the process of the protagonists discovering the strong, generative connection between history and literature. In other words, Gregory's process towards an understanding of history facilitates the same process for the reader. Andrew Uzendoski similarly argues that by "[j]uxtaposing multiple worldviews, cognitive estrangement serves as the mechanism ... that spurs the reader to interrogate the dominance of existing social and political systems" particularly in how the novel "critiques Eurocentric epistemologies while recognizing the material ramifications of epistemological transformations" (190). Remaining hopeful, Uzendoski describes Gregory's move to El Mar de Villas as "lead[ing] leads a political movement to empower marginalized and disenfranchised peoples after reading his grandfather's speculative novel" and thus "representing the full transformative potential of cognitive estrangement" (190). While I agree that *Plagues*' ontological power does indeed stem from its use of cognitive estrangement, I do not read Gregory as a redemptive hero; instead, implicating both Gregory (as ethnographer of history) and the reader in the activity of searching for "the authentic" (Retman 5), Gregory serves as a cautionary tale about the importance of reading and analysis practices grounded in an understanding of racial capitalism.

Conclusion

By using Melamed's discussion of reading practices to analyze Gregory *as* a fetishizing reader, I argue that the metafiction within *Rag Doll Plagues* facilitates a similar process of historical contextualization of readers' own reading practices. Reading Gregory's evaluation of the novel's resolution as satire of *la raza cósmica*, the novel's ontological challenge comes to bear: readers must recognize the novel as existing in same plane of reality as the "novels of

history” (Morales *Plagues* 148), thus recognizing the absurdity of colonial redemption through blood enslavement. Mere ‘readers’ (passive) become characters (active) within a historical narrative, aware that they benefit from the exploitation of others, and renounce Gregory’s celebration of blood enslavement. Figuratively speaking, the novel encourages the creation of ontologies by allowing the reader to become a narrator of history, an author of history. As such, *Plagues* presents a framework for hopeful worldbuilding narrative strategies and practices of contextualization, cultivating what Emma Pérez calls a “decolonial queer gaze” (124), what William Calvo-Quirós describes as “clandestine intellectual maneuvers to retain collective memory and in situ knowledge” (157), what Americo Paredes calls the vernacular wisdom of “sabidurías populares” (2) and what Laura Pérez calls a critical investigative eye (128) that reads between the lines. The worldbuilding narrative strategies guide readers to acknowledge their complicity in colonialism, providing an ideological challenge against any quintessential Chicana experience by critiquing essentializing tropes of hybridity and highlighting the mestizo’s responsibility and complicity in the (neo)colonial repression of indigenous communities. To fail the ontological challenge is to ignore the generative link between literature and history and thus, through the eyes of a racial liberal reader, regard the novel as merely a closed work of fiction.

Similarly, in the next chapter, “Recreating the Real: *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*” I show how Anna Deaveare Smith’s multivalent set of texts (which includes theatrical performances, plays in textual form, and a film adaptation of the play) resists narratives that restrict race to a zero-sum game between two, and only two, races at a time. Made up of interviews with people close to the events of the Los Angeles Uprising, the form of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, itself, muddles the difference between life and literature, providing a multiplicity of stories and deliberately eschewing a singular, cohesive narrative. Smith, herself, has been critiqued for

stereotypical elements in her performances of interviewees of other races, particularly Korean shop owners. I argue, however, that much like *The Rag Doll Plagues*, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* similarly enacts an ontological challenge for its readers by firstly presenting a case for the blurring between history and narrative, and then requiring readers to read the text itself through this lens. Such a contextualized reading that responds to the text's worldbuilding narrative strategies would then analyze Smith's "multicultural" performances as a point of departure for critique of essentializing racial identities.

In many ways, Morales' *The Rag Doll Plagues* reflects what Melamed describes as the "possibility for multiple disassociations: of cultural production from people of color, of representation from context, and of antiracist intentions and desire for interracial exchange from activism for racial equality" (92), or what I would call textual *convivencia*. Published during Melamed's Liberal Multiculturalism, *Plagues* satirizes representational politics by locating the cure for both racism and the massive plague within Mexican blood, something that can be bought and sold and passively made a part of the hegemonic body. Further, though, *Plagues* also anticipates the concatenating of neoliberal policies that dismantled borders as it poised people as disposable consumers, particularly through its figurative corporate State, the Triple Alliance. Through the recurring focus on reproducing hybridized children, *Plagues* satirizes romanticized notions of hybridity like that of *la raza cosmica*, which reinforced Mexico's mestizo identity without supporting indigenous communities' autonomy. The combination of speculative fiction with metafiction that dissolves the difference between history and narrative creates a mirroring of the protagonist and reader's experiences. Such metafiction play poses a rhetorical dare that requires readers to reconcile the generative link between history and narrative. As Gregory's beliefs come into conflict, readers must choose what they think is *historical* about Gregory's

narrative, revealing themselves as an author of the annals of history. In that position, then, readers must confront their own contradictions, and thus, wrestle with their complicity in the aftereffects of colonialism.

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Chapter 2:
Recreating the Real
Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992

*Dreams are made of some
Indelible substance.*
Josie Morales

*[To] attempt to create new possibilities based on visions that become contagious
that will allow us to engage in heroic actions always against the odds,
no guarantee whatsoever,
That's hope.*
Cornel West

*Indelible: making marks that cannot be removed; ineradicable, permanent, lasting,
ingrained, persisting, enduring, unfading, unforgettable, haunting,
never to be forgotten.*

Where does public history end and personal narrative begin? Practically anyone in the United States during the 1990s saw the footage of LAPD officers beating Rodney King; indeed, the perspective that George Holliday captured on film from his apartment balcony became an undeniable fulcrum towards the Los Angeles Uprising, firmly wrenching itself onto the nightly news nationwide—and even internationally. The power of a visual representation of police abuse—irrefutable evidence of a long history of institutional and systemic racism—was supposed to sway the predominantly white jury into charging the officers, but instead showed the nation that the official narrative did not intend to account for structural and systemic racism. Prosecutors did not call Josie Morales, another resident in Holliday's apartment complex, to testify about how the LAPD officers began the beating without any instigation; her testimony contradicted Melanie Singer, a CHP officer. How easily one personal narrative becomes entrenched in official history, and the other relegated to the margins, again favoring the inherent

truth of state hierarchies like the CHP over the storytelling that comes from lived experience. Josie Morale's act of witnessing serves as one way of understanding this chapter's worldbuilding theoretical frame; her vignette, in conjunction with the others studied below, show how *Twilight* can operate as way of exploring literature as theory. Josie Morales exemplifies how storytelling facilitates the experiencing of other realities, how dreams and collective narration can open interstitial spaces where twilight dusk obscures discrete outlines. Juxtaposing Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* with newspaper coverage and recent documentary film, in this paper, I explore the generative relationship between personal narrative and official history.

On March 3, 1991, George Holliday recorded a group of police officers outside of his apartment balcony beating Rodney King repeatedly during a traffic stop (Mydans). Spurred by the video evidence Holliday sent to local news stations, four officers were charged with excessive force, though many more were present at the scene. In November 1991, a Korean shop owner was sentenced to only 400 hours of community service and a \$500 fine for killing Latasha Harlins, a Black teenager, shot in the back as she walked away from an argument (Stevenson 236). These two trials converged on April 29th, when, after a tortured year-long trial, a predominantly-white jury acquitted three officers and failed to reach a verdict on the fourth for the excessive force charges (Welsh and Adamstein). Los Angeles was furious. What the nightly news denounced as "the Riots," others have articulated as part of a resistance by the name of 'No Justice, No Peace.' For five days, business was not usual. Whatever the perspective on the aftermath, its catalysts could not be ignored. In the subsequent retrials, the CHP and LAPD recanted their initial reports about King being under the influence of drugs or speeding over 100mph (Ingram and Berger). They were subsequently convicted.

As part of her collection called, *On the Road: A Search for American Character*, Deavere Smith interviewed over 300 people connected in some way with the Los Angeles uprising. Almost ten years later, Smith's 1993 play was adapted into a film, meant to serve as a middle ground between the play and the play's written text, the former of which changes and fluctuates according to the performance. This chapter will mainly focus on *Twilight*, the written text, which Deavere explains "includes some of the material I performed both in the play's Los Angeles version for the Taper and in the version presented at the New York Shakespeare Festival" and "additional interviews that were not included in the stage versions" to "enrich the reader's understanding of the conflicts that erupted on April 29, 1992. For those who both see the play and read the book, I hope the book can serve as a companion to the theater experience" (*Twilight* xvii). Taking up Smith's instructions, this chapter reads the text version of *Twilight: Los Angeles*, as representative of both LA and New York forms of the play, in conjunction with the film adaptation from 2001, as a way of studying the less-than-ephemeral aspects of Smith's performances.

Using Smith's critical introduction to the text form of the play as indications for how to read the play, I argue that the narrative strategies of the play – both text form and film adaptation – provide instructional context for reading and understanding the play. In other words, reading Smith's introduction, the play's text, and the film in conjunction, clarifies how the narrative strategies of the texts set up an intellectual and ontological challenge for the audience. Much like the use of metafiction and satire in *The Rag Doll Plagues* that served to highlight readers' implication in (neo)colonialism, here Smith uses the ambivalence of twilight to her advantage, obscuring the clear outlines of any one outcome. Firstly, as a warning and caveat, in the introduction to the written text, Smith reminds her audience about subjective experiences: "This

book is first and foremost a document of what an *actress heard* in Los Angeles. The performance is reiteration of that” (*Twilight* xxiv). By highlighting her subjective experience and refusing audiences any neat summary of her interviews, Smith models the reading practices necessary for purposefully contextualizing the interview vignettes held inside her text and performances. As she explains it, Smith refuses the expectation to find the “solution to social problems,” instead “looking at the *processes* of the problems” (*Twilight* xxiv, emphasis in original), the give-and-take of unraveling the threads of individual experience. Smith is ultimately an actress, and according to her, “acting is a constant process of becoming something” (*Twilight* xxiv). In this way, Smith suggests that she wants all of her readers to become actors, to inhabit twilight time, the space of the constantly processual contextual evaluation, when clear outlines dissolve into interpretable ghosts. Using Smith’s own self-critical behavior as a model for reading practices, a pattern of relational context emerges, where one’s one perspective must always be questioned, remaining in flux, becoming as adaptation to changing social, cultural, and historical contexts.

“Recreating the Real: *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*” tracks how Anna Deaveare Smith’s play resists narratives that restrict race to a zero-sum game between groups on distinct sides of a racial binary. Like *The Rag Doll Plagues* in the previous chapter, the form of *Twilight* allows for its worldbuilding narrative strategies to make audience’s reductive liberal multicultural reading practices legible to themselves. Smith, herself, has been critiqued for stereotypical elements in her performances of interviewees of other races, particularly Korean shop owners. I argue, however, that much like *The Rag Doll Plagues* previously, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* similarly enacts an ontological challenge for its readers by firstly presenting a case for the blurring between history and narrative, and then requiring readers to read the text itself through this lens. Such a contextualized reading that responds to the text’s worldbuilding narrative strategies

would then analyze Smith's "multicultural" performances as a point of departure for critique of essentialized racial identities.

In fact, to extend Smith's critical introduction to refer to the video adaptation in addition to the text, Smith's critiques of colorblindness and the American conception of equality, as elaborated in the introduction, undercut the allegations of stereotyping. After all, if Smith charges the audience with questioning their own perspective in order to look at the processes of social meaning, any stereotypes that appear in the play are also the responsibility of the audience member who conjured them. Scenes where Smith moves quickly between, say, the white Police Commissioner, Daryl Gates, and Korean shop-owner, June Park, the switching back and forth between these two characters of different races seems to suggest a colorblind notion of equality, where both an immigrant woman and the Head of the LAPD occupy equal citizenship. In reality, however, the switching back and forth between these characters resists such an easy, liberal multicultural reading of the text, highlighting the racial mis-matching, which, combined with the inconsistencies between the "true" text and Smith's performance, generates an ontological challenge that then requires audiences to question anything that feels real. In other words, when the audience sees a Black woman playing both a white man and an Asian woman, the physical (yet arbitrary) racial markers that correlate with a particular race are called into question, causing a rift in between the audience's current perspective and their social perspective based on stereotypes long reinforced in the media.

All in all, this racial mis-matching, in addition to Smith's modeling of critical reading practices, stands in opposition to critiques that Smith's work deals in colorblind ideals. Further, and mostly importantly, Smith's also puts forward instructions to guide her audience's interpretation of her work. She reveals her position as someone who was merely "listening with

an ear that was trained to hear stories for the specific purpose of repeating them with the elements of character intact” (Smith *Twilight* xxiv), underscoring how her search was one for individual personality, and not the unifying voice of an era, if such a voice could ever exist. Thus, Smith “played *Twilight* in Los Angeles as a call to the community,” “performed it at a time when the community had not yet resolved the problems,” in order to “be a part of their examination of the problems” (*Twilight* xxv). While this examination included many different and differing perspectives, Smith notes how the expectation for one voice to unify an entire city is inconsistent with racial history. “There is little in culture or education that encourages the development of a unifying voice. In order to have real unity, all voices would have to first be heard or at least represented” (Smith *Twilight* xxv). Thus, while there have been many critiques for colorblind readings of Smith’s work, taking her indications and reading practices into consideration, it becomes clear that Smith is merely pushing the interpretative work onto the audience, urging them to de-familiarize themselves with easy cultural summations or aspirations, such as that of a unifying voice.

Smith’s technique is further able to call into question easy neoliberal assessments of racialism, ironically through her focus on individual character. As previously mentioned, *Twilight*, and many other similar projects, all form part of Smith’s larger collection titled, “On the Road: A Search for American Character.” While Smith’s project might be concerned with individuals’ quirks or storytelling tendencies, her play explores the catalyst or context for these social identities, therefore using individual characters as a way to enter relational conversations about historical traumas. Smith’s focus on identity also mirrors the importance she places on identity’s process of becoming. It is this process of becoming that has the most potential to bridge different perspectives. “After all, identity is in some ways a process toward character. It is

not character itself. It is not fixed” (Smith *Twilight* xxv). This potential for possibility, for collective becoming is one way that Smith’s reading practices serve as examples of worldbuilding. If the play acts as a representation of a cacophony of voices all affected by systemic racism and, more specifically, April 29th, 1992, then Smith’s goal has simply been to highlight how “our race dialogue desperately needs this more complex language” (*Twilight* xxv) that can capture multiple points of view at once. Smith’s focus on character, far from simply proposing empathy as a solution for racism, reenacts her grandfather’s advice that “If you say a word often enough it becomes you” (Smith “Ringside” 38). Thus, as she tries to “become America, word for word” Smith’s acting is also a “healing strategy, a balm against the de facto segregation” which “hit me in a way that caused me to question the degree to which survival required me to lose some of my own empathic imagination” (Smith “Ringside” 38). The context that the play facilitates the healing process for Smith contests the critiques that it simply smooths over racial conflict, in order to put forth a false ideal of colorblind equality. In addition to Smith’s charge that acting is a process of becoming, the playful mismatching that she employs to highlight the arbitrary nature of racial stereotypes, and her context-as-process reading practices all serve to highlight the difficulty to succinctly summarize Smith’s work, all the while unfolding a collective worldbuilding framework.

Made up of interviews with people close to the events of the Los Angeles Uprising, the form of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, itself, muddles the difference between life and literature, providing a multiplicity of stories and deliberately eschewing a singular, cohesive narrative. Thus, I read the ‘transcripts’ within as themselves theoretical frameworks for making sense of reality. In other words, by reproducing participants’ words and performances, *Twilight* creates a record of varied ontologies, in itself becoming a theoretical framework for cultural studies that

foregrounds the contextualization of personal narratives to better understand official historical narratives. Like *The Rag Doll Plagues* in the previous chapter, *Twilight: Los Angeles*' form allows for the building of disparate worlds of understanding about Latasha Harlins, Rodney King, and the 1992 Uprising, requiring the juxtaposition of storytelling, history, news coverage, music, and cultural practice. This chapter reads theater as theory and uses the theoretical frameworks found within *Twilight* to apply them back onto the play itself. Reading *Twilight: Los Angeles* and its film adaptation in addition to the larger narratives surrounding the 1992 Los Angeles Unrest, I track a larger textual analysis of the event, its representation, and the reverberations it has had on discourses of race, particularly in urban centers.

Twilight time

Anna Deavere Smith titled her 1993 play, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, after the architect of the LA gang truce and the conceptual framework he presented, by the same name. "So twilight / is / that time / between day and night. / Limbo, / I call it limbo" (Smith *Twilight* 254). As the time between light and dark is both night and day, Twilight Bey's framework, as performed by Smith, applies limbo as a moment of possibility, at once encompassing multiple perspectives for seeing the world and interpreting the past. By reading *Twilight* against official coverage of the 1992 LA Uprising, I focus on the radical worldbuilding narrative strategies within the interview transcripts as potential ruptures that create liminal spaces within official history where new narrations are possible.

In order to explore the relationship between narrative, history, and worldview, I first discuss the interviews that together make up the foundation of the text's theoretical framework, some of which the interviewees themselves pose as theory, and other vignettes that follow

personal narratives. While the former are more explicit in their theoretical stance, the relationship between these theoretical and narrative entries reflect my larger method of reading both cultural production and cultural practice as theory. By likening Twilight Bey's concepts to the multivalent understandings of knowledge and ontologies of the ongoing Borderlands conversation about liminal spaces (concepts such as Gloria Anzaldúa's neplantla, Emma Pérez's decolonial imaginary, and Jose Esteban Muñoz's queer futurity, among others), this paper aims to show how the concept 'twilight' operates as a framework for interpreting reality, namely, through the *creation* of ways of being through storytelling.

Cultivating what Emma Pérez calls a "decolonial queer gaze" (124), what William Calvo-Quirós describes as "clandestine intellectual maneuvers to retain collective memory and in situ knowledge" (157), what Americo Paredes calls the vernacular wisdom of "sabidurías populares" (2) and what Laura Pérez calls a critical investigative eye (128) that reads between the lines, *Twilight: Los Angeles* produces a relational history between the individuals' ways of telling a story and neocolonial legacies of exploitation. Thus, Smith's worldbuilding narrative strategies guide readers to acknowledge their complicity in colonialism, providing an ideological challenge against any easy reduction of different communities into one unified human race. In keeping with Emma Pérez's description of the decolonial imaginary as a "rupturing space, the alternative to that which is written in history" (6), Smith's play, its text and film adaptation serve to denaturalize our conceptions of racial stereotypes, challenging them by highlight the racial mis-matching apparent when Smith performs someone of a different racial group. As a "time-lag between the colonial and postcolonial" and "an interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated," the decolonial imaginary can be a useful framework for understanding how Smith's work serves as radical worldbuilding (Pérez 6). Like twilight time,

which requires interpretation of its fuzzy outlines, the decolonial imaginary is “intangible to many because it acts much like a shadow in the dark,” a shadow between the “subject and the object on which it is cast, moving and breathing through an in-between space” (Perez 6). Thus, I use Perez’s description of how the imaginary “conjures fragmented identities, fragmented realities, that are “real,” but a real that is in question” (Perez 6), in order to understand how Twilight itself, the concept of especially difficult interpretation, as a theoretical framework.

As defined by Bey, twilight comes from having ‘twice knowledge,’ of both day and night. Similar to how Anzaldúa’s nepantla serves as a liminal space for accessing multiple forms of reality as once, twilight allows for different possibilities than are accessible in the daytime or nighttime. Bey also associates this limbo as one that exceeds chronological conceptions of time, allowing new theories and ideas to become accessible.

So a lot of times when I’ve brought up ideas to my homeboys, / they say,
‘Twilight, / that’s before your time, / that’s something you can’t do now.’
When I talked about the truce back in 1988,
that was something that was considered before its time,
yet / in 1992 / we made it / realistic. (Smith *Twilight* 254-5)

Smith, as Bey, explains how the truce between the Bloods and the Crips in the aftermath of the Los Angeles Uprising exemplifies a twilight possibility: something thought impossible became an available reality, all through the foregrounding of historical contextualization. In the example Bey provides, the truce only becomes reality in the aftermath of the explosive 1992 Uprising, in response to the systemic racism represented in the beating of Rodney King, the killing of Latasha Harlins, and the failure of the trials. Smith uses Bey’s concept of twilight to structure the form of both her play and book by the same name, suggesting that the collection of interviews constitute

a similar liminal space that allows for ontological creation. Twilight allows us to participate in its clarity: “it’s more interpretive, / it’s more creative” (Smith *Twilight* 234). It’s oppositional and propositional.

Building upon Bey, via the hand of Smith, Homi Bhabha describes this twilight limbo as “the moment of ambivalence / and ambiguity,” when “the hard outlines of what we see in daylight / that make it easy for us to order / daylight / disappear” so that “we begin to see its boundaries in a much more faded way. / That fuzziness of twilight / allows us to see the intersections / of the event with a number of other things that daylight obscures for / us” (Smith *Twilight* 233). Clarity can be obscuring. Where clarity brings certainty, the need for interpretation brings possibility. While Bey’s conceptualization focuses on the different possibilities that become available, Bhabha describes the process by which more ontologies become possible. When we live in moments of certainty (during the daytime), we expect clarity and take our visions for granted. However, “[w]e have to interpret more in / twilight, / we have to make ourselves / part of the act, ... / we have to project more” (Smith *Twilight* 233). The falling away of clear outlines and paths of action requires the act of interpretation, as opposed to passive consumption of understanding. Thus, Bhabha argues that looking upon the 1992 Uprising as a moment of twilight allows it to be “the moment / when the L.A. uprisings could be ... something / other than it was seen to be” (Smith *Twilight* 232). But it is not only the extra interpretive work involved in twilight that allows for possibilities; it’s that we become cognizant of our interpretative limits--we know we’re straining our vision to make sense of the fuzziness. Thus, this realization of our limited ability *to perceive* “in twilight / challenges us / to / be aware / of how we are projecting onto the event itself,” how “[w]e are part of / producing the event”

(Smith *Twilight* 233). Twilight allows us to participate in its clarity: “it’s more interpretive, / it’s more creative” (Smith *Twilight* 234). It’s propositional.

It is this detail about daylight and daytime that underscores that there is no value judgment placed on daylight over the darkness of night. Day and night are opposites, but they both merely exist in clarity. Daytime is a time of passive reception and thus of obscured causes and effects. A crucial catalyst for twilight’s multiple valences, nighttime provides “a total dose / of what goes on in the daytime creates at night” (Smith *Twilight* 256), according to Bey. The restrictive and blunt ontological limits that order daytime fall away at night, resulting in a hyper-reality. Bey describes this awareness of the nighttime as a space within which not many exist, because it requires the twice-knowledge implicit in the twilight understanding. Instead of affiliating darkness with anything negative, Bey affiliates it “with what was first” and as a “dark individual ... stuck in limbo,” he sees darkness as himself (Smith *Twilight* 255). Thus, Bey takes his concept as both a method of understanding and creating different realities, allowing twilight to act also as a methodology for enacting change.

I see the light as knowledge and the wisdom of the world and / understanding
others, / and in order for me to be a, to be a true human being, / I can’t forever
dwell in darkness, / I can’t forever dwell in the idea, / of just identifying with
people like me and understanding me and mine. (Smith *Twilight* 255)

By staying up through both day and night, Bey can view the different rigid planes of existence of day and night, but also the twilight hours between day and night, that allow for a larger understanding of the rest of the day. Bey’s *twilight* serves as both a theoretical concept and a methodology, combining the knowledge required to question the daylight outlines with the

actions needed in order to both access and create different ontologies. *Twilight* creates as it critiques.

Going Beyond the Evidence

“*[To] attempt to create new possibilities based on visions that become contagious that will allow us to engage in heroic actions always against the odds, no guarantee whatsoever, That’s hope.*”

This chapter’s definition of hope is firmly entrenched in Cornel West’s description of the difference between hope and optimism. Because hope requires to look in the face of evidence that things will only get worse, West talks about optimism as being a secular concept because it, as opposed to hope, takes evidence by its face value. In order to mobilize West’s concept of hope, he describes how one must go beyond evidence and “attempt to create new possibilities based on visions that become contagious that will allow us to engage in heroic actions always against the odds, no guarantee whatsoever” (Smith *Twilight* 1:09:10). Thus, for West, hope is an important theoretical framework that allows one to effect change, but one that must be put into motion outside of empirical logic. In this way, West calls himself a ‘prisoner of hope,’ because misery and despair is only the beginning place for hope; beyond that, there are a million possibilities, shadowy fragments waiting to be outlined in light.

Reading the Racial Ambiguity in Twilight

Next, I will discuss how *Twilight’s* form also invites readers to apply its framework to itself, as a method of critically reading the text. Some scholars, such as Nancy Cho, have discussed the fine line that Smith walks between artful performance and stereotypical mimicry.

However, that ambivalence itself is an aspect of twilight; the play is a symphony and a cacophony, at once. It simultaneously explodes the racial binary which dominated the narrative about the uprising, while threatening to reduce those same voices to stereotypes, by sheer fact that a finite text could never be a complete examination of an entire city-worth of narratives about April 29th, 1992, what led up to it, and what happened afterward. Thus, *Twilight* requires readers to “react to it” and interpret what is left when “the hard outlines . . . that make it easy for us to order / daylight / disappear” (Smith *Twilight* 233), asking readers to apply the framework found within itself to itself.

The mirroring effect that Anna Deavere Smith has made her own particular performative artform is not a perfect recreation of testimony. In fact, the very inconsistencies of accent, skin color, gender, minute variations for each version of the play, all contribute to a similar metafictional release of reality, as we saw in *The Rag Doll Plagues*. Here, however, there is no central author that is creating all of the characters and their words; instead, there is Smith, who manipulates the testimony by cutting and rearranging it into a text that asks audiences to participate in the “examination of the problems” (*Twilight* xxv). While Smith’s directions to “interpret” more deeply in the twilight moment are more obscure, I argue that her hyper-racialized performances serve to exaggerate static notions of race, exploding them into a conversation about how communities intersect in complicated ways.

“The Chica-Iranian Project” (2003), by the performance troupe, La Pocha Nostra, directed by Guillermo Gómez-Peña, follows in the lineage of pushing stereotypes to their

home > galeria > chica-iranian project

TEST YOUR ETHNIC PROFILING SKILLS!
MATCH THE NAME OF THE ARTIST WITH THE PERSONA PORTRAYED



- Mark Piñate, Chicano
- Bella Warda, Iranian
- Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Post-Mexican
- Ali Dadgar, Iranian
- Isis Rodriguez, Chicana
- Emiko R. Lewis, Hapa/Half Japanese
- Roham Shaikhani, Iranian
- Liz Lerma, Chicana

TYPICAL ARAB CHOLA

THE CHICA-IRANIAN PROJECT

ORIENTALISM GONE WRONG IN AZTLAN

Figure 1. “Typical Arab Chola.” *The Chica-Iranian Project: Orientalism Gone Wrong in Aztlan*, La Pocha Nostra, 2003, is an online interactive game that challenges players to match hyper-exaggerated mash-ups of Chicana, Indigenous, Iranian, and Middle Eastern stereotypes.

breaking point, connecting the liberal multicultural logics of the Islamophobia, systemic racism, and xenophobia that affect communities of color. Together with Iranian performance artists Ali Dadgar, Bella Warda, and Roham Shaikhani, Gómez-Peña’s troupe trade racializations, combining stereotypes into absurd new characters, such as the “Typical Arab Chola” (Fig. 1). “Chica-Iranian,” however, is openly playful and daring in its metafictional description of itself as “a performance photo essay on the dangers of ethnic profiling in the post 9/11 era.” Players choose which artist is playing which exaggerated combination of stereotypes, made to guess by

using the artists' names as racialized clues. Each correct answer is met with the quintessential Orientalizing sound: a loud gong bang allows audience members to proceed to the next question, the next riddle. Assuming the audience's adaptive capability for ethnic profiling, the game eventually culminates by thanking audiences for "participating in our (non)objective risk classification exercise" and adding "greatly to our store of targeted intelligence," using satire to critique racial profiling security measures as an active practice in subjective knowledge about certain races as inferior to others. Without explicitly declaring who benefits from such security measures or for whom this intelligence actually works, the game ends by declaring, "We feel much safer now." By subverting the audience's clandestine associations of certain kinds of criminality to particular kinds of racial others, "The Chica-Iranian Project" refuses the audience's unconsciously ingrained presupposition to simplify race into discrete and distinct groups. Thus, while on the surface "Chica-Iranian" seems to reinforce harmful stereotypes of Chicanos as gangsters and Middle Easterners as terrorists, it actually plays a similar ontological challenge than that of *The Rag Doll Plagues*. Here, the "mish-mash" of identities sets off an ontological challenge for the audience, where stereotypes are pushed to their absurd limits, undoing them as racial truths, in the process.

Similarly, reading the text version of *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* in conjunction with the film adaptation of Smith's play, *Twilight: Los Angeles* (2000) as directed by Marc Levin, produces contradictory planes of reality. Despite beginning with the assertion that only "the actual words from their interviews are used" (Smith *Twilight* 05:40), Smith takes creative license with the words of her interviewees in her performance, changing the order or cutting out portions, especially in order to juxtapose one vignette with another. In some instances, Smith adds words that are not present in the text version, which theoretically is closer to replicating

interviewee's words. Even so, reading the text along to the film version highlights the impossibility of recreating a person's voice, way of speaking, and mannerisms, both in performance or in text. In the latter, the act of transcribing a story told begins already to manipulate it, only for it to be interpreted later by readers in their own voice. In her performance, Smith deliberately plays upon this duality when she switches between characters of different races.



Figure 2. Still from *Twilight: Los Angeles, 2000*.

While “The Chica-Iranian Project” came three years after the film adaptation of Smith’s *Twilight*, the two are useful in conversation with each other to reveal the darkness and despair necessary for hope, and the absurdity of the causes of generational pain. Where *La Pocha Nostra* takes the approach of shocking the participant, luring them into a no-man’s-land beyond politically correct platitudes, Smith’s performance more subtly suggests that the conversations about the Los Angeles Uprising are too invested in neat reenactments of colonial racialization. In



Figure 3. Still from *Twilight: Los Angeles*. 2000.

one particular scene where Smith switches back and forth between Daryl Gates, the former LAPD Police Chief, and Mrs. June Park, the wife of a Korean shooting victim, Smith relies on nothing but the difference in the accents of her interviewees to challenge the possibility of complete reproduction. The stark difference between Smith's performance of Gates' confidence of a politician explaining away a scandal and Park's grief-ridden pleas for understanding almost produces whiplash, as Smith jumps back and forth between extreme examples of privilege, or lack thereof. In addition to use of the accent, Gates and Park are generally framed in different shots: Gates, mostly in medium shots, to capture his gesticulating hands, especially when they rest in his pockets as he wades through a particularly thick lie, and Park in close-up shots that allow the pain portrayed on Smith's face to fill the screen. Park's cries "The City Council, they knows him. / And the police, they knows him. / Then, why did he have to get shot?" are

interspersed with Gates explaining why he headed to a fundraiser as the verdict was read, highlighting that law and order were not intended to be accessed equally by all. In addition to foregrounding how citizenship works differently for some, this scene also serves to challenge the audience's ways of making sense of reality. If Smith, as a Black woman, is able to recreate both interviewees, a white male and a Korean woman equally, then her performance highlights the arbitrary nature of racial stereotypes and cultural norms.

In reading "The Chica-Iranian Project" in combination with the film *Twilight, Los Angeles* as counterparts, arises a genealogy of the playful explosion of racial stereotypes that encourages audiences to simultaneously acknowledge their racialized biases instead of repressing them, while also questioning the narratives they take for granted. Refusing to let audiences off the hook for their internalized racializations, both require audiences to lean into their biases, undoing the game and the seamless nature of Smith's back-and-forth performances, as the narratives behind racial stereotypes begin to contradict each other.

Dorinne Kondo, theater scholar and one of Smith's dramaturges during production of *Twilight* the play, sees in Anna Deaveare Smith's acting method of inhabiting the speaking patterns and demeanor of her subjects as staging "the (*im*)possibility of knowing the other and of realizing a pastoral, power-free community in the multiracial nation-state" (Kondo 100). Using Smith's method as an example for her 2018 *Worldmaking: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity*, Kondo underscores Smith's performance, itself, highlights the gap between her identity as an actor and the identity of the subject of her acting. In other words, although Smith's work is often approached through a liberal humanist lens that views Smith as an empty vessel, inhabiting other identities through the common identity of humanity, Kondo argues that Smith's performances actually draws attention to the differences and contradictions within personal

narratives (105). Thus, Smith's act of reaching across towards an intimate understanding of the subject of her acting mirrors the reaching across the gaps underscores the vast difference in lived experience, not the flattening humanity that can absolve us all of the sins of racial capitalism. Thus, the relationality that Kondo reads onto Smith's work also situates itself as a destination not yet reached, calling for a process of identity, of negotiating one's narrative within and in response to others' personal histories. Such a dialectical process of relations is often "quotidian," without "automatically conjuring the divine" (Kondo 29). Thus, it is precisely the relationality of everyday life that Kondo argues is captured by the dialogue within a work of theater, recreating the dialectical back and forth of affecting and being affected, "the dialogic relationality of social life" (2). After all, "as theater artists are creating their art, they are also making and unmaking race" (Kondo 2), so too do narratives that invite collective rewriting of history.

Similarly, in the last chapter to his 1999 work *Disidentifications: Queers Of Color And The Performance Of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz describes the mechanisms of queer worldmaking, or, that which "willfully disavows that which majoritarian culture has decreed as the 'real'" (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196). Focusing on minoritarian performance, in particular, Muñoz describes how minoritarian performance "labors to make worlds... of transformative politics and possibilities" through theatrical and everyday rituals that "have the ability to establish alternate views of the world" (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 195). The everyday resistances held within performance and ritual do more than present alternative perspectives; they are both "oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of 'truth' that subjugate minoritarian people" and oppositional counterpublics "enabled by visions... that reshape as they deconstruct reality" (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 195-6). These 'counter publics' "are the aftermath of minoritarian performance" and have the ability to affect participants' place

in time and space, “*transport*[ing] the performer *and* the spectator to a vantage point where transformation and politics are imaginable” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196, emphasis in original). In relation to Kondo’s theorization of the necessity of reaching across the gaps between lived experience, I use Muñoz’s concept of worldmaking to describe the ways in which *Twilight, Los Angeles, 1992* “produce[s] these vantage points by slicing into the façade of the real that is the majoritarian public sphere” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196) thus enacting worldbuilding: the collective remaking of the world through hopeful narrative practices.

“Manifest through strategies of iteration and *reiteration*” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196), worldbuilding is possible only in the gaps between familiar and variation, me and you (other), hope and optimism. “*This reiteration builds worlds*” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196, emphasis in original). Inhabiting the valleys between personal histories and collective stories, honoring the past while rewriting the present, inviting iteration while constantly in flux, worldbuilding “establishes the groundwork for *potential* oppositional counterpublics” (Muñoz *Disidentifications* 196). The power of words can only transport reality to alternative worlds when the storytelling is collective and relational. Thus, worldbuilding must always be in search of a destination that is everywhere and unreachable: the gaps between histories, between different moments in space and time. Muñoz’s concept of queer worldmaking, which recognizes that both the past and the future are created in the present, urges readers to “think and feel a then and there,” instead of surrendering to the “here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality” in order to “dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (Muñoz *Cruising* 1). Through the process of collective storytelling, worldbuilding navigates the valleys between multiple narratives, continually threading and unthreading a quilt of ‘imperfect witness’.

Bearing witness

When Josie Morales witnessed four police officers beating Rodney King on March 3rd, 1991, she knew she had to watch because what she saw was wrong (Smith *Twilight* 67), and if no one watched, it would not exist. Morales was not equipped with a camcorder, the modern technology that allowed George Holliday to become a major fulcrum in the trial against the officers for using excessive force. Fearing that Holliday's video wouldn't be enough to sway jurors, Morales pleaded with the prosecution to put her on the stand to testify about how the four officers began the attack. Instead, the prosecution in the 'trial of the century' relied on Holliday's tell-all video and the almost-all-white jury was not moved by the images of a Black man being beaten. Decades before police were captured on video killing Eric Garner, Laquan McDonald, Mike Brown and many others, a jury in Los Angeles decided that the newest technology in video recording was always already obsolete in holding state institutions accountable for racial violence. Although videos show images of violence in action, these images must still be read by law enforcement authorities and juries, disproportionately made up of whites.

Watching deep in the night, in the early morning hours of March 3rd, 1991, Josie Morales bore witness to a total dose of the racist policing that was usually obscured by the daytime's limited categorical and ontological understandings. While Morales' insistence to watch the police brutality in itself served to create an understanding of the event that ran contrary to official records, prosecutors favored the video's representation of an event over testimony's ability to recreate an event. Although Morales' testimony could only have complemented Holliday's video, the prosecution did not include it because "it contradict[ed] what Melanie Singer said" (Smith *Twilight* 68). A California Highway Patrol officer in her third year, Melanie Singer would become a major force for both the prosecution and the defense. As one of the two officers first in

pursuit of King, Singer was called to corroborate King's alleged 'unusual behavior,' on which the defense was hanging their argument that King was under the influence of PCP. Singer's description of King did not overlap with the symptoms of PCP and further, she directly testified to witnessing Powell hit King directly in the face and head. Perhaps the prosecution looked favorably upon the direction of Singer's testimony, which, in addition to discrediting the officer-defendants, carried with it what former District Attorney Gil Garcetti described as the "magic" (Smith *Twilight* 75) which police officers cast over juries. While Singer was the first to break ranks and testify against police officers, in relation to Morales' testimony, her tears regretting the severity of King's wounds were not only too little, too late, but also obscured the power of Morales' more substantial and uninhibited testimony.

Melanie and Timothy Singer, two married CHP officers working together, began the incident when they reported a car driving at high speeds. Although the media and defense team made wide use of the allegation that Rodney King was speeding upwards of 115 m.p.h., according to April 21, 1991 LA Times coverage of the trial, "authorities now dispute that the car was going that fast" (Ingram and Berger). The discrepancy over the speed at which King was driving indicates the intertwining relationship between colonial systems of power and narrative, allowing the state to simultaneously create and recreate truths, while denying people any truth at all. As agents of the state, the Singers, Melanie in particular, could craft a narrative of being, at once, unaware of and repulsed by the beating ("Defense Witness Springs Surprise," "Tearful Testimony"). The City of Los Angeles could simultaneously promise to thoroughly investigate the LAPD's cover-up of the King beating while claiming that the passengers in King's car, Bryant Allen and Freddie Helms, were not due restitution because there was no evidence of their being assaulted while being "subject to a Terry stop" (Allen v. Singer). While officials of the

state were allowed to fabricate narratives, King, Allen, and Helms's testimony is ignored: King did not testify during the first state trial against the officers and although they are in such close proximity to the epitome of a candid moment of police brutality caught on tape, Helms and Allen are discredited, themselves. Josie Morales is never put on the witness stand to describe what she made sure to watch. Just as night brings dark hyperreality and day brings restrictive light, not all moments of interpretation will resist oppression. While the Singers and the rest of the CHP and LAPD create and recreate narratives, the act of their telling does not create realities that currently, literally do not exist. In other words, while state officials make use of their sanction to fabricate tales in favor of the state, they only reproduce the same modes of oppression and therefore, Singer's belated teary tale of wanting to provide aid for King, for example, does not constitute any worldbuilding potentialities because it doesn't create new unexpected possibilities; it only reinvigorates a long history of racist legal discrimination, particularly at the hands of overly emotional white women.

Twilight's opening for interpretation is not inherently utopic. The officers involved in the beating, themselves, rely on different interpretations of reality to make sense of what happened that night: "Everybody who saw the incident saw something different," Officer Powell said ("Tearful Testimony"). If a police officer, an agent of the state, admits that reality is dependent on (the interpretation of) the viewer, how can any official process ever reach objectivity? "During a recess, Officer Powell said, "I'm hoping for some effective cross-examination because the way the jury is seeing him now is not the way I saw him that night" (Mydans). While the police officers involved in the beating also created their own narratives that explained their perspective (i.e. the justification that King was on PCP), these stories simply recreated the US's history of one group's state-sanctioned power to exert violence over a minority group.

Therefore, the lies told by CHP are not examples of radical worldbuilding because they do not create any new collective narratives. Instead of radically writing stories that undercut historical narratives that situate people of color as vessels to be controlled, the Singers are merely continuing a long history of state violence.

Approaching Bey's concept of twilight as both theory in the flesh and storytelling as a *teoria*, I show how this framework can also be useful in making sense of the event, itself, in a larger form of textual analysis that includes Smith's play as an artifact along with newspaper coverage about the trial against the officers who beat Rodney King. As we know from above, the ambivalence of twilight requires viewers to actively take part in interpreting the event, signaling a moment of creation and possibility. However, as this study tracks the ontologically-generative relationship between history and narrative, I will also examine the ways in which officials of the state use the ambivalence of twilight to edit both historical and local context as needed. Bey's multivalent conceptualization of twilight as both a delta and a catalyst of change also helps to map the convergences in fellow participant interviews that together create a network of the creation and recognition of different ontologies.

It was a Dream, ... and it came to pass

Josie Morales, one of the few people who could provide testimony about the majority of the beating, becomes overshadowed by the prosecution's decision to rely on Melanie Singer and George Holliday, instead. Before the disappointing and disrespectful verdict was read on April 29th, Morales knew that the video would fail to convince jurors and result in acquittals.

“and I told him, ‘If you do not put witnesses, / if you don't put one resident and testify to say what they saw,’ / And I told him in the letter / that those officers

were going to be acquitted. / But I really believe that he was dead set / on that video / and that the video would tell all, / but, you see, the video doesn't show you where those officers went / and assaulted Rodney King at the beginning. / You see that?"

Although Morales' husband, who she says was petrified,--"he grew up in another country where this is prevalent, police abuse is prevalent in Mexico"-- wanted to go inside, Morales knew that she had to witness. Morales was haunted was by the feeling of imminent acquittal, and according to Avery Gordon, "to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social contexts" (190). Where, for Gordon, haunting "is a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening" (63), Gloria Anzaldúa, author of the perennial classic *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, describes a similar concept in 'la facultad,' "the learned capacity to read, renovate, and make signs on behalf of the dispossessed" (61). Josie Morales, in her determination to bear witness, was haunted by historical contexts of the past, allowing her to perceive a reality different than the prosecutor, or others around her. At its most basic, Morales' determination *to watch* was a worldbuilding action in it of itself; it was her act of witnessing that allows for the event to exist in a scope larger than what the video shows.

In a discussion about the topic with her co-worker, Morales describes the difference she sees between 'thoughts' and 'dreams.' Whereas thoughts begin within a singular mind, "dreams are made of some kind of indelible substance" (Smith *Twilight* 69) that put into effect a moment of twilight. "And I was so upset. I told my co-worker, I said, 'I had a terrible dream / that those guys were acquitted.' / ... She goes, 'You, you, / you know, don't think like that.' / I said, '*I wasn't thinking I had a dream!*'" (Smith *Twilight* 68, emphasis added). While thoughts can be creative, the distinction that Morales draws here, shows that thoughts, themselves, are not

generative, because, at the very least, they require to be put into action in order to affect. Dreams, on the other hand, exist as a twilight space between the effects of history and the potentialities of the future, a space *like* the present.

Yeah, I do have dreams / that come true, / but not as vivid as that one.

I just had this dream and in my heart felt ... / and I saw the / men

and it was in the courtroom and I just / had it in my heart ...

something is happening / and I heard they were acquitted,

because dreams are made of some kind of indelible substance.

And my co-worker said, 'You shouldn't think like this,'

and I said, 'I wasn't thinking / it was a dream.'

And that's all, and it came to pass. (Smith *Twilight* 68-9)

In the case of Josie Morales, the distinctions she draws between 'thinking' and 'dreaming' allow us to understanding the basic potentialities and requirements for worldbuilding twilight moments. In dreams, a different history was accessible, that of the people, that said that even when there is evidence, the people will be denied. So in the dreamspace, Morales was able to put forward a different potentiality. Although the prosecution failed to adhere to Morales' warnings, her witnessing and dreaming helped provide a more robust understanding of the event, at least for the subsequent criminal and civil trials.

Future Work

Twilight: Los Angeles has been influential in many ways, from the topics it studied, to the form it took, of multiple vignettes vying for attention. This legacy has been continued by many texts, including the online multi-modal documentary, *KTown '92*. Most recently, the novel *All*

Involved, by Ryan Gattis, also attempts to recreate the experiences of many different people during the LA uprising, following a Latinx gang as it takes advantage of the police being overwhelmed. Filtered through Gattis' characterizations, room for interpretation dissolves, as the tropes are clear as day: the murderous henchman is humanized by an interest in drawing, for example. Though Smith's influence on the contextualization and juxtaposition of the interviews cannot be denied, Gattis uses his interviews as fodder for a larger story he wants to tell. *All Involved* includes a multiplicity of voices, but even though Gattis includes text from a *Twilight* interview in his novel, he never once cites Smith, nor acknowledge his role in a longer historical narrative, that includes, at the very least, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. Thus, just like the interpretation of twilight doesn't always resist oppression, a multivalent chorus of voices can similarly obscure causes and effects, much like daytime. My next project about *Twilight* will read it in conjunction with Gattis' work, in order to show how a multiplicitous form is not enough to constitute radical worldbuilding, in it of itself. Another larger project will read *Twilight* against the myriad television specials that were released to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the LA Uprising.

Twilight as a theoretical approach

Will the theatre respond by creating a language, a way of seeing, an audience, an artist who has the facility to perceive in twilight, to perceive the obscured, to see the twists and turns, to see inconsistencies, ambivalences, ambiguities?

Anna Deavere Smith, "Ringside" 38

Lastly, by way of conclusion, I will discuss how this connects back to the study of worldbuilding. Chapter 1 discusses the metafiction in *The Rag Doll Plagues* as enacting an ontological challenge for the reader, thus triggering an epistemological crisis, which I read as having the potential to make the figurative literal through the novel's use of historicity. Here in chapter 2, I show how *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* similarly enacts an ontological challenge for its readers by firstly presenting a case for the blurring between history and narrative, and then requiring readers to read the text itself through this lens. As a particular approach, then, *Twilight* is more than the simple existence of multiple possibilities for reality, but how those possibilities are interpreted. Like *The Rag Doll Plagues*, *Twilight, Los Angeles, 1992* makes us aware of our interpretative practices by exaggerating racial stereotypes and putting the onus on the reader to decipher through the text's contradictory narratives and racial mis-matching.

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Chapter 3:
This Bridge Called Instagram:
Collective Worldbuilding through Analogue and Digital Convivencia

haunt

/hōnt, hänt/ verb

verb: **haunt**; 3rd person present: **haunts**; past tense: **haunted**;
past participle: **haunted**; gerund or present participle: **haunting**

(of a ghost) manifest itself at (a place) regularly.

(of a person or animal) frequent (a place).

Be persistently in the mind (of someone).

This definition comes from the description for “Always, Already, Haunting, ‘disss-co,’
Haunt,” the 2019 art exhibit at The Kitchen, a NYC artist collective, which includes the work of
Guadalupe Rosales, in addition to other photographers that “engage notions of embodiment that
complicate the assumed clarity of mourning and rejoicing, presence and absence, and posit the
importance of desire and pleasure.” Recreating the 1990s as a way to mourn the death of her
beloved cousin by reliving the years leading up to it, Rosales uses archival photography and
Party Crew ephemera from Los Angeles in the 1990s to build a temporal bridge between now
and then. Thus, Rosales’ work “understands haunting as a representational illogic, or a way of
rejecting the production of convenient and easily read linear narratives that are too often ghosted
by particular omissions, absences, and historic violences” (“Always, Already”), representing
both the pleasure of events organized by Party Crews and the ways that racial capitalism affected
her community at the end of the twentieth century.

Similarly, in her 1997 exploration of the “alternative stories we ought to and can write
about the relationship among power, knowledge, and experience” (23), *Ghostly Matters:
Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon explores the relationship between
haunting and the “intermingling of fact, fiction, and desire as it shapes personal and social

memory” (24). Because “haunting occurs on the terrain situated between our ability to conclusively describe the logic of Capitalism or State Terror, for example, and the various experiences of this logic, experiences that are more often than not partial, coded, symptomatic, contradictory, ambiguous” (24), Gordon highlights how collective memory must be rooted in the lived experiences of those in the interstices of power; in other words, with attention to the “omissions, absences, and historic violences” (“Always, Already”) in personal narratives. Therefore, our individual stories of relation are at the heart of haunting, for “we are part of the story...: the ghost must speak *to me* in some way sometimes similar to, sometimes distinct from how it may be speaking to the others” (Gordon 24, emphasis in original). Thus, the dialectical process of simultaneously moving toward and away from the worldmaking destination, between one’s story and another’s, creates a sort of recognition of a world that is both familiar, yet can never really exist, because it is dialogic and related to the telling of individual stories as they continuously inform each other.

In the case of Guadalupe Rosales, the haunting recognition described by Gordon manifests in the form of a narrative world made up of personal stories that are both familiar and unreachable. With particular attention to women in Latinx neighborhoods in LA, Rosales harnesses Instagram to curate public digital archives celebrating the 1990s Party Crew and lowrider car scene across two separate handles and in public exhibitions. Rosales’ 2018 book, *Map Pointz: A Collective Memory*, captures the process of her digital *convivencia* – living with – that brought people together in the collective recollection of their memories knocked loose while perusing Rosales’ collection of others’ ephemera from the 1990s. Facilitating a space where people can witness how differently one ghost haunts multiple people, Rosales’ work seeks to haunt its readers to “make choices within those spiraling determinations that make the present

waver” because “to be haunted is to be tied to historical and social effects” (Gordon 190). Thus, in keeping with Gordon’s theorization, Rosales’ work, which is rooted in an understanding of both social and historical contexts as they affect our own narratives, also facilitates haunting, or, an alternative way of sensing, “a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (Gordon 63).

Being haunted, being tugged at by social and historical contexts, can be another name for “theory in the flesh,” as described in the groundbreaking collection and namesake to this chapter, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse together to create a politic borne out of necessity,” an “attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 19). Thus, *This Bridge Called My Back*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, was collectively written in 1981 as a text of revolutionary solidarity, where women of color, “who had been historically denied a shared political voice, endeavored to create bridges of consciousness through the exploration, in print, of their diverse classes, cultures, and sexualities” (xvi). The recognition of complicated networks of relation between lived experiences—what Gordon calls haunting or what *Bridge* calls theory in the flesh—becomes a collective narrative. “We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 19) because although history is written in the present moment, women of color are still relegated to the margins of so-called official history. “The very *act* of writing then, conjuring/coming to ‘see’, what has yet to be recorded in history is to bring into consciousness what only the body knows to be true” (Moraga and Anzaldúa xxiv, emphasis in original). Such is the process by which theory in the flesh manifests: the body as both “*expression* of evolving political

consciousness” and “the *creator* of consciousness, itself” (xxiv, emphasis in original). Where *This Bridge Called My Back* serves as a “living testimony of women of color epiphanies of political awakening,” Chapter Three, “This Bridge Called Instagram,” similarly aims to become part of “the *unofficial* and truer record” (Moraga and Anzaldúa xxiv). Looking both backward and forward, as did the authors of the original collection, “This Bridge Called Instagram” seeks to continue the work of archiving accounts of *consciencia* and “origin stories of displacement” by highlighting the solidarity and contradictions that occurred simultaneously.

In weaving a collective narrative using each individual’s own words, many contradictions must be reconciled, but can never be resolved. Moraga describes this process of bridging the gap between self and other as the attempt to “separate the fibers of experience we have had as daughters of a struggling people,” feeling the “the pull and tug of having to choose between which parts have served to cloak us from the knowledge of ourselves” (Moraga and Anzaldúa xxiv). Working together to unravel a knot is the process by which theory in the flesh is constructed and put to use, “pursuing a society that uses flesh and blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal” (xxiv). But like the variations in how ghosts haunt different people, *Bridge* underscores that there “is nothing *easy* about a collective cultural history” of capitalism’s ‘unnatural disasters’ (Moraga and Anzaldúa 19). In fact, the root of *Bridge*’s radicalism comes from the learning to live with the contradictions of life. Thus, just as *This Bridge Called My Back* “is an account of U.S. women of color coming to late 20th century social consciousness through conflict—familial and institutional—and arriving at a politic of experience, “that makes sense of the seeming paradoxes of our lives,” “This Bridge Called Instagram,” means to highlight a particular instance of how a contemporary Los Angeles artist

simultaneously creates theory in the flesh while similarly braving contradictions in order to provide a nuanced expression of lived experience.

Fast forward from 1981 to a few decades into the twenty first century, and contemporary artist, Guadalupe Rosales, an East Los Angeles native, has reached international acclaim for her work archiving party crew ephemera in public art exhibits and Instagram archives. In 2000, after the gang-related death of her cousin ended her time with the AZTEK NATION party crew a few years earlier, Rosales took up a friend's offer to visit New York. She ended up staying for fifteen years (Miranda). Homesickness and the NYC art scene inspired Rosales to reconnect with her Los Angeles roots, spurring the creation of the public Instagram accounts where she invited others to share their memories nowhere else to be found. As Rosales says, "four years ago the only things [she] had was a stack of photos and a box of 'love letters' from [her] teenage years," and it is only with the participation of social media followers that the collection began to grow (*Map Pointz*).

First *@Veteranas_and_rucas* was dedicated to Latinas raised in Southern California. *@Map_Pointz*, which focuses on youth active in the LA 1990s party crew and rave scene, came second, after an influx of attention required Rosales to move beyond just one handle. However, as the account that grew Rosales' popularity, *@Veteranas_and_rucas* takes on multiple responsibilities. According to Pilar Tompkins Rivas, director of the Vincent Price Museum at East LA College (which recently featured an exhibit of Rosales' work), Rosales is "building this archive of images of women that mass media doesn't have," thus making it "an important exercise in feminism" (Miranda). Thus, Rosales participates in the retrofitting of memory, or what Chicana history scholar Maylei Blackwell describes as the "form of countermemory that uses fragments of older histories that have been disjunctured by colonial practices of organizing

historical knowledge or by masculinist renderings ...in order to create space for women in historical traditions that erase them” (2). @Veteranas_and_rucas also put forth a critique of cisheteropatriarchy and the ostracizing misogyny of the Chicano movement, alike, creating an archive of images of women at different moments in Chicana history, from the 1940s Zoot Suit era to the 1960’s political movements, to more contemporary veteranas, during the 1990s. Although she began the social media accounts as a way to relive her individual memories through seeing others’ snapshots, by reaching towards across the gaps, Rosales was able to tap into a deep void within United States cult history.

This chapter follows how Rosales’ work has been able to uncover and reclaim a history that haunted her and many others, rejecting respectability politics sensibilities that shame communities of color for prioritizing their pleasure ahead of capitalist assimilation, all while serving as an example of hopeful worldbuilding narrative practices. Rosales “investigates collective histories within Latinx youth culture in Los Angeles, reflecting everyday experiences in communities of color in the 1990s, from private spaces such as the teenage bedroom, to cruising, parties, and other forms of socializing” (*Echoes*). These spaces of socializing were likewise the space within which the worlds of many everyday resistances were hidden. From her public art exhibitions that recreate the privacy of a bedroom, her communal Instagram archival accounts, to her 2018 book *Map Pointz: A Collective Memory*, Rosales’ work makes possible the experiencing of other worlds, namely a world where communities of color in the 1990s are protagonists in their own stories, all the while calling attention to the silences that exist within the gaps between personal narratives.

Guadalupe Rosales works to preserve the experience of growing up on Whittier Avenue in Los Angeles while making known an entire world of meaning. Rosales’ use of an individual

Instagram account rewrites collectivity into cultural history, weaving individual haunting memories felt in the flesh into a collective memory continually in process in the digital world of Instagram. “Through a reciprocal relationship with the public, Rosales shares the messages of those submitting to her accounts, and provides detailed information about the images provided by the contributor, such as identifying party crew members, acknowledging wedding anniversaries and birthdays, naming family members in photos, as well as specific streets and neighborhoods where the images were taken” (*Echoes*). Rosales’ method of working with her followers enacts collective worldbuilding on a larger scale, providing an applicable framework for rewriting history collaboratively by attending to the gaps. “By presenting personal and family narratives alongside the images, her work engages in storytelling, as she implements a process of writing a different public history about Latinx youth culture across the region” (*Echoes*). While Rosales’ digital *convivencia* with social media participants served an important role in the curation of the collection, this chapter will focus on the 2018 print-iteration of Rosales’ work, *Map Pointz: A Collective Memory*. Lastly, Rosales’ installations and archives, which blend different temporal realities, provide a bridge for *Indelible Practices of Hope*, helping me address the borderlands that exist between the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the next.

Rosales’ art bridges the twentieth and twenty first centuries using the latest social media technology to revive an era of self-representation that was not automatically on public display, by harnessing new personal profile-based networks. The representations that Rosales curates and mixes into her art occurred on people’s own terms because photos, in the analogue film era, were mostly circulated to friends, family, and specific recipients in a physical form. Thus, by creating an archive that houses these self-representations, Rosales has preserved images of the past, where the subjects are “representing themselves on their own terms as they want to be seen”

(Miranda). Cruising, party crews, fashion: Rosales recreates a Los Angeles lightyears away from the upscale shops and paparazzi of Rodeo Drive. On Whittier Boulevard in South East LA, thin eyebrows, dark Jordana lipliner, and big hair were in style. It is all ephemeral, living only in one's memory. Rosales notes how "we can forget certain details about the past, holding on to just a few. In time, we tend to lose those moments too." Thus, the physical photographs that filled photo albums or adorned the edges of a mirror become themselves chronotopes of the past that transport their viewers through a variety of senses and emotions. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering study the differences in participants' perceptions of analogue (physical) photos and digital photos: the physical photo seems more formal, more real (585). Indeed, Rosales, herself, describes the wallet-sized photos that make up an important part of her archive, remembering how people would "treat those photos like trading cards, writing a message on the back and giving them out to our friends at school" (Pitcher). More than just a representational image, these physical photographs and other ephemera are "relics" that "hold so much energy" (Pitcher), the energy of being handed out, of being received, and of connection. Rosales' motivation, then, for turning her Instagram archive into a book, *Map Pointz: A Collective Memory*, flows from the need and desire to see your cultural past represented and recorded *somewhere* tangible.

Splicing both the nostalgic feeling of years-old ephemera and social media's digital scrolling, *Map Pointz* is a hybrid genre—part photo album, social media feed, archival notes, autoethnography, documentary, aesthetic project, and historiography. Without page numbers, the reader is left to experience the decade held within all at once. *Map Pointz* is also part exhibit, showcasing a childhood home, party crew houses, and even meta-pictures detailing Rosales' arrangements of pictures and ephemera in an a public art exhibit. What intrigued Rosales to become part of a party crew and later to relive the moments lived with Aztek Nation, she gets to

recreate in her book: the ingenuity of youth in a world that insists on shutting them out, the counterculture of defiantly enjoying yourself when only certain bodies are allowed pleasure, the determination of youth looking for fun but without anywhere welcoming to go. Just like the party crews that would host their popular parties in abandoned warehouses, when no one was publically remembering this kind of life in the 1990s, Rosales made it happen. For Rosales, the purpose of *Map Pointz* is threefold: it is “about paying respect, preserving, honoring, and decriminalizing youth subcultures;” unlearning, relearning, and reexamining” the history of youth in SoCal; and “honoring those who we’ve lost in time” (*Map Pointz*). Building her own story based on the connections she made, Rosales challenged so-called official history’s negation of Chicana 1990s LA counterculture.

Like Moraga’s experience in writing the introduction to *Bridge* thirty-five years after its initial publication, and without Gloria, the ephemera that makes up Rosales’ work is interesting particularly because it *is* dated, “marked by the hour and place of ... our geographies of dislocation and homecoming, the ancestral memory that comes with us, and the politics of the period that shaped us” (Moraga and Anzaldúa xvi). Rosales recreates the beauty, the turmoil, the complexity of a Brown youth in the 1990s, creating a past in the present, so that both may continue to develop into a new future. Thus, the party crews, and more specifically their strategies for collective enjoyment, become both the content of the Instagram archives, and describe the ‘beat-juggling’ process of writing history collectively that Rosales later employs. To use Moraga’s terms, the collective reach towards across the gaps between personal narratives becomes both the expression of alternative consciousness in process and the *creator* of that consciousness, that alternative world.

Guadalupe Rosales' work connects many Angelenxs to their past lives, some which had been forgotten, erased, or left without many artifacts or mementos. Her work, both in its digital Instagram form and in the form of her physical installations, rejects the idea that the cultural histories of communities of color criminalized by the state are not worth documenting and saving for historical memory. Beyond that, Rosales' communal archive-building, facilitated by social media platforms, allows this project to be collective. Rosales acts as the curator and organizer, but she would have been unable to collect so much ephemera on her own. While Rosales facilitates the process of gathering artifacts, *Map Pointz* highlights how this retrofitting of history, as Maylei Blackwell calls it, is a collective and communal act. These multiple layers of worldbuilding potentiality, in addition to Rosales' connections between two centuries, provides the bridge that my project needs to connect the narratives of LA communities of color in the 1990s to the way we tell those historical narratives now, in the twenty-first century. Thus, Rosales' work facilitates my goal of connecting the worldbuilding narrative strategies that oppressed communities of color use as strategies for making the world around them in their own vision, from the 1990s to the present.

From the 1990s to the Present and Back Again

Although the decade began with the Immigration Act of 1990, which increased overall immigration into the United States, policy developed later in the decade ushered in a new era of open hostility and racism towards immigrants and communities of color. Three acts were approved by California voters in the 1990s that demonstrate this shift: Proposition 187 (1994) which prohibited undocumented people from using public services such as emergency healthcare

and public education, the repeal of affirmative action in 1996 (Proposition 209), and the repeal of bilingual education in 1998 (Proposition 227). The 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act paved the way for the neoliberal repeal of affirmative action by focusing on serving communities of color by surveilling them instead of adjusting institutional processes for systemic racism. The Immigration Act of 1990 expanded immigration, but coming on the heels of the early decade recession, public discourse began to focus on criminalizing immigration. “These California-based initiatives have extended into the national arena of public policy” as seen in “President Clinton's immigration and welfare bills that further curtail the rights of not only the undocumented but legal immigrants as well; UC-Regent Ward Connerly's nationwide campaign against affirmative action; and the numerous English-only proposals” (Chabram-Dernersesian 179). Thus, racist anxieties about criminal immigrants and communities of color became racially coded national and local policies. For these, and many other reasons, not to mention the LA Uprising of 1992, the 1990's in Southern California were a decade with heightened racial anxieties.

It was the birth of the Internet that made vocabulary like ‘network,’ take on many different meanings and fear of mass computer Y2K chaos fanned the fires of modernist anxieties. After the 1980's, the advent of the Internet heralded a new era of communication and technology. The new advances in computer technology also brought with it speculation about humankind's modernist future and anxieties tied to the possibility of a new uncontrollable era of power: one where machines would act unpredictably, where minorities were self-aware of their imminent majorities, particularly Latinx. Quickly evolving technology and the changing social fabric and ethnic makeup of Los Angeles and California were just some reasons that white, suburban Americans continued to both resent and fear difference.

But on the streets of East LA and other barrios in that urban hub, novel ways of incorporating technology into the art of everyday life provided a respite for communities of color. The growing trends in turntablism created a market for tailor-made DJ equipment, thus separating music-making from delicate vinyl records⁴ (Hansen 44), allowing those who had previously been barred from entering dance clubs and other nightlife venues the opportunity to create their own spaces for pleasure. Though DJs and other musicians had already been using turntables as instruments for more than two decades, it wasn't until 1995 that DJ Babu coined the term 'turntablist,' to describe a "distinctive type of DJ, an instrumentalist who does not simply reproduce existing music but creates entirely new music out of records," whose turntablism is their art," explains music critic Mark Katz in his 2012 book, *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ* (126). The -ism signaled toward this art form, providing "a sense of seriousness and cohesion to the art and even suggested something of a philosophy" (Katz 126). Developing the long history of turntablism that included Grandmaster Flash and Grand Wizard Theodore (creator of the record scratch), "it was not until the early and mid-1990s that a form of DJing, self-sufficient and largely independent from MCs, really flourished" (Katz 126). Though turntablism was mythically birthed on the East Coast, its expansion into California ensured that communities of color on the West Coast would further evolve the art form.

Soon, friend groups became DJ Crews and Promoter Crews, slanging the latest not-strictly-legal warehouse parties to their networks, working together to create spaces focused on creating an open environment for each other's fun and pleasure. By seeking out spaces and moments of convivencia, communities of color in Los Angeles were interacting in such a way that suggests they also understood the world around them relationally, with nothing else existing

⁴ Ironically, it was the development of digital devices for the DJ market that replaced the use of vinyl records and partially explains why the term 'turntablism' loses ground as soon as it is coined—it simply no longer referred to the experiential reality of creating music (Hansen 44).

separately or outside of the relationships between people and things. Martha Gonzalez, scholar of the fandango style of music, defines *convivencia* as the “deliberate act of being with each other as community” that “is a social, moral, and musical aesthetic of [Gonzalez’s collective] fandango practice” (270). I use Gonzalez’s term to importantly signal how the “reconceptualization of music as an activity rooted in *convivencia* is an important disruption in how we think of music in our present age,” with the aim “to bring focus on relationships and process rather than sounds, outcomes, or product” (270). Similarly, in 1990s Los Angeles, brown and black youth theorized music making and enjoyment as sites of resistance against increasingly neoliberal policies that focused and prioritized the individual.

The collective act of digital *convivencia*, in this case, creating spaces for mutual enjoyment, serves as an example of hopeful worldbuilding in the face of a so-called official history that ignores communities of color – their music, cultural history, and the legitimacy of their pursuit of happiness. As Cornel West explains it, optimism is being able to look at past evidence and seeing the possibilities for goodness, for change, a secular belief in evidence. Hope, on the other hand, requires leaps of the logical imagination to create theory in the flesh, in order to “go beyond the evidence” (Smith 1:09:10) to imagine new possibilities. Hope stems from a gritty cynicism engendered by a historically contextualized understanding of racial politics, in order to seek alternative ways of being beyond institutions. Haunted by the discriminatory practices of clubs, dancehalls, and other venues, and as resistance to educational, political, and social systems that ignored them, communities of color in Los Angeles in the 1990s used technology as a collective instrument of creating spaces that centered their experiences and validated their joy, which then facilitate the very same process digitally on Instagram more than twenty years later.



Figure 1: The feed on Rosales’ Instagram page, @Veteranas_and_rucas, which showcases examples of young Chicanas from the 1940s to the 1990s, and all in the present.

Such sites of everyday resistance became the fodder for Guadalupe Rosales’ public Instagram archives that facilitate the building of relationships online in order to use them as building blocks for a shared world of meaning and being, fostering digital *convivencia* with her handles @Veteranas_and_rucas and @Map_Pointz. Rosales’ work of documenting—making indelible—a cultural history of the past is mediated through file sharing on social media accounts, creating a digital space where Brown feed-scrollers can see their past represented. However, including many representations of women in neighborhoods throughout California, the portraits featured on the Instagram accounts are not identical and are provocative, in part, because of their “almost” familiarity. A view of the @Veteranas_and_rucas feed (Fig. 1) reveals the pull of the space in between two almost-the-same experiences: at first, some photos appear to show the same person, which prompts the viewer to attend to the differences in the images. This

almost-familiarity recalls Gordon's ghost, suggesting that it exists when one can recognize personal memories in parts of a ghost's message to another. Variations in color and texture give the flat webpage a mountainous landscape, with gaps between the individual representations of self-identified veteranas. This landscape illustrates the process of Rosales' digital *convivencia*: creating spaces for mutual recognition and negotiation—reaching toward the gap between the self and other⁵—as in the process of Gonzalez's *fandango* practice, a relational theory in the flesh where one's sound plays off others' voices.

In particular, Rosales' digital *convivencia* “remaps cyberspace,” which, in turn, changes shared notions of epistemology and knowledge-production. In the 1997 essay titled “The Virtual Barrio @ The Other Frontier (or the Chicano interneta),” borderlands scholar, poet, and performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña describes how the changing 1990s landscape of the internet—and all of its myths of equal access—intersects with race. Describing “theoreticians of color, feminists and activist artist [sic] [that] have finally succeeded in crossing the digital border without documents” as “newly arrived cyber-immigrants,” Gómez-Peña outlines their digital desires:

“to re-map the hegemonic cartography of cyberspace
to politicize the conception of cyberspace
to develop a multicentric, theoretical understanding of the cultural, political, and aesthetic potential of new technologies
to exchange different sorts of information -- mythopoetic, activist, performative, imagistic
to hopefully accomplish all this with humor, inventiveness and intelligence
Chicano artists in particular want to ‘brownify’ virtual space; to ‘spanglishize’ the net, and ‘infect’ the *linguas francas*.”

Though Rosales' work does not take off until 2015, almost twenty years after Gómez-Peña declares the goals of cyber-immigrants, Rosales is still working towards those same goals. By

⁵ See Dorinne Kondo's 2018 book, *Worldmaking: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity*, for her discussion of Anna Deaveare Smith's acting method as calling attention to and reaching across the gap between self and other.

making available a public archive of photographs and other images that document a particular cultural history, Rosales is brownifying the internet, trading in different epistemologies, remapping and politicizing cyberspace. Seeing ahead to Rosales' use of Instagram to create "encyclopedias chicanas" or, "cultural memory banks," and "spaces for encounter, dialogue, and exchange," Gómez-Peña calls for "activist artists and theoreticians is to find innovative, grassroots applications for new technologies" in order "to link community centers, artistic collectives, and human rights organizations by means of the internet." Thus, Rosales' methodology also serves as a framework for future study of social media platforms that aim to engage a large audience in the collective creation of an archive, an example of Gómez-Peña 'grassroots applications for new technologies.' With her focus on self-representation and party crews, Rosales also curates this alternative archive with attention to humor, or rather, its close synonym, joy, inventing a new way for individual social media accounts to reflect physical reality.

Because the project was borne out of Rosales' need to connect across distance with those who had similar experiences, the personal connections behind each piece of ephemera are what texture Rosales' art, prompting participants to reconsider the personal narratives as narrated by fleeting, partial, and imperfect memories. Choosing Instagram over other more text-based platforms, Rosales "wanted the photographs to do the talking," while recognizing that "to see the comments is also a big part of that" because "that's where people learn and argue" (Pitcher), negotiating within digital convivencia. Rosales describes her biggest inspiration as "hearing people's stories that were similar (and sometimes different) to mine" especially because "teenagers, [Rosales] included, were creating unique spaces in the midst of gang violence, the 1992 L.A. Riots, and other racial injustices like Proposition 187 [Illegal Aliens Ineligible for

Public Benefits’]” (*Map Pointz*). Similar to the differences in the way a ghost might haunt one individual as opposed to another, or Moraga’s separating of fibers of experience, Rosales values the opportunity that the comments provide to practice living with the contradictions of life. In this way, in addition to providing a space for the silences within the gap between personal narratives to be heard, Rosales facilitated digital convivencia, where participants filled in each other’s memories, bridging the contradictions in each other’s experiences with their own stories.

These discussions and negotiations within the comments also reflect the ‘almost-familiarity’ that binds the alternative archive together in the first place, bringing the 1990s into the present and making ‘now’ part of the past: Rosales notes, “People often don’t believe the photos are from the ‘90s because the fashion looks so similar” (Pitcher). Indeed, Rosales’ Instagram accounts create a bridge between two centuries, providing representations of both a past timescape’s aesthetics and practices, between the expression and the creation of ways of being. For the scope of this chapter, however, I mainly want to address how the print version of her work, *Map Pointz*, documents the process by which Rosales’ builds the digital archive collectively. It could not be possible if she had set out to do this individually, if only because Rosales, alone, lacked the multivalent and disparate ephemera necessary to haunt its viewers with contradictions, variations, and iterations.

Turntablism’s Beat Juggling as Methodology

Gaye Theresa Johnson’s 2013 *Spaces of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity* tracks “interracial antiracist alliances, about divisions among aggrieved minority communities, and about the cultural expressions that emerge from shared urban spaces” (ix), particularly through the

intersection of music and cultural space. Johnson's concept of "spatial entitlement," which she defines as "a way in which marginalized communities have created new collectivities based not just upon eviction and exclusion from physical places, but also on new and imaginative uses of technology, creativity, and spaces," (x) describes the innovate worldbuilding of Los Angeles DJ, Promoter, and Party Crews. Beyond creating spaces away from exclusion, Party Crews transform back yards, abandoned warehouses, and other abject locales into the site of collective enjoyment and pleasure. The act of creating "new articulations, new sensibilities, and new visions about the place of Black, Brown, and working-class people on the local and national landscape," in itself was "diagnostic of authority," revealing the "complex interworkings" (x) of the changing social structures at the turn of the 21st century. Following Johnson's understanding allows for acts of pleasure and enjoyment to be cast as "everyday acts of resistance and survival demonstrative of more than just the courage of freedom seekers" (x). In this way, both Rosales' digital *convivencia* mediated by Instagram and ordinary backyards hosting events for youth to get together – to *convivir*, live with – become spaces of hopeful worldbuilding practices that created new collective realities.

Organized by pooling resources together and innovating new solutions to problems, the cultural practices of the Party Crews fit in with the *rasquache* 'something-out-of-nothing' cultural trends especially popular in the 1990s. Symbolized by the rose bush growing out of an old Folgers' coffee can, the term '*rasquache*' was first defined by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto as



Figure 2: As rasquache as it gets: here a DJ mixes music on turntables placed atop two inverted shopping carts that have become the music stand.

“neither an idea nor an aesthetic, but an attitude or taste, the style of the underdog, making do with what is on hand” (1989 5). “It’s a result of knowing how to survive through the use of every day ‘movidas’; thus it is “not a style because a style is something that is frozen, but a sensibility of something that is always changing, like culture itself” (Ybarra-Frausto 2014 202). However, as Ybarra-Frausto clarifies, it is also about being “fregado pero no jodido” (1989 5), being *screwed but not doomed*. Perhaps Mark Dery best explains the distinction between rasquache and other forms of theorizing a style of making-do: rasquache, then, is “Claude Lévi-Strauss’s bricolage, in tire-tread huaraches” (3). Rather than use bricolage to distinguish between the engineer and the bricoleur, I am more interested in the “spirit of survival” (Castillo 9) inherent in rasquache movidas, as exemplified by the Party Crews strategies of creating new instruments or

stylish venues and stages from materials on hand. Rasquache goes beyond ingenuity—its practices require “a stance that is both defiant and inventive,” which becomes the ability “to hold life together with bits of string, old coffee cans, and broken mirrors in a dazzling gesture” of survival (Mesa-Bains 157-8). According to David Spener, Ybarra-Frausto himself agreed that “rasquache equals survival with hope” (17)—the gritty hope of which West speaks. Thus, party crews’ operations developed Johnson’s everyday acts of resistance based on the relationships between people, and how those relationships contained materials that could be refashioned into a jamming and inviting party.

Lived experience filters and is filtered by theory in the flesh—creates it and expresses it. Thus, Party Crews’ rasquache cultural practices serve as an example of Johnson’s use of turntablism’s ‘beat juggling’ as a methodology for both creation of theory in the flesh and the expression of that theory. Beat juggling, the use of a turntable as an instrument in the creation of a new sound that highlighted DJ’s musical virtuosity by isolating a track’s musical break, its drum and snare, vocal phrases, or sound effects and manipulating the sounds with a cross fader, “indicated unprecedented advances in digital technology, and helped create a soundscape appropriate for the needs of its listeners” (Johnson xiv). In addition to breaking the social norm of protecting delicate vinyl records by scratching them, Johnson describes how the act of music making was itself collective:

At times, DJs work together, using two or three turntables each. Together they form a sort of band, with each DJ responsible for a different sound. For example, one DJ will isolate the drums behind a particular song, another will manipulate a record to make a bass line, and yet another will be responsible for a horn riff. One sound alone, or the work of one DJ or sound in this form of beat juggling, means very little until it is joined with other sounds and results in a collective sonic production. When multiple DJs beat juggle in one performance, they must manage multiple turntables and cross faders to break down beats on records and then recreate them. The records they choose when creating these new rhythmic and melodic patterns are as diverse and complex as the styles developed to execute the movement necessary to perform these physical manipulations quickly and

accurately. ... Turntables have pitch controls to alter the tempos and tones as well, so DJs must be masters of both mixing and memory. ... Beat juggling must anticipate audiences' collective memories and produce an appealing textual combination of those memories. (xiv-xv)

The physical act of creating new things out of old, disparate (musical) components and the process of beat juggling with the other members of the crew are the creation and expression of the rasquache elements of party crews. Thus, like Gonzalez's use of fandango's *convivencia* as a methodology for both music- and meaning-making, Johnson theorizes beat juggling as a practice that "encodes and communicates centuries of musical memory, minimizes the distance between diverse geographical spaces, collapses the time elapsed between different albums and songs, and interpolates a wide range of life experiences into a new beat" (xv). The act of moving quickly between multiple songs and beats, often switching back and forth, splicing, or otherwise manipulating the different elements serves as a metaphor for understanding how the work of LA-based artist Guadalupe Rosales inhabits the different timescapes at the turn of the 21st century, mixing them into each other with the help of online communities.

Yes to Pleasure, No to Respectability Politics

While she has been criticized in the past for allegedly glorifying gang life, for Rosales, "it is part of the story," she says. "It just is. Just like we talk about the fun times and friendships, we can also talk about the traumas and the violence" (Miranda). Refusing to romanticize the remembrance of the era until it is devoid of any meaning, Rosales again bears witness to all of the relational aspects of growing up around party crews, legitimizing the scene's validity as a cultural history, without sanitizing it of difficult discussions of its proximity to gang violence.

However, Rosales also rejects the criminalization of communities of color, and party crews, especially as portrayed in “undercover” local news segments that aim to legitimize racialized state violence. Such news segments serve to unfold a competition of assimilation into white professional culture, urging immigrants and people of color to shed those cultural practices that set them apart from the dominant (white and respectable) race. Respectability politics describes the concern with assimilation into whiteness, holding people of color to unreachably high standards of decorum, in order to deny them citizenship (both legal and figurative) when they do not meet such racialized standards⁶. With the bodies of people color simultaneously hypersexualized and exploited by racial capitalism, Rosales validates the everyday resistance of communities criminalized by the state experiencing joy and pleasure. Highlighting the mysteries within the interrupted action of candid shots and the gaps between individual narratives, Rosales shows how social activities of 1990s Los Angeles, such as cruising, served as settings for courtship, camaraderie and other important relationship building activities.

For Rosales, both in the 1990s and in the digital age, *convivencia* was the destination: “The best part about cruising was that it didn’t matter what your car looked like just as long as you made it to the streets. The point of getting out there was to socialize and meet people, most of them teenagers” (*Map Pointz*). Thus, Rosales does more than retrofit history; her work also makes an argument about how the enjoyment and pleasure of communities of color should be validated, rather than shamed, ignored, and criminalized. Like Eddy Alvarez’s reading of 1990’s LA turntable legend DJ Irene as a “bad woman” and a “bad ass bitch,” Rosales creates a space, both online and in the tangible pages of her book and public exhibits, where people can “fuck with gender, wear whatever [they] wanted, be a *puta* and [not] feel judged.” Against narrow

⁶ A common example would be the knee-jerk search for criminality that often accompanies a new incident of racialized police brutality in order to justify state violence: *Did he have a weapon? Had he committed a crime?*

patriarchal designations that women are either virgins or whores and Latina women, in particular, are subservient, and in resistance of the stigma against bodily excess in communities of color, Rosales facilitates a digital space where women can project their self-representations, or representations of their experience as they saw and remember it.

Before streaming or cable television reached new heights of popularity, local news segments were instrumental in distributing messages about what was purportedly happening on the streets of Los Angeles. As opposed to Rosales' validation of the joy communities of color were experiencing in the 1990s, KTTV FOX 11's segment "FOX Undercover" is infamous in Los Angeles for its biased "exposés" of communities of color, segments that attempt to legitimize and justify the unjust criminalization, segregation, and discrimination against these communities. The description of the 1996 FOX Undercover five-part series "Gangs and Moms" describes its project as "examining the gang culture that *infects* Los Angeles youth like a *cancer*" (emphasis added). Similarly, in another segment that documents "the rebellious world of party girls," a white male commentator describes the lived experience of members of a party crew called UnPredictable Ladies (UPL)⁷. Floating words and testimony from the women is spliced between and among the white male newscaster's comments of disapproval. Disgusted, the commentator notes how members of UPL "walk down the street like they own it," while a woman's voice in the background can be heard saying "*Life is short...live it.*" While the segment explores the many variations of women's participation in the party crew scene (organizing, deciding to strip, dancing alone, with other women or with men), the very fact of their participation in prioritizing fun and pleasure serves to demonize them in the eyes of the white FOX 11 commentator, facilitating the same process for viewers every time the segment is aired.

⁷ Though the commentator tried to appear to be "one in the know," his advice to youth that wanted to stay out of gangs: simply say your mother disapproves.

As opposed to the Instagram feed that showcases images that users have themselves submitted, often stylistically posed, the camera in the “Party Girls” segment follows the members of UPL from behind, flattening their identities into a focus on their skirts. Ironically, the segment itself locks the women into a sexualized role; their mere presence on the street is evidence of their transgressions against respectable gender roles. Where the portraits on the Instagram feed and within *Map Pointz* are both posed and willingly submitted to the archive, spaces where participants can exercise their subjectivity by deciding which contextualizing information or facial gesture to include, the FOX news segment only objectifies the UPL members further, using them as props to advance their propaganda for a narrative about the criminality of communities of color. Rosales, on the other hand, chooses not to sanitize the archive of tensions, showcasing the contradictions between different personal narratives, in the comments, but also in the crowd-sourced photos participants upload to her site.



Figure 3: Members of UnPredictable Ladies.

The party girls segment ends with an ominous tone about the “specters of violence threatening the party scene,” promising a new segment next week about “casualties” from the streets. Rosales captures this “casualties” segment in *Map Pointz*, reproducing still images from the newscast and accentuating the gap that exists between the respective media of film and the printed page. The images focus on Anthony Alonzo, a dancer and party crew member who was killed when a fight broke out at a party. Where the segment uses the dancer’s death to legitimize the criminalization of party crews, and by extension, communities of color, Rosales instead juxtaposes the segment stills with images of surviving party crew members at Alonzo’s memorial, a testimony to the strong personal connections made during his life in a party crew. Even though images of Alonzo dancing were used as part of a series exploring the tragedies of the party scene, Rosales’ transformation of the moving image onto paper reflects the inability of the news segment to understand the nuances of the lives they attempt to capture on film. As a person of color whose body should foremost serve racial capitalism through exploitation, Alonzo’s joyful dancing still represents bodily excess, the static page unable to contain all of his movements. Applying rasquache’s something-out-of-nothing aesthetic and politic to the flattening of Alonzo into a narrative that criminalizes communities of color, Rosales remakes the

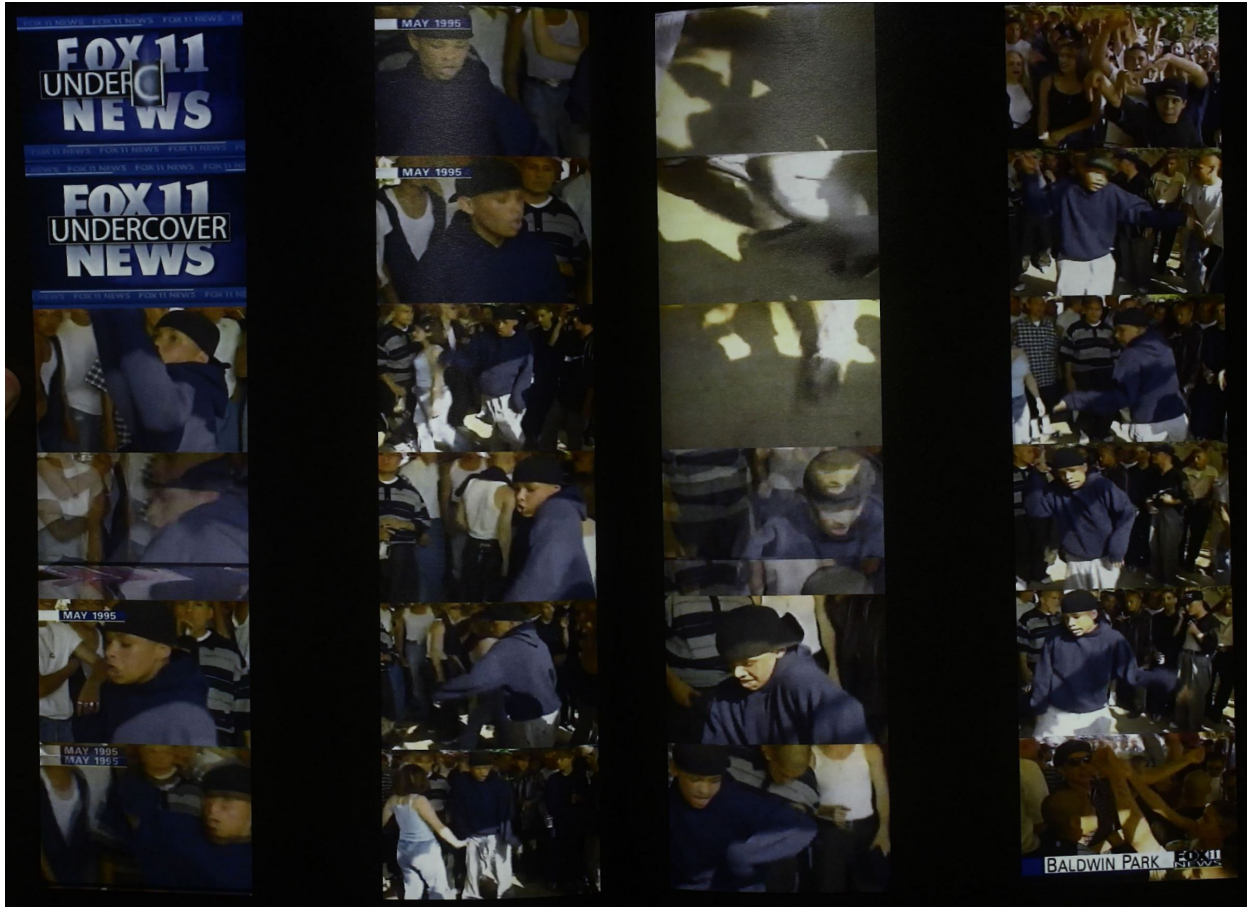


Figure 4: Rosales includes stills from a local news segment called FOX 11 Undercover, where they ‘report’ on what *really* goes in South Central LA. The partial translation of film to print reflects the segment’s inability to *see* the subjects it captures on film.

FOX news segment into a testament of its inability to contextualize Alonzo’s experience, and by extension, the lived experience of communities of color across LA.

The movement outside the frame, hinted at by the blurs in the still images of Alonzo dancing, the impossibility of translation from film to print, serves to highlight how analogue and digital archives are both incomplete. Holding the physical ephemera in your hands carries a different weight than the simultaneous juxtapositions of multiple self-representations, multiple realities, as in the always-updating Instagram feed. In fact, not even memory, with one’s many biases and interests, captures the full nuance of the collective process by which space is

negotiated across multiple personal narratives. Rosales' work remembers and recreates spaces that bring people together in convivencia.

From Analogue, to Digital, to Three-Dimensional

On September 15, 2018, I attended the opening of Guadalupe Rosales' first solo exhibition, in the 'HOY Space' at the Vincent Price Museum at East Los Angeles College (ELAC), located in the San Gabriel Valley. Here in Monterey Park, business names are in Mandarin, Korean, Spanish, among other languages. In the parking lot outside the museum, Classic Car Clubs, like the Lady Volks, showed off their custom paint and hydraulics jobs, as the beats of old school music played. Once inside the museum, the music from outside died down, air conditioning blasted, and everything hushed, even though many small groups of people questioningly walked deeper into the building. Where was the exhibit that matched the exuberance outside? The elevators were crowded, so I decided to take the stairs up to where, presumably, I would find what I was looking for.

A long line stretches across the entire floor of the museum all the way back to the elevators. People of color dressed to the nines (though now with thicker eyebrows) excitedly await their turn to enter the exhibit and relive their experiences as youth in 1990s Los Angeles. At the end of the line, a museum aide acts as bouncer and counts heads; the room is at capacity. Waiting outside, I hear the beat and thump of dance music. Every time the 'bouncer' opens the door, flashes of light bolt through. The line moves slowly.

When I do make it in, the sterile form every museum takes falls away. Blue lights soften my view, with projectors set on mirrored floors showcasing a two-channel video-collage of

1990s photos and ephemera to complete the immersive installation. Among the sculptures made with archival materials, an altar to Rosales' cousin highlights the intertwined relationship between nostalgia and mourning, remembering and memorializing. Outside the exhibit, back in the crisp white halls of the museum's institution, a pay phone recreates the practice of circulating directions to parties – map points – via personalized voicemail messages. The museum-provided placard invites participants to “pick up the phone and see where the next party is,” explaining that “the phone numbers for these ‘party lines’ were found on flyers that circulated around the Southern California party crew scene of the period, directing people from one event to the next.” Altogether, *Echoes* created a collectively vibrant and mournful space that contrasted with the soft silences and hard lines of the museum.

In a gallery opposite to *Guadalupe Rosales: Echoes of a Collective Memory*, the permanent exhibit, *Form and Function in the Ancient Americas*, included artifacts from civilizations in what we now recognize as Peru and Mexico, among other Central and South American countries.⁸ The contrast between these two exhibits serves to highlight the difference between two different approaches to history. *Form and Function* troubles the use of the term “pre-Columbian” to describe the historical period in the Americas before the arrival of Christopher Columbus' colonizing forces in 1492, but it nevertheless includes an array of ancient artifacts objectified and necessarily disconnected from their contexts due to colonial genocide and destruction. *Echoes*, however, features photographs, many of which are posed self-representations, submitted to an online archive for public viewing, along with whatever personal context the submitter chose to include with the image. While those individual details are not necessarily represented in the collective exhibit, the gallery space becomes a physical

⁸ Vincent Price, famous for his roles in horror and noir films, was also an avid art collector; Price's personal collection sourced the permanent exhibit at the museum named in his honor.

representation of the Instagram feeds. Further, Rosales does include a personal explanation of the altar to her cousin, giving story to both the art piece and to Rosales' history itself. In contrast to the absences that linger due to colonial history as showcased by *Form and Function*, *Echoes* leans into the hauntings, contextualizing history by using personal narrative to unravel the gaps across individual experience.

Form and Function could also serve as an alternate title for this chapter, however. In the museum it refers to artistic artifacts as representations of larger cultural processes (a ceramic sculpture as the physical representation of funeral rites, for example); in this project, it refers to the way in which the collective beat-juggling practices of party crews in the 1990s make up the content of the Instagram feeds and Rosales' work, but also how those same indelible practices of *convivencia* serve as a framework for the collective worldbuilding Rosales facilitates in her work, form and function. The bridge called Instagram connects people across time in shared practices of collective narrative strategies to create the world around them in their own vision. To use Moraga's terms, the bodily memories of the party and low-rider crew experience are theory in the flesh: both the creation of consciousness and the *expression* of consciousness—a form of self-representation and a functional way to *live with* each other.



Figure 5: A now-iconic photo of Latinas on what used to be the Sixth Street Bridge (connecting East Los Angeles to Downtown), with my brown thumb holding it down. Now, Angelenxs can hold their 1990s in their hands. Photographer unknown, Mind Crime Hookers party crew on 6th Street Bridge, Boyle Heights, 1993, Guadalupe Rosales.

It's 2019 now, and the iconic 6th Street Bridge that connected East LA to Downtown exists no longer. 'Concrete Rot' made the structure susceptible to collapse during an earthquake and the viaduct was demolished in 2016. Map points that used to direct traffic to collective spaces of pleasure now must refer to new landmarks. The 6th Street Bridge, with its power to simultaneously separate and connect distinct neighborhoods, exists only in memory or in hauntings⁹.

Rosales' work alters the way we construct the past and the future. Like the DJ crews who use beat juggling to collectively mix different records into a new, more complicated song, Guadalupe Rosales mixes between records of the 1990s, the present, and every other time period

⁹ The structure was rebuilt, of course, now replete with a twelve-acre park underneath, set to open in 2020 and poised to make memories with new residents. The bridge built in the 1920's, however, remains an icon of twentieth century Los Angeles.

that informs those eras. Therefore her work is always in flux, especially given the collective nature of it— interacting with her participants on social media and at art exhibits. Any study of Rosales' work can only present a snapshot, however candid it might be, of the enduring collective understanding of party crew history in 1990s Los Angeles.

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Chapter 4:

“‘Oppression exists, but not here’”

The Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade and the Importance of Storytelling

Members of the all-womxn-of-color Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade (OPC¹⁰) don't care what people think about them—they're riding bicycles and writing their own story. Taking back the streets of LA on two-wheeled 'steel horses,' OPC was formed in 2010 by Xela, a young mom who wanted her daughter to grow up amongst and supported by a community of women. In the years since their inception, OPC uses social media to create Los Angeles in their own vision, organizing community efforts that range from Luna Bike Rides every full moon, to Survival Arts workshops for self-defense, and supply-donation rallies for those living houseless in Los Angeles. In a city ruled by car culture and thus many dark streets women are warned to stay away from, the OVAS (short for both Ovarian Psychos¹¹ and 'One Very Angry Squad') battle against gentrification and cisheteropatriarchal violence. By collaborating directly with the community, the OVAS 're-develop' East LA to meet the needs of the residents of the community, framing their work with "Feminist Ideals, Indigenous Understandings, and an Urban/Hood Mentality." Reading OPC's Xicana feminist praxis—both their online presence and their activism—as a form of self-representation, this chapter examines how critical theories of hope inflect urban community organizing in the 21st century, a time when stories posted to social media have become central to platform building. Using the 2016 documentary, *Ovarian Psychos*, as a representation of their processes of collective narration, I track how the OVAS write their

¹⁰ A note about language use, throughout the chapter, I use the phrases 'Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade/OPC', 'the OVAS', 'members of the Ovarian Psychos', interchangeably to refer to the bicycle brigade. Spanish will be translated but not italicized.

¹¹ And, on their website, OVAS stands for: "Overthrowing Vendixs, Authority, & the State" (*sellouts*).

own work into a long history of resistance. OPC's cultural and rhetorical practices challenge the oppressive norms of so-called official history while simultaneously fashioning new possibilities for reality in Los Angeles; in other words, the OVAS develop a critical theory of hopeful worldbuilding—on their bikes.

First, I will provide a brief overview into the work of the OVAS, secondly I will highlight how the documentary situates the OVAS' activism within conversations about their family history, and then, analyze how a tense moment where one OPC member poses a large-scale critique reinforces their commitment to reflecting the needs of the community they serve. Next, I'll read the historical and cultural context of one of OPC's digital flyers for the 2017 Black Mass, the annual summer ride, formerly known as Clitoral Mass. Lastly, I'll end on some notes for future work on OPC.

The Ovarian Psycho-Cycle Brigade grew up in the hood, where gangs were prevalent and so were the stylistic aspects of their countercultural lifestyle. Beyond that, Andi Xoch, a longtime member of the OVAS, explains how OPC feels alienated from the nationalistic sense of American society, challenging its racial, gender, sexual, and political norms: "The reason why we're in Ovarian Psychos because we feel that we're fuck-ups" (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 2:46-9). Their feeling of alienation is due to both society's attempt to restrict their gender identity and sexuality into what Alma Garcia describes as the traditional, Catholic gender roles within Chicana families that relegate women into secondary roles (5), and its attempt to impose capitalist individualist norms that preclude communal worldbuilding. In other words, the OVAS are fuck ups in society equally due to the fact that they don't work 9-to-5s, and that they refuse to conform to the image of a "good woman." In "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us that "language is a male discourse," describing how and why "overcoming

the tradition of silence,” is imperative for women (76). Thus, as “fuck-ups,” the OVAS are “*hociconas[s], repelona[s], chismosa[s]*” because “having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada* [(badly raised)]” (Anzaldúa 76, italics in original), particularly for a woman. As *hociconas, women with big, snout mouths*, OPC lives up to Anzaldúa’s declaration that wild tongues cannot be tamed; they can only be cut out.



Figure 1. “Ovaries so big, we don’t need no fucking balls.”

Forming their own gang of support systems, the OVAS appropriate gang symbology, wearing bandanas to cover their face and using their hands to form ovaries, fashioning a gang sign to refer to their clique (Fig. 1). Paired with the tagline, “ovaries so big, we don’t need no fucking balls,” OPC’s gang aesthetic pushes back against the militarized masculinity that aims to scare women and non-binary folks into submission. In a city like Los Angeles, women who ride their bikes must continually be on the defensive against dangerous drivers who prioritize their monetized time over a bicyclist’s life, and men who catcall or otherwise harass women on bikes,

women walking, women. Playing on the common saying that dangerous or risky tasks require one to have “big balls” (the large testicles of the ideal male subject) in order to prove one’s valor, here the OVAS go beyond the common knowledge saying, instead beating chauvinists at their own game where the size of gendered body parts directly correlates to one’s bravery and strength. Beyond simply positing their ovaries as larger than balls, because common parlance cites patriarchal violence as what makes streets unsafe for women, by disregarding ‘common sense’ victim-blaming precautions against taking up space on the streets, the Ovarian Psychos call society’s bluff, revealing cautionary tales of danger as cisheteropatriarchal tools for attempting to control women’s behavior through shame and fear. Thus, they take pride in their sexuality and bodies, rejecting the shame imposed on them. Reflecting the gang aesthetic that pervades their community, the Ovarian Psychos refashion it into a symbol of inclusive support and power, against the oppressive limitations that society imposes to restrict their movement.

Matching their hood aesthetic, OPC also seeks to invert the religious influence in their upbringing that similarly sought to control their behavior, using shame to reinforce gender and sexual norms. Early on in the documentary, interspersed with footage from Luna Rides, organizing meetings, and lots of flyers, we see the OVAS’ take on the Catholic Creed: “As an Ovarian Psycho, I give my word, palabra, to live my life with my feet firmly planted on my pedals. With mad heart for my sisters, my hood, and my people. And with my spirit always rebellious” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 12:07-12:18). Much like their reappropriation of gang signs, the OVAS subvert religious practices and iconography into new, more inclusive meanings. The OVAS’ credo is very much a way of life, not just a pledge, but a religious commitment to their community and to *desmadre*, in other words, to being contrarian punks. Though the OVAS want to remain firmly grounded in the communities where they came from,

they also acknowledge that like the pedals of a bicycle, their communities are steady and dynamic, all at once. This understanding of the growth and change inherent to and necessary in healthy communities allows for evolving and interconnected notions of social commitment and personal wellbeing. In fact, describing the monthly Luna Rides, Andi Xoch underscores that the dialogue between “women, women-identified, gender non-conforming folks” that takes place before, during, and after the ride, “is the most important part” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 10:13-23). Against the religious model that represses, shuns, and shames in order to control human behavior, the OVAS write fluidity, change, and reciprocity into their credo and into their community events.

As Joss the Boss, one of the original OVAS, says, Ovarian Psycos “is for the uneducated woman, the knuckle-headed girls, for the punk rockers, for the cholas, for, fuck, the sisters, the sisters in the neighborhood that, fuck, that live that hard life” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 10:24-43). OPC exists as a communal space that focuses on those marginalized, criminalized, and discarded in a capitalist society, particularly those who refuse cisheteropatriarchal norms. Influenced by the cultural around them, OPC uses their own hand symbol to rep their clique, reappropriating gang signs as symbols of militarized masculinity. Further, the OVAS also critique Catholicism, the ultimate confluence of gender and colonial hierarchies, by subverting and reappropriating religious practices and iconography, particularly in their public mass-ride flyers, which I will analyze later in this chapter.

Worldbuilding Visions Beyond

In creating a space that is open to the difficult work of what Chela Sandoval calls “differential consciousness,” the OVAS strive to change the world around them for those that

come after, combining their pride in being ‘fuck-ups’ with a commitment to support each other and write themselves into being, by breaking colonial legacies of violence. Chela Sandoval employs the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Hill Collins, and other women of color thinkers, theorizing her metaphor of the automobile’s clutch as based on women of color’s experience of being the “outsider/within.” Making use of the activity of what Anzaldúa calls weaving "between and among" oppositional ideologies, Sandoval sketches a new topographical space, where multiple differential consciousness can be accessed. Describing the differential consciousness as “the clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power” (58), Sandoval theorizes a dialectical process of oppositional consciousnesses in relation with each other. Defining differential consciousness as the medium “through which the equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness become effectively converted, lifted out of their earlier, modernist, and hegemonic activity,” Sandoval thus stresses the importance and utility of a flexible approach. Moreover, this flexibility compounds possibility, for “when enacted in dialectical relation to one another and not as separated ideologies, each oppositional mode of consciousness, each ideology-praxis, is transformed into tactical weaponry for intervening in shifting currents of power” (Sandoval 58).

As Sandoval, herself, suggests, the processual, dialectical nature of the differential consciousness can be applied and generalized onto Anzaldúa’s concept of *la consciencia de la mestiza*, specifically her writing about *la facultad*, “the learned capacity to read, renovate, and make signs on behalf of the dispossessed” (61). Such abilities for differential consciousness, or the ability to “see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (Anzaldúa 61) and act according to *la facultad*, are borne out of the

experience of women of color who learned to successfully navigate through racial and heteropatriarchal systems, internalizing “an ‘outsider/within’ identity that guides movement of being according to an ethical commitment to equalize power between social constituencies” (Sandoval 61). Thus, the documentary’s form of interspersing powerful footage of the OVAS taking over the streets between the different stories of trauma, itself, reflects the work of differential consciousness. Further, in the later sections reading mass bike ride flyers as cultural products, I show how OPC’s organizational collective praxis is not only an extension of a long history of women of color theory, but also engages the multiplicitous work of differential consciousness. Thus, Sandoval’s always-in-process approach to political organizing and movement building provides a useful lens for viewing the many prongs of the OPC’s organizational goals. Within this chapter, differential consciousness also provides a theoretical framework for understanding (1) OPC’s in-your-face aesthetic, (2) their personal goals for support, growth, and rectification of trauma, and (3) the collective narratives they weave as different forms of Sandoval’s automobile clutch.

Generational Trauma, Systemic Trauma

Acknowledging the connection between systemic colonial trauma and generational family trauma, *Ovarian Psycos* highlights how trauma can be – unwittingly – passed on generationally. Xela de la X, the founder of the Ovarian Psycos, explains what motivated her to dream up the Psycos: “Ovarian Psycos is a refuge for the run-away, for the throw-away....I understood that, being an ‘at-risk youth,’ now an adult, I’m still an ‘at-risk’ adult...like that doesn’t go away, so where are the spaces for us” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle, 1:58-2:20). Subtly redefining ‘at-risk youth’ as the runaway and throwaway, Xela reappropriates the term

used as racialized shorthand, showing how running away or flouting the norm and being thrown away are two sides of the same coin. OPC is specifically for those who refuse to or cannot conform to society's respectability politics, which dictate that your quality of life should be directly related to the amount of capital you own and are able to produce. In this way, the Ovarian Psychos connect capitalist and cisheteropatriarchal social norms as the causes of generational, intimate, and systemic trauma. Beyond providing a supportive space for each other, the OVAS historicize their actions. Thus, their space is one that seeks to name the violence endured both physically and psychologically, highlighting the importance of communal spaces on a personal level, in order to weave their personal stories into a larger communal narrative, to challenge capitalist, gender, and social norms that use shame to dictate behavior.

Systemic racial and heteropatriarchal violence affects all of the OVAS and Xela explains how their work aims to create a space to counteract that violence: “the majority of us, if not all of us, have some kind of trauma in our life. We’re just that safe space for each other, to bring a sense of comfort, of family” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 2:50-3:07). Violence against women, queer, trans, and nonbinary folks of color is both intimate and systemic and as such the documentary explores the connections between the trauma and violence that happens both at home and around the city. Focusing mainly on both Evie, a newer addition to the group, Andi Xoch, a longtime member, and Xela, the founder of the OVAs, the documentary explores the relationships that the OVAS have had with their mothers and other women growing up. Throughout the three intergenerational conversations, repression achieved through shame and silence becomes a recurring theme,¹² reflecting “the ways in which la familia has been deployed as a means of maintaining normative kinship arrangements” (Rodriguez 168). Interspersed

¹² For an in depth exploration of the Chicax family, see Richard Rodriguez's *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* (2009).

between these difficult conversations with their mothers about the trauma of their childhood, images of misogynistic social media posts they've received, and news stories about femicides in their community, footage of the OVAS leading mass bikes rides serves as a counter-narrative of hopeful worldbuilding. Thus, the documentary's experimental form, itself, acknowledges but drowns out cisheteropatriarchal norms following the OVAS on wheels, chanting "Whose Streets? Our Streets!"

Beginning with Evie, whose initiation into the OVAS we see later in the documentary, the OVAS unfold the connections between personal and political trauma, and examine the ways that trauma is passed on generationally. In a portion of the film that focuses on the relationship between Evie and her mother, Maria Isabel describes how her traumatic memories of violence are intertwined with her regret at not being able to study because of so much guerilla war in El Salvador when she was young:

"Las bikas es más para chicos que para chicas. Por eso yo a Evie le digo, Evie, trabaja, aprende, sé profesional. Por si un día tú te casas, tú eres profesional y no vas a sufrir como yo. ... No tuve estudios, porque cuando yo estaba chica había mucha guerrilla en El Salvador. Si yo hubiera estudiado, otra vida fuera la mía. No viviera aquí en este apartamento, tal vez tuviera una casa. Pero no estudie. Qué me toca? Limpiar? Ese es mi trabajo, limpieza. Cuando la Evie puede ser una abogada, verdad?"

"Bikes are more of a boy thing than a girl thing. That's why this is what I tell Evie: work, learn, become a professional. Then one day if you get married, you'll be a professional and won't suffer like me. I didn't study because when I was young, there was war in El Salvador. Had I been able to study, I'd have another life. I wouldn't be living in this apartment, maybe I'd have a house. But I didn't study. What do I get? Cleaning? That's my job – cleaning. But la Evie could be a lawyer, right?" (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 6:02-40).

For Maria Isabel, success in life is directly connects gender and individualistic social norms because her experience of growing up in poverty and war precluded any other forms of increasing their quality of life. Without outright crushing her mother's dreams for a better life for

her in the form of a career in law, Evie simply says, “I don’t know about abogada (*lawyer*). No sé (*I don’t know*)” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle6:40-6). As a refugee, Maria Isabel wants Evie to conform to both gender and professional norms, as an investment in capitalist success. Evie, on the other hand, sees beyond both blades of the double edged sword: she no longer fears her community because she, with the OVAS, has found a way to take it back, and thus, bikes are neither for boys nor girls, but simply a vehicle to connect. Evie also resists the respectability politics that her mother’s fear threatens to impose on her, realizing the importance in creating understanding and comfort outside of white, heteropatriarchal institutions. Thus, Evie seeks to write a counter-narrative against both the fear of living in a war zone and the capitalist complacency that feeds on fear and shame.

For Maria Isabel, fear of gang violence connects the experience of living in El Salvador and Los Angeles, where scarcity of resources creates deadly competition for profit. This fear informs her actions and as seeped into the way she has raised Evie. Maria Isabel describes their life in El Salvador:

“Dónde yo crecí era un lugar muy pobre. Yo pasé mucho tiempo escuchando ruido de los helicópteros y los balazos. Tuvimos que dejar la casa nosotros, caminando y las balas cerca de nuestros pies. Y llegamos aquí, y los cholos, muchos balazos. Yo la había enseñado que cuando habían disparos, uno se tenía que meter debajo de la cama.

I grew up in a place that was very poor. For a long time I heard the sound of helicopters and gunshots. We had to leave our house. We walked with bullets flying by our feet. And we arrived here and the cholos, lots of gunshots. I’d taught them that if they heard gunshots, to get down under the bed” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 6:46-7:14).

Like many countries in Central and South America, the United States’ involvement in politics in El Salvador, militarizing both the police and organized crime groups, has exacerbated the country’s history of neocolonial exploitation. In Los Angeles, a militarized police squeezes and targets communities of color, using commodified incarceration as a method for controlling

communities into capitalist submission, one way or another, within the prison walls and outside of them, as well. Evie sees beyond the fear, and explains she, in turn, feels traumatized by the fear that her mother lives with everyday. “Yo creo que por tu experiencia y viviendo en esta comunidad donde habia muchos cholos, nos crisaste como que si nos hubieras criado en la guerra (*I think that because of your experience and living here with lots of cholos, you raised us as if we were living in a war zone*)” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 7:15-7:28). For Maria Isabel, fear of gang violence connects the experience of living in El Salvador and Los Angeles, where scarcity of resources creates deadly competition for profit. Evie’s community organizing through the Ovarian Psychos has informed how she views her community around her, and thus Evie can recognize the patterns of fear and trauma that threaten to repress generation after generation. As Maria Isabel sits quietly receiving her daughter’s analysis, Evie writes their personal family history onto the larger political similarities between El Salvador and Los Angeles, and moves the narrative away from one of foreclosure, to one of communal possibility with the OVAS.

We don’t see if Maria Isabel responds to Evie’s point because at this point, the film cuts away from the conversation, peeking through a sliver of window, into the apartment complex’s courtyard. In the next scene, we return to Evie and Maria Isabel sitting on their couch, but the conversation has come to the Ovarian Psychos, and Maria Isabel contemplates letting Evie join in on events that will keep her out of the house. When Evie tells her mother that OPC are “preguntando que como [se] sintiera (*asking how she would feel*)” if they invited her to join, Maria Isabel simply says, “Híjole! (*Good Grief!*). Hurt, Evie asks for an explanation and Maria Isabel responds from a place of fear and desperation.

“Si va, si ella acepta va estar todos los fines de semana en la bika? En la noche? Aquí es una ciudad muy grande, si ella me dice voy, voy a un lugar, de ese lugar se va a otro lugar... en dónde yo la busco? No se puede buscar una persona. ... Yo pienso que todas

las mamás, si los hijos no están, uno no está tranquilo. (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 7:43-8:11)

If she goes, if she accepts, she'll be on her bike every weekend? At night?... This is a big city. If she tells me, 'I'm going to this place,' from that place she goes to another place... Where could I go look for her? You can't just look for someone. ... I think all mothers...if their kids aren't around, you can't relax.

Maria Isabel carries the heavy trauma that only neo-colonial violence – violence that is systemic, personal, and perpetuated by both the state and cisheteropatriarchal harassment and femicides – which causes her to want to protect Evie at all costs, even if Evie has to give up her community organizing work with the OVAS.

Maria Isabel's past in a war zone has carried over to the way she understands Evie. This difficult realization helps to foreground that trauma always has a larger historical context. While the war will be remembered as the victory of one faction over another, Maria Isabel, like others raised in precarious and dangerous situations, will never again be able to relax if she doesn't know that all her children are home. "If something happened, where would I go look for her?" she asks. In such a big city, you can't just find a person. By joining the OVAS and continuing her work supporting the community, Evie refuses the double-edged sword of fear: she refuses to live in fear of her community, and also refuses to be economically shamed into abandoning her outlets for comfort and social change, in favor of white supremacist institutions like careers in law. While this initially causes a rift in their relationship, later in this chapter, I will also explain how Evie's work with the OVAS was precisely what allowed Maria Isabel to reach a different kind of relationship with her daughter. Further, it's no question that a Civil Rights lawyer¹³, for example, can have easily-measurable material effects for a community, as opposed to, say,

¹³ It is no coincidence that having a lawyer in the family would be a common desire of families at the intersections of oppression. Future work will address the tension between the younger generation's worldbuilding desires and the older generations' want for an institutional 'in.'

pushing Evie to be a literature scholar. However, by the end of the film, the older generations realize how the OVAS' organizing also has positive material effects in their community.

Serving as both a counternarrative against Maria Isabel's fear of Evie joining the Ovarian Psychos and as a vehicle for transitioning into the next story, interviews with Xela, Andi, and Joss the Boss describe how powerful it felt to claim space in very dangerous zones. Xela describes it feeling "like a fire had been ignited... and it went wild," (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 10:58-11:03). As viewers, we follow OPC on their first Luna Ride, the reciting of the first iteration of the OPC credo, and many organizing meetings, including one to plan the "Pop Your Cherry Ride" for first time riders, reappropriating, rewriting, and refusing the Mexican 'wives' tale' that riding a bike would break a woman's hymen. The scene ends with a montage of flyers for the Psychos' recent rides ends on the image of a flyer for the November 2011 "Ride Against Domestic Violence" in memory of Cindi Santana, killed at school by an ex-boyfriend (Knoll, Wilson) serving to introduce the next story of personal and systemic violence against women.

News coverage describing the incident sets the scene of misogynoir, as the documentary unfolds the story, its reverberations in the community, and how the OVAS responded to this personal story in a way that connected people in solidarity. Interspersing the news coverage with testimony from the OVAS, this instance of violence, especially when paired with Evie's story previously, exemplifies how systemic cisheteropatriarchy—which makes the heteronormative subject the goal of liberal and radical practices (Ferguson 10)—is at once intimate and systemic. During a Luna Ride, news of the young woman's death reaches the community, and one family's story of pain becomes a communal burden, which everyone around them attempts to alleviate. "Her family ... didn't have enough resources for her freaking funeral, ... wasn't even allowed the time to mourn her death because they had to... have fundraisers right in front of their house,

selling tacos, you know what I'm saying? Like, ... the whole community came out, but I'm saying, how did we fail this young girl?" (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 13:13-13:35). Instead of dismissing the particular instance of misogynist violence as a story between Cindi and her murderer, the OVAS' documentary explores how systemic violence against women is compounded by the economic and material effects of racial capitalism, where the most marginalized communities have the least resources for dealing with the physical and psychological trauma of oppression. Xela, rapping over news footage of Bree'Anna, another young woman found killed in Los Angeles, reinforces the violence against women in the community as one of their driving forces. Transitioning away from the individual stories of communal pain, the documentary follows the OVAS on a Luna Ride, chanting "WHOSE STREETS? OUR STREETS. WHOSE STREETS? OUR STREETS!" and resting finally on the image of a poster asking for donations for Bree'Anna.

Suddenly, in the next scene, women squeeze into a kitchen, filling their plates with chiles rellenos and rice. After eating, Andi Xoch, her sister, and her mother, Maria Olvera, gather on the living room couch to pour over family photo albums. As compared with Evie's dialogue with her mother, the focus on Andi's home life is relatively short, but it does exhibit a shared pattern of silence and repression—of emotions, behavior, and desires—as an attempt for greater survival. Maria Olvera, Andi's mother, for example, explains how she "was always cautious [her] girls" because she unfortunately witnessed "the abuse of other children." Maria Olvera feared such abuse recurring against her daughters, and thus she "never liked them to leave the house by themselves" (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 15:58-16:16). Though she begins by describing her frustration at not 'fitting in' an 'American' life of sleepovers at friends' houses, Andi soon reaches the true, painful kernel of her disappointment: "I guess we don't really have

that relationship where we can be like ... be so, like in tune with our emotions with each other” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 16:30-7). Because her mother’s fear has affected the way she has tried to protect Andi by limiting her autonomy of a person—ironically what Maria Olvera is presumably trying to avoid—Andi cannot comfortably grow into herself as a person. Instead, it is a process of negotiation, failure to connect, and deep familial bonds. Frustrated after the conversation, Andi Xoch retreats to the roof of the apartment building, overlooking all of Los Angeles, to meditate on the meaning of her work the Ovarian Psycos to allow for different stories to pass onto new generations.

THUG LIFE. The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everyone. Rapper Tupac Shakur’s phrase that he popularized alongside his code for protecting and building up underserved communities, also serves as a lens for understanding OPC’s healing-centered approach to serving their community. Beyond working through their own trauma, and acknowledging the ways that their forebears have unwittingly passed on colonial trauma, the juxtapositions of individual stories within the documentary highlights how trauma often becomes a never-ending cycle. The OVAS, themselves must be dialectic in their approach and commit to a constant reevaluation of their actions, and whether they are being informed by personal trauma instead of community wellbeing. As such, before exploring the trauma Xela experienced as a young girl, the documentary first follows how she handles the responsibility and power of being the organization’s founder, especially as OPC grows and elects different levels of leadership. A woman with an idea, strong passion, and ‘huge ovaries,’ Xela can easily take charge of a situation. At a OPC organizing meeting to discuss recruiting more people, members in positions of leadership question whether Xela needs to manage every aspect of running the organization. In response to Xela’s suggestion that she and the Left and Right [Ovary] (co-leadership of the

organization) be the only ones to attend initial meetings with new recruits, Claudia reminds Xela that it “would be really cool for [her] to trust that [she], Taryn, and maybe Alex could handle that.” As LRO (Left And Right Ovary), Claudia and Taryn feel that they, along with Alex, the Human Resources representative, should be able to enact their titles and therefore help grow the organization away from Xela’s micromanaging. Though the documentary resolves the tension by ending the scene on Xela’s sarcastic suggestion that any meeting is fine, as long as she is there, there lingers a sense that tension is inevitable in communal organizing around and working through of trauma. The stories we tell shape the world around us, and in our youth, the stories others tell shape our understanding. Underserved communities do not have access to the resources necessary to deal with the effects of trauma—like Cindi’s family, their survival dictates that they must always continue working, in spite of any difficulty, even the death of their daughter. By addressing the potential difficulties from living in post-colonized homes, such as Xela’s desire to control situations around her, the documentary’s narrative arc, which often focuses on Xela, foregrounds accountability as the starting ground for any communal working through of systemic and generation trauma.

Only about twenty minutes into the film, the documentary begins uncovering the difficult kernel at the heart of the need for a group like the Ovarian Psychos, while also revealing Xela’s personal tensions with her role within the group. The last personal story of intimate violence unfolds Xela’s childhood trauma, reinforcing once more how part of the OVAS’ community work is, in fact, working through their own trauma. The documentary’s use of “low-angle close-ups and short-focus shots incite an effect of authenticity and uncensored biography” (Hosek 120). In a scene of the film shot to resemble a reality TV show—showing emotional breakdowns in real time, often resulting in Xela asking the cameras to stop rolling—Xela returns to her

childhood home where she experienced sexual trauma and the added violence of being shamed for her own existence. These difficult scenes underscore the contradictions that exist within the gaps between personal narratives. For the member of the Ovarian Psychos, others' stories of trauma are both familiar and unrecognizable, and thus telling a collective story brings contradictions and conflict.

Harnessing the quintessential Mexican Macho stereotype (big bigote, can of Tecate in hand, manning the Asada on the grill), Xela's brother, Marcello, explains that "whatever beatdowns my mom didn't get, uh, were transferred on, so all right, to Xela now...all your frustrations and all can be taken out. You know what I mean, which was not cool at all, but that's a day in the life" (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 22:51-53:10). Though Marcello clearly doesn't agree with the way their father singled out and hurt Xela, he also cannot grasp the severity of the situation, simply describing it as "not cool." In addition to the physical and sexual violence Xela endured, the shame of being a woman was reason enough to lock her in a windowless room, never allowing her to leave, while her brothers were free to play in the house's courtyard, out on the street, or even at neighbor's houses. Marcello calls that room Xela's cell, where she was on 24/7 lockdown (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 23:25-30). Away from the grill and the bright sun, the interior of the house is sterile and dark. Images of gold-rimmed glasses popular in the 80s and a gilded plaque of the Ten Commandments serve as recognizable chronotopes of Mexican homes; this childhood home is like so many of the childhood homes in East Los. Though Xela's story is the only one that explores such extreme restriction of space, the "gendered restrictions of space influence all of the Psychos" (Hosek 121). Describing her windowless room as "solitary confinement," Xela doesn't get very far in

describing the trauma she endured in the room, ending that portion of the interview suddenly and quickly, heading outside to smoke a cigarette.

While Marcello can admit the terrible nature of Xela's confinement, he doesn't actively analyze the ways that he benefitted from Xela's abuse, even if he never participated in it. Maria Luisa, Xela and Marcello's mother, explains that she "always thought that raising boys is more easy than to raise a girl" (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 24:48-55). Despite Xela's cries for help, Maria Luisa cannot admit her mistakes, and instead laments the difficulty of passing on the knowledge necessary to protect yourself and others around you, potentially because, Maria Luisa, herself, was never taught those lessons. Xela explains, in a close up shot, that she tried to tell her mother what was going on, but Maria Luisa never believed her. Biting the back of her hand to stave the tears, Xela ends the testimonial session once again. Overlaid on top of images of the Virgin Mary, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and El Niño Dios, Maria Luisa explains that she "tried to do [her] best, the way [she] thought it was the best" (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 25:50-5). On the one hand, Maria Luisa refuses to take responsibility for her role in continuing generational processes of trauma and violence. However, the documentary fails to address how Xela's father's actions, as the root of their family's problem, cause the subsequent reverberations of pain. Connecting back to OPC members' critiques of Xela, Maria Luisa's story again underscores how trauma does not provide a blank slate for accountability; on the contrary, these two iterations of women dealing with trauma highlight how healing must be a communal act, always taking into account how one's actions reverberate onto others' lives. It should come as no surprise that Xela, who spent her childhood locked in a room and denied all freedom, yearns to control the reality around her. Instead of lingering on those two figures for very long, the

documentary instead moves to scenes of Yoli, Xela's daughter, playing with her dog, presumably in the midst of writing a different story.

While the degree of physical trauma and misogynoir varies throughout the individual narratives of violence against women, shared themes of repression, shame, and control connect the different stories of young women growing up in South East Los Angeles. Evie's mother, Maria Isabel, wants so much for her daughter to enjoy a life that she did not experience, that she would rather prioritize professionalization over self-actualization. Similarly, Andi Koch is inspired to search for connection amongst other women because she feels that her mother's desire to protect her by isolation has stifled their relationship's capacity to deal with raw emotions, and thus, most feelings are ultimately repressed. Cindi Santana and Bree'Anna Jovette Guzman, both victims of militarized masculinity, connect the OVAS' personal stories to the history of violence in their community that has inspired their communal work. Lastly, Xela's personal testimony links all of the previous stories together, underscoring how one must undertake a commitment to end the cycle of trauma, by recognizing its effects on our actions and refusing to let trauma dictate the way we interact with others. In other words, Xela reminds us that you have to hold yourself accountable before and as you organize, writing reality around into a new story to be read later. These close readings of the personal stories of trauma, together, show how the form of the documentary exemplifies the approach the OVAS take to their work: they are telling their own story, with its holes and imperfections, and simultaneously, rewriting that story by bookending it—literally re-writing the beginnings and ends of the stories. Refusing to let the trauma become the sole determinant of their lives, as it has been for their mothers and their childhoods, the OVAS change the arc of the narrative; instead of trauma as the climax, their turning point is rejecting a culture of fear and shame by banding together to support each other.

I Saw Your Light and It was Shining

While the documentary anchors the OVAS' work in difficult discussions of generational trauma, OPC members also ground their stories in the long legacy of women of color feminism, in order to inform their actions with the resistance knowledge already existent in the community and communal history. The OVAS serve as an example of worldbuilding because they overlay their personal stories onto the larger narrative of history, in order to put new collaborative realities into being. In other words, by writing their personal traumas in conjunction with the trauma of colonization and systemic racism, the OVAS anchor the stories to each other, allowing OPC members to write the world around them in their own vision. "We could be riding fucking broomsticks," Xela, the founder of the OVAS says, "this is just a vehicle to connect. When women are dying on the daily, if you don't see that shit, then step son, this shit ain't for you then." OPC calls out toxic masculinity for what it is and realize that the stories told about them will frame them as crazy, bitches, unreasonable. Instead, they tell their own stories. The stories we tell shape the reality around us.

In keeping with the narrative strategy of juxtaposition, overriding stories of "big balls" with testimony about "big ovaries," Xela's return to the room of her childhood trauma is framed by the initiation of Evie into the OVAS, and the recitation of the second iteration of their credo—antidote to and partially engendered as a response to Xela's personal trauma. Interrupting the personal stories of pain, violence, and trauma with footage of OPC reclaiming space for themselves, this scene of initiation also underscores how the Ovarian Psychos see themselves as indebted to previous generations of organizers and thinkers. Their new credo doesn't highlight their rebellious heart, instead it proposes community healing as dissent. "We are an all women of

color bicycling brigade, cycling for the purpose of healing our communities physically, emotionally, and spiritually, by addressing pertinent issues” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 21:13-30). In this new iteration, the OVAS highlight the importance of healing, not only themselves, but their community as well. Taking their two credos into comparative consideration, they reveal the two sides of righteous anger: both the frustration at injustices and the determination to attempt to right the situation.

No one better exemplifies both the need for righteous anger and for decolonizing of history than Assata Shakur, a member of the Black Panther Party, exiled as a political prisoner in Cuba since 1979. Her autobiography has long an important text for women of color who seek to organize in their communities. Beginning in media res, on the turnpike where she is alleged to have shot an officer, Assata describes her abusive imprisonment and her revolutionary ideals of liberation. Shifting to and fro between poetry, love notes, historical prose, and suspense narrative, Assata’s autobiography exemplifies Sandoval’s differential consciousness, moving from form to form. Against the wishes of her lawyer (who was also her aunt), Assata recorded a long explanation, titled “To My People,” about the charges of which she was accused, and it was later disseminated on many radio broadcasts. This statement articulates Assata’s political motivations and priorities, which mirrors OPC’s organizing around issues of gender, sexuality, intimate violence, capitalist exploitation, and racial violence.

Asserting her identity, Assata connects her triple transgressions in being Black, a woman, and an anti-capitalist revolutionary:

I am a Black revolutionary woman, and because of this i have been charged with and accused of every alleged crime in which a woman was believed to have participated. The alleged crimes in which only men were supposedly involved, i have been accused of planning. ... They have offered over fifty thousand dollars in rewards for my capture and they have issued orders to shoot on sight and shoot to kill. (50)

Accused of causing the death of a police officer, thus engaging in ‘dangerous’ activities not becoming of a woman, Assata becomes the epitome (both literal and ideological) of the threat perceived by law enforcement about the Black Liberation Army. In fact, Assata resents being compared to Ma Barker (50), the mother of several American criminals, and popularly thought of as the mastermind behind the Barker-Karpis gang of the 1920s and 30s; many years later, accounts suggest that Ma Barker simply was supportive of her sons, but did not engage in any gang activity. For transgressing racial *and* gender roles together, Assata becomes the object of law enforcement’s retaliation and violence.

Assata’s note also rectifies the narrative that the Black Liberation Army are criminals, refusing to abide by the fictive borders that assumes State sovereignty over all, and attributing once and for all, the violence and thievery of empire.

They call us thieves and bandits. They say we steal. But it was not we who stole millions of Black people from the continent of Africa. They call us thieves, but we did not rob and murder millions of Indians by ripping off their homeland, then call ourselves pioneers. They call us bandits, but it is not we who are robbing Africa, Asia, and Latin America of their natural resources and freedom while the people who live there are sick and starving. The rulers of this country and their flunkies have committed some of the most brutal, vicious crimes in history. They are the bandits. They are the murderers. And they should be treated as such. These maniacs are not fit to judge me, Clark, or any other Black person on trial in amerika. Black people should, and, inevitably, must determine our destinies. (Shakur 51)

Connecting histories of colonialism to contemporary examples of neocolonial relationships between so-called global north and the global south, Assata draws a transnational coalition operating both in resistance of their localized constraints, and towards an understanding that their particular, local constraints were part of a network of racializations and orientalisms. In referring to a global collective politics that articulates the vast effects of capitalism, yet still critiquing the “rulers of *this* country,” cannot provide a fair trial, Assata employs an early version of what Ellie

D. Hernández describes as postnationalism—an adjustment phase between the ethnic nationalism politically useful in the 1960s and transnational ideologies that move beyond borders (12).

Lastly, Assata connects the concepts of anger with the charges of mental illness or hysteria that have been historically used to dismiss women. Firstly, Assata's stance as a *revolutionary*, in itself suggests a taking up of arms against an unjust ruler. "I have declared war on the rich who prosper on our poverty, the politicians who lie to us with smiling faces, and all the mindless, heartless robots who protect them and their property" (Shakur 51). Assata's declaration of war also reflects the OVAS' anger and frustration against not only the capitalist state, but towards vendidxs (*sellouts*) who don't show up for their community or who care more about property than about community. Beyond that, in declaring 'the rulers of this country' "maniacs ...not fit to judge ... any other Black person on trial in amerika," Assata makes a case for a new postnational framework, while also flipping the meaning of 'maniac.' Instead of someone experiencing mania or hysteria—mental conditions associated with the sensitivity and unreasonableness of women—Shakur defines maniac as synonymous with the colonial murderer, thief, bandit, weaponizing the very term used to silence, stifle, and dismiss women.

In a poem titled "Rhinoceros Woman," written as an ode to a fellow prisoner, Shakur further develops her exploration of mental illness and how it has been used selectively, to further dismiss, marginalize, and control certain bodies. Shakur pairs this exploration of the use of mental illness as a tool for controlling bodies and behavior with a declaration of love and acceptance, reflecting OPC's later theoretical frameworks, meeting guidelines, and organizing actions. "Rhinoceros woman.../ They say you're crazy/ cause you not crazy enough/ to kneel when told to kneel" (Shakur 62). Here, Shakur again defines insanity as the refusal to do what one is told, especially if it represents encroaching on one's own power. This refusal to give up

one's power presumably also results in or is a result of some kind of trauma, the ode continues: "Hey, big woman— / with scars on the head / and scars on the heart / that never seem to heal— / I saw your light / And it was shining." In the second stanza, the speaker recognizes the trauma in both the head and the heart of the Rhinoceros Woman, acknowledging the violence borne out both out of epistemological and spiritual genocide, yet, ultimately, it is the woman's shining light that catches the speaker's attention. This shared recognition of each other's light, shining despite and in spite of so much, extends a shared experience of oppression that threatens to put them out.

In one last re-definition of (in)sanity, Shakur again throws it back against heteropatriarchy, making it a symbol of the result of centuries of colonialism. However, where past racial discourses have pathologized people of color due to the racial oppression they experience, here Shakur marks it as a colonizer's pathology. "They hate you momma / cause you expose their madness. / And their cruelty. / They can see in your eyes / a thousand nightmares / that they have made come true" (Shakur 62). Where madness previously signaled a woman's refusal to kneel when told, and thus conform to gender roles, here it again triggers a dismissal of the Rhinoceros Woman but because she represents the past of their cruelty, a haunting body who has survived beyond anyone's expectations. "Rhinoceros Woman— / The world is blind / and slight of mind / and cannot see / How beautiful you are. / I saw your light. / And it was shining." Where the poem begins with scars, Shakur ends it again with an affirmation of the light she recognizes in other oppressed peoples who resist, especially when their very existence is resistance.

Reading her broadcasted explanation in conjunction with the love poem she wrote in prison, Shakur's righteous anger is matched only by her desire to connect with other oppressed people. Shakur ends "To My People," with what is now known as 'Assata's Prayer,' a short

affirmation of anticapitalist political priorities and commitment to each other. As Assata reminds her readers, “every revolution in history has been accomplished by actions, although words are necessary” (52). As such, the OVAS highlight the initiation of new members with the reciting of Assata’s Prayer. For the OVAS, the colonial and cis-hetero-patriarchy that oppressed previous generations is directly related to the sexual violence, gentrification, displacement, and discrimination of their communities now. Reciting Assata’s Prayer together directly opposes the alienation of displacement and violence, by foregrounding collective love and duty to each other:

We have a duty to fight.

We have a duty to win.

We must love and protect each other.

We have nothing to lose but our chains.

At the end of the prayer, Claudia excitedly rejoices in excitement: “Again! Again!” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 21:59). As part of Evie’s initiation ceremony, reciting both the OPC credo and Assata’s Prayer creates a dialogue between different generations of organizers. As part of the documentary, formally, the credo and Assata’s Prayer serve as counternarratives to the imminent retelling of Xela’s childhood trauma, as discussed earlier. Reciting their credo and the prayer are both performative, yet tangible, acts that highlight a simultaneous need for committed healing, righteous anger, and accountability to each other.

Countering the emotional drama of Xela’s story, the documentary instead follows Andi Xoch on a tour of Los Angeles murals, in order to transition into a discuss of Los Angeles during the 1960s and ‘70s, an important hub during the Chicano Power movement and the epicenter for the Chicano Moratorium. In a clip from Moctesuma Esparza’s 1973 Emmy-winning film, “Cinco Vidas,” which explored the Chicano movement through individual portraits, a Chicana explains

how anger is central to her sense of justice: “My independence as a woman and as a Chicana is very important to me. It’s this anger that I feel, the frustration that I feel, the hostility that I feel, that I...cannot walk away from a situation that I feel is unjust, because I feel it’s my business” (Sokolowski & Trumbull-LaValle 30:13-33). In its splicing historical films into an exploration of the OVAS organizing, the documentary formally links their multiple forms of righteous rebellion into a larger narrative of resistance over the years. Beyond that, this genealogy of anger reveals how the OVAS’ rebellious heart and in-your-face attitude is more than a desire to be contrarian--quite the opposite, the OVAS’ work opens new possibilities for reality, as they acknowledge and name histories of oppression in order to rewrite their future trajectory.

Already ostracized from feminist circles for bringing up race, “Chicana feminists, as active participants in the Chicano movement, experienced the immediate constraints of male domination in their daily lives” and thus, “Chicana feminists challenged the portrait of the so-called “Ideal Chicana” drawn by Chicano cultural nationalists” (García 5). Based on both the OVAS’ lived experience and historical accounts of movements from the 60s and 70s, women who refuse gender norms are psycho, aberrant, scary. Advocating for themselves in unjust situations makes them ‘angry bitches’ or separatists. In response, Xela connects cisheteropatriarchal oppression with colonial exploitation, flipping the script on what constitutes an antisocial psychopath. “A lot of our history isn’t even in the history books. We haven’t addressed the rape and the slaughter of our people and the burning of our books, so we’re people without roots. This is what we should get called psychotic for” (Sokolowski and Trumbull-LaValle 32:20-34). By addressing the rape and slaughter of SELA femicides, descendants of colonial patriarchal oppression, OPC participates in the retrofitting of memory, or what Maylei Blackwell describes as the “form of countermemory that uses fragments of older histories that

have been disjunctured by colonial practices of organizing historical knowledge or by masculinist renderings ...in order to create space for women in historical traditions that erase them” (2). Thus, much like Assata’s use of ‘maniac’ and ‘madness,’ the OVAS define ‘psyco’ as the opposite of the individualism of colonialism and capitalism, as process of *convivencia*—living with each other—that, as seen in the historical footage from the Chicano movement, uses a sense of righteous anger to fuel each other’s light for collective movement building. Skirting expectations and demands for civility, while simultaneously retrofitting history, the OVAS build the world they want to live in. In “To My People,” Assata Shakur notes how “every revolution in history has been accomplished by actions, although words are necessary” (52). The stories we tell shape the world around us.

Black Mass: the Evolution of CMASS

Moving on to the extracinematic reality that interacts with OPC social media presence, next I read mass bike ride flyers as cultural products that, in conjunction with the documentary, shows the evolution of the OVAS’ narrative and cultural practice, and also allows for the literary and linguistic analysis of OPC’s cultural dialect. Focusing on 2016 and 2017, I read the progression of the design of OPC’s summer mass bike ride flyer, specifically mapping how OPC’s image changed in response to feedback they received. If the stories we tell shape the reality around us, analyzing the language and narratives of OPC flyers, I will explore how the Ovarian Psychos develop a collaborative narrative strategy in order to remake the world around them in their own inclusive vision.



Figure 2: Flyer for OPC's 2016 mass bike ride, "Clitoral Mass LA."

Every summer, OPC hosts a mass bike ride which, in its centering of women and non-binary people, stands as a counter event to the yearly Critical Mass bike ride, where males, especially white males, are the majority (Carroll). OPC first named their alternative mass bike rides "Clitoral Mass," cleverly riffing on the name of the mainstream cycling event. Further, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, OPC subverts the virgin/whore dichotomy in religious



Figure 3: La Virgen de Guadalupe.

iconography by reappropriating it for their own uses. The flyer from 2016's Clitoral Mass (Fig. 2), features a masked woman riding a bicycle, breaking out of la Virgen de Guadalupe's iconic scalloped aura background (Fig. 3), which, in this case, also happens to resemble a vagina.

Wearing tight jeans and a tight tank top, the figure in the flyer is a far cry from Guadalupe's long robe, multiple layers of clothing, and elaborate veil. Instead of demurely covering her head, the bike-rider instead wears a bandana, alluding again to OPC anti-establishment organizing and, in conjunction with the aesthetic of the stylistic lettering of 'Ovarian Psychos,' the inspiration they

get from their hood, as described earlier in the chapter. This black-and-white flyer provides the mass bike ride information in English, with little context. The two-hour difference between the 9am Meet-Up time and the 11am Ride Out time suggests a dialogue will take place before the communal movement through the city.

The small amount of contextual information is dedicated to declaring the ride “for womxn: cis, trans, queer, two spirited and gender non conforming people,” elaborating on the event’s name “Clitoral Mass LA.” While OPC bike rides are always open to queer, trans, and non-binary folks, they have received a lot of critique for their trans- and nonbinary-exclusionary focus on genitalia because it reduces gender identity to the ownership of particular body parts. In a Q&A after the documentary’s New York premiere (as published in the online media brand popular with Latino millennials Remezcla.com), Xela and Andi Xoch discuss the group’s approach to the feedback from the trans community. After acknowledging the privilege she has as a cis-woman thus exacerbating OPC’s problematic focus on the ovaries, Xela calls for a new, collaborative approach to feminism that undoes patriarchal shame on certain bodies, without reducing gender to genitalia.

[W]e’re also in the process of trying to reconcile what does it mean understanding that we come from a privilege of having ovaries meanwhile also coming from super-colonized Mexican households [where] we didn’t even know the name of our organs until we went into high school. ... So how do we reconcile the fact that these are girls coming with these same exact attitudes of like, shaming this idea that we’re women, that we bleed. Although I understand we come from a privileged place with respect to our trans sisters, there still has to come a point where we can come to understand our life experiences. And we fucking love the fact that our trans sisters are also saying “Fuck the script! We will live our lives the way we want to!” So how can we work together for the same reality for the rest of our children coming up? I don’t know. We haven’t figured it out but understand that that conversation exists. (Betancourt)

Without pretending to answer a difficult question for the trans community, Xela identifies one particular point of entry for shared community organizing: the script. For Xela, being in OPC is



Figure 4 .OPC's 2017 Black Mass Flyer.

about rejecting the role handed to you, forging your own way of life by writing yourself into history. With this shared narrative strategy in common, the focus isn't on particular body parts, but how larger historical, colonial narratives use shame and violence to preclude difference, limiting the ideal subject to the white cis-male.

Momentarily sidestepping the difficult conversation about greater transinclusivity, Andi Xoch shares that they've considered changing their name, in itself, is a long process of negotiation. When this interview was published on Remezcla.com in June, all preparations for

Clitoral Mass in August were already set, so the flyer does not reflect the larger conversation about their name. Providing context for Andi's quick sound bites, Xela explains the relational approach they take to collaborative "script writing." Connecting the intersections of the limitations of OPC's inclusivity, including mental health stigma and ableism, Xela again highlights the importance of communal work: "the questions should not stop but it's about how we can communally address them. It's not about stopping the work but about propelling the work forward" (Betancourt). Reading this June 2016 interview in conjunction with the documentary reveals a larger process of dialectical negotiation behind the scenes during organizing meetings.

In contrast to the 2016 flyer, just one year later, the flyer for the 2017 mass bike ride (Fig. 4) tells a completely different story. This time, we only see a head, mostly covered by a Zapatista-styled balaclava, which fades into the simple, black background. Though the flyer still does not include much context for the ride, one notable difference is a new name: instead of Clitoral Mass, Black Mass, a reference of course to the quintessential parody of Roman Catholic church ceremonies. Gone, also, is the vagina and any reference to ovaries. Still present, the Carve-Your-Name-in-Something Font signals OPC's bad-ass attitude, cinched by the inverted cross on the figure's forehead, perhaps drawn in the same black eyeliner that adorns the eyes.

While the 2016 poster did not reflect OPC's ongoing process of accountability, the 2017 poster advertises a more transinclusive event. By removing the mention of genitalia, and omitting the traditional "female sign," the bike ride no longer centers these essentializing gender tropes. Instead, the poster's cultural symbolism invites viewers—those in the know—to read between the lines. An inverted cross serves both to subvert Catholic restriction on gender and sexuality, and also rework the traditional female sign into one that includes nonbinary and transpeople. However, it should be noted that OPC's most transinclusive poster also advertises a

ride “for all genders,” presumably also responding to the online critique (read: harassment) that lamented that Luna Rides excluded cis-men. While the genital symbolism is gone, and the flyer still centers femme identity, it appears a less-complicated task to open the ride to all genders than to figure out how to limit what identities are present¹⁴. Overall, the differences in how the 2017 poster approaches gender as opposed to 2016’s flyer suggest that this is a conversation that continues to evolve. In fact, 2017 was the last summer mass ride that the OVAS’ have planned. Taking the place of Clitoral Mass or Black Mass, the “Solidarity NOT Charity” Annual Bike Ride takes place in December or January and distributes care packages to shelters and people living on the streets of Los Angeles. Thus, without necessarily labeling with a term like ‘feminist,’ OPC has shifted the conversation about gender from essentializing tropes, instead refocusing on the material effects of a neo-colonial capitalist society, joining together to help each other in solidarity against capitalism.

Wary organizers, the OVAS are aware of the US labor movement’s complicated history of racism and racial discrimination, and as such, the little contextual information the 2017 Black Mass flyer provides reflects their relational approach to race and class. Where previous posters did not welcome men, the only people not welcome to the 2017 ride are the gentrifiers. However, the OVAS’ 2017 poster pairs its concern with material conditions with one other guideline: “Brave Space for POC,” signaling that the OVAS aim for their work to exist at the intersection of race and class. In opposition to the hotly contested concept of ‘safe spaces’ in higher education settings, the term ‘brave space’ was first described in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators* by Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens in 2013,¹⁵

¹⁴ Future work will collaborate with the OVAs to further develop their story, particularly attentive to how OPC member perceive this shift, and how Black Mass 2017 was different from Clitoral Mass 2016.

¹⁵ An aside about current trends in institutional discord: Ali’s whitepaper published in the NASPA Policy and Practice Series, “Safe Spaces and Brave Spaces: Historical Context and Recommendations for

according to National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) policy analyst, Diana Ali. Though ‘safe space’ and similar concepts also have a long history within movement building, particularly areas where members of the queer community felt safe to disclose their identities, despite their belonging to a criminal class outside of these zones (Hanhardt 5). While, on the one hand, OPC’s decision to use the phrase ‘brave space for POC,’ signals that their community organizing approaches economic, gender, and racial oppression as intertwined and self-compounding relationships, their use of ‘brave’ instead of ‘safe’ space is open for interpretation. It may highlight that an effect of expanding of the ride to include any all genders (namely cis-men) could detract from OPC’s mission to center women and nonbinary people of color. I read it, however, as an indication to all participants that the ride will be a space that centers POC voices, allowing them to be brave in their opposition to disrespect on the ride, because they know they have back up. While this question of interpretation cannot be answered by the 2017 poster alone, when the Black Mass Flyer is read in conjunction with previous iterations, we can start to read between the lines that the OVAS strategically lay out.

While the 2017 Black Mass poster itself doesn’t provide much context about what a brave space for POC entails, nor does it list separate meet-up and ride-out times, as its 2016 counterpart, I argue that this is a method of obscuring some of the details for the ride, so that the organizers remain in control of the ride, instead of being overrun by the mass of riders. Keeping in mind how important dialogue is to OPC and especially considering that cis-men would attend this ride and require an explanation of social expectations, I suggest that only providing the meet-up time obscures the ride plan for viewers of the poster, preventing them from simply

Student Affairs Professionals,” finds that, within the constructed settings of a classroom, safe spaces and brave spaces share the same components. For the purposes of Ali’s paper, “and to create a clear distinction between definitions—a classroom safe space will be referred to hereafter as a brave space” (4). Thus, the debate in higher education between the terms is a moot point.

arriving at ride-out in order to skip the grounding conversation. Again, OPC uses strategic storytelling to achieve their goals—here, only those familiar with the OVAS’ mission will understand that a dialogue, presumably about ride guidelines to center POC riders, in addition to gentrification and femicide, will take place before the ride.

Lastly, the mask the figure wears in the 2017 Black Mass poster resembles the masks worn by members of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), a coalition of socialist organizers in Mexico. This cultural symbol serves to summarize their organizing approach: OPC is anti-capitalist and trans-inclusive feminist, recognizing how these identities are further impacted by racism or anti-indigenous oppression. Indeed, OPC has been working with similar groups in Mexico, and have organized simultaneous mass bike rides on both sides of the border. Thus, the 2017 Black Mass poster, as cultural product, allows us to read the history of the development of the narrative the OVAS create as what Ellie D. Hernández calls postnationalism, “a succinct way to categorize the dislocation of Chicanas/os, caught or suspended between the national order and an emerging transnationalism” (4) which “describes a refusal or inability to enter into global modernity” (11). Indeed, since their uprising in 1994, the “influence of the EZLN on Los Angeles social movements is both implicit [ideology] and explicit [strategy],” highlighting the “increasing disillusionment with traditional political institutions and electoral politics in general and the emergence of new forms of political action in response to this alienation.” Thus, the Zapatista concept of autonomy is reflected in OPC’s organizing, “focusing less on the state and more on the community as a site for social change” (Zugman Dellacioppa 123). The combination of the warning “No Gentrifiers!” and the Zapatista mask worn by the Black Mass figure both underscore that OPC intends to “develop” Los Angeles for their own collective needs, away from capitalistic pressures and institutions.

While articulating the struggles of living in Los Angeles, a region controlled by the United States and its capitalist motivations, the OVAS pay homage to Zapatista women organizers and theorize liberation beyond the reform of the State. The documentary also shows the OVAs using cultural symbols reminiscent of the Chicano nationalism of the 1960s, which sought to build solidarity through a shared mythological past rooted in Aztlán, the mythical birthplace of the Mexica people. Over time, this homogenizing mythos has been challenged because “Chicanas/os are global, migratory, displaced, and yet situated in an intellectual movement that possesses a cultural nationalist bent that for the most part provided a foundational logic about origins. In other words, the birth is at odds with the development that follows” (Hernandez 11). While the Aztec dancers at pre-ride ceremonies shown in the documentary, Xela’s discussion of a “postcolonized traditional Mexican home” as opposed to the “traditional Mexican, which is very much indigenous,” among other things, do reinforce the same Chicano nationalism that excluded radical womxn of color, these nationalistic tropes also show the contradictions of contested spaces and of movement organizing. Hernández explains how the “move toward postnationalism appears as a discontinuous or fragmented part of an earlier cultural nationalism, in both political and aesthetic offerings” (9), partially because the nationalistic approach “has been supplanted by feminist, performative, borderlands, and queer approaches” (10). While the Zapatista mask and specifically-Aztec tropes of indigeneity exist in contradiction to one another—one representing a coalitional politics beyond borders or nations, and the other bound to a mythical past—together, they represent OPC’s postnationalist disidentification with Chicana nationalism. Much like postnationalism is “an adjustment phase,” “neither direct resistance to global capitalism nor an unconscious drive within nationalist imperatives to maintain a tribal lineage best encapsulated as the mestizo, mixed-race Chicano”

(Hernandez 12), worldbuilding is not inherently liberatory. Indeed, the contradictions within OPC's story reinforce their point about the necessity of ongoing, collaborative dialogue. Grounding their personal and historical narratives in the need for adjustment, OPC's worldbuilding is a dialectical process of collective envisioning of a world beyond, where beyond keeps getting them farther and farther.

CAILE!

The 2017 Black Mass poster, with its strategic inclusion of information on a need-to-know basis, is complemented by a flyer distributed on the OVAS blog, available only to those interested enough to learn a little about OPC. Though, considering that OPC shares different forms of its posters on its Instagram account for different purposes (i.e. countdowns, or to advertise solidarity rides happening in other cities), it is difficult to generalize how much context any given viewer accesses. In this chapter, to simplify, I simply read the flyers themselves as cultural products, as displayed and contextualized in individual blog entries.

The supplemental CAILE! digital flyer (Fig. 5) contextualizes the main 2017 Black Mass Flyer, providing more explicit information about OPC values and the political symbolism of joining the ride. More importantly, it displays a specific kind of language mixing and cultural rhetoric, reflecting the lived experience of the communities that remain in the margins of two colonial languages, English and Spanish. Thus, the flyer does supplement the Black Mass poster, but by doing so mainly in Spanish, it only provides contextualization for those that also speak Spanish, not for monolingual cis-males that might now join the ride. Overall, as a cultural product, the CAILE! digital flyer situates OPC as they come across *la herida abierta* – as

Anzaldúa calls the open wound of the border – with its multiple colonial and cis-hetero-patriarchal norms, all competing to standardize each other.

Even the CAILE! Flyer is divided into two sections, one for basic event information, and one for deeper social contextualization of the ride’s purpose and political symbolism. “Caile!” loosely translates to “drop by!” and would usually refer to a party or kickback at someone’s house. Here, the OVAs use it as a way to ask people to drop by into the politically-motivated



Figure 5: The colorful CAILE! Flyer posted on the OVAS blog.

bike ride, signaling that while their actions against the state require difficult dialogues, it is also a fun and exciting event. Instead of focusing on Black Mass iconography, the Caile! flyer invites viewers to a “Raite en las calles,” *a ride in the streets*. Raite, the Spanishification of ‘ride,’ is a word with a long history in Los Angeles, a city ruled by car culture and where English and Spanish mix on nearly every block. Thus, their use of the word ‘raite’ similarly signals how the OVAS identify with a culture not discretely penned in by borders. Here, the OVAS again, reappropriate the word which is generally only used to mean ‘car-ride’ to focus on something that is physically, environmentally, and spiritually healthy: a collective bike ride.

Rounding out the top section of basic information, the only English on the flyer, somewhat translates ‘raite’ and provides the date. Interestingly, instead of mention of Black Mass, this poster takes another approach, but, much like the 2017 Black Mass poster, it does not mention the clitoris nor the ovaries. Rather than center any particular genitalia, this poster alludes to previous rides through the abbreviation “CMASS,” potentially also playfully reappropriating the abbreviation and hashtag that accompanies Critical Mass events, widely considered the more mainstream event (Carroll). The rest of that line – “womxn of color ride” – further hints at past iterations of “CMASS” that specifically centered womxn of color and provided a safe space for women and non-binary people. In fact, the Womxn Who Rock Collective defines womxn as “a socially-constructed, gender-fluid category that includes, but is not limited to femme-identified transgender and cis-gender women, and other formations as well.” Where the Black Mass poster, itself, only mentioned gender very generally, here ‘womxn’ reminds viewers of OPC feminist background, while also signaling their ongoing process towards transinclusivity.

Below the heavy line that cuts the flyer in two, the list of social issues on the bottom half of the flyer also “connects the dots” (as the OVAS like to say) to the ongoing social movements

taking place around Los Angeles, all listed in Spanish. “Unete contra: desalojo y desplazamiento; aumentos de renta; inmigracion y deportaciones; violencia policiaca. *Join up against: eviction and displacement; rent increases; immigration and deportations; police violence.*” Overall, the flyer represents both OPC’s linguistic fluidity with the words spoken on LA streets and their political priorities, which will both be reinforced during the ride.

For the OVAS, Spanish is for communicating, not over-correcting. The poster simultaneously shows a facility with Spanish while subverting the norms of the Real Academia de Español. Nary an accent is found on the flyer, and words are sometimes spelled phonetically, with a combination of English and Spanish phonemes, as in the last line: “no nos vamos ah dejar,” where the Spanish word ‘a’ is spelled phonetically in English (ah). Similar mixing of English and Spanish spellings, as in ‘desplacamiento,’ and anglicized words like ‘raite’ and ‘renta’ are, of course, subjects of particular disdain of language (and culture) purists. Thus, this mixing of language at the phonetic level, as opposed to Spanglish’s facile mixing of words and phrases, exemplifies how the OVAS write hopeful narratives reflecting the communities they serve in the language as it is spoken, without regard to arbitrary standardizations.

Secondly, this poster articulates (in Spanish) OPC’s political priorities and demonstrates their dedication to writing these hopeful visions collectively, with the communities around them. The tagline, “unete contra,” itself is a call to collective action of resistance. Beyond that, the issues represented on the poster also reflect the collective struggle for autonomy, reflecting the EZLN’s movement “away from pressuring the state to developing a cross-border network of grassroots organizations engaged in their own particular social struggles” (Zugman Dellacioppa 122). The flyer connects material issues of increasing rents and displacement with the structural and systemic violence of deportations and police abuse, implicitly alluding to the Zapatista desire

to organize beyond the state. Thus, the flyer—and the stories and histories within—also situates OPC in a non-chronological timeline, where today’s mass ride rewrites the now by reading the past and the future as subject to the terms of the present. Unete Contra. In this digital flyer, the OVAS call folks to connect against displacement, rent hikes, deportations, and police violence, while also creating the world around them in their own vision.

Eden en la yarda y en el jardín

As an extension of the East LA home, both public and private, la yarda serves as an important counterspace to the spatial limits imposed on Evie, Andi, and most especially, Xela, during their childhoods. James Rojas describes la Yarda, *front yards*, as personal expression, serving different purposes from event hall to salesfloor. “The front yards of the barrio reflect Mexican cultural values applied to the American suburban form” (136). Similarly, Margaret Crawford describes the fluidity of the extended outside (court)yard of most homes: “It is simultaneously an arena of sociability, a site of control, an outdoor work area, and a stage for symbolic elaboration.. . . Infinitely flexible and always in flux, the *yarda* can accommodate special events, from a garage sale to a *quinceañera*. It can become a lush jungle of plants or, paved over, a playground or car repair shop” (119-20).

In keeping with the expressive and performative freedom of la yarda, gardens pervade the second half of the documentary, suggesting that the difficult tilling earlier in the organizing season will soon become time to sow. Xela’s back yard and patio, shown throughout the film as Yoli’s playground, art studio, garden space, and stomping grounds, sets the scene for intimate moments between mother and daughter, eating greens together, straight out of the ground (Figs 6 and 7). Xela discusses her decision to leave the OVAS, if only for a while, motivated by the fear

that she could be robbing Yoli of her childhood by always being busy organizing, deciding instead to dedicate some time to her daughter, to stop the cycle of childhoods cut short.

Xela's moment with Yoli transitions into Evie and Maria Isabel at the local community garden. Although Maria Isabel could not understand her daughter's motivations, by the end of the documentary, Evie declares that her work with the OVAS deepened their relationship. The images of Evie and Maria Isabel in the community garden mirror the opening scenes of their dialogue, where they both are watering plants, tending to their apartment's front garden. While Maria Isabela had been motivated by fear which then precluded other collective potentialities, in el jardín, she can share Evie's dedication to an ideal, sharing a persimmon with her daughter. Maria Isabel's willingness to join Evie *outside of the home* and experience the community garden suggests that Maria Isabel is working through her trauma of fear. Consequently, Evie has been able to continue her commitments to the OVAS, deepen her relationship with her mother, and even find a new job, three things that, at the beginning of the documentary, all seemed mutually exclusive. The documentary aptly ends with Yoli's twelfth birthday held, of course, in Xela's backyard. As the film closes, Yoli blows out birthday candles... which promptly relight.



Figure 6: Xela and her daughter, Yoli, in the garden near the end of the film.



Figure 7: Evie and her mother, Maria Isabel, in the community garden.

Xister, are you psycho?

Cultural products can be a point of departure for practice. Roderick Ferguson reminds us that, “as it fosters both identifications and antagonisms, culture becomes a site of material struggle” (3). So as the OVAS continue to evolve their narrative, they serve the marginalized communities of LA, deploying their differential consciousness with book circles, skillshare workshops, healing spaces for themselves, supplies rallies for the houseless, and, of course, bike rides. Similarly, I begin this work here with the decolonization of the cannon, reading words written in everyday lives as theory. Beyond that, both the documentary and the flyers analyzed in this chapter, together, track the recursive process of collective narration, showing how OPC grounds their organizing in historical narratives, in order to retrofit both their personal and collective narratives. Working beyond borders, and organizing beyond state institutions, OPC recognizes the need to fight discriminatory racial institutions, but do so using their Zapatista ideals, focusing on coalitional autonomy, instead of reforming the state. Lastly, by recognizing that their personal trauma drives and can detract from their work, OPC also foregrounds the importance of working through generational trauma as an important form of collective worldbuilding and survival.

My next steps will be to use this material as an entry point for action, or theory in the flesh as Cherrie Moraga would say. Building off of Michelle Habell-Pallán who reads tweet exchanges between Girl in a Coma, a punk-rock band, and their fans, the next iteration of this project will collaborate directly with the OVAS in order to read their social media presence and create a manual of the advantages and pitfalls of using social media in order to organize. As I develop this project, I plan to collaborate with the OVAS themselves, as well as other organizations doing “situated development for members of the community,” in order to engage

with them in the rewriting of colonial histories and crowdsourcing a narrative that can serve to follow up on Assata's handbook for organizing for the social media generation. This future project will also attend more carefully to the role of social media, specifically, in OPC's organizing and in the documentary.

Much like *The Rag Doll Plagues* and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* in their multiplicitous forms, and Guadalupe Rosales' collective memory, the Ovarian Psycos continuously recommit themselves to serving their community, even when they are just telling stories together. The OVAS reappropriate the alienation represented by the 'hood' aesthetic into their own gang signs, stances, and separatist taglines, getting one over on the militarized masculinity that seeks to limit their spatial comfort, refusing the common trope that big balls are good for anything. In intertwining their stories of personal trauma with the larger history of colonial and cisheteropatriarchal violence, OPC underscores the importance of recognizing the effects of generational trauma on the individual self and, more importantly, seeking collective healing. By facing their earlier and lifelong traumas, the OVAS are able to take their role as narrators of a collective history, especially given how capitalism, cisheterosexism, and racialization aims to disrupt networks for collective and communal organization. Beyond writing their own story, OPC weaves their collective worldbuilding narrations into the large history of women of color feminist theory, drawing heavily from Assata Shakur's autobiography and casting themselves as the new iteration of the nationalistic Chicano movement of the 1960s. As such, I read their multi-layered work of worldbuilding as the differential consciousness that Chela Sandoval says is always in process, moving between different modes of oppositional consciousness, and as an iteration of Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *la facultad*. Lastly, reading their mass bike ride flyers as cultural products allows me to situate the images within a social context, revealing how the

OVAS' use of language and narrative practices reveal their groundedness within the communities of color around them.

OPC is for the knucklehead, the punk rocker, the chola, the psycho. In a world where colonization, racism, and cisheterosexism go unquestioned, the OVA's dedication to convivencia and collective action, storytelling, and creating the world in their vision, is pretty psycho.

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Epilogue:

¿Y qué?

*All that you touch
You Change.
All that you Change
Changes you.
The only lasting truth
Is Change.
God Is Change.*

From *Earthseed: the Books of the Living*
in *Parable of the Sower*
by Octavia Butler

*Quisieron enterrarnos,
pero se les olvidó que somos semillas.*
They tried to bury us.
They didn't know we were seeds.

Neighborhoods and communities in Los Angeles and across the United States are presently changing, moment by moment, as they did in the 1990s. The massive growth of cities pushes working class communities farther and farther from the city center. The technologies that facilitate our communication across borders begin to threaten our sense of normalcy, leaks and hacks commonplace. Global warming will remap our geography and the three steps leading up to my house may no longer stem the floodwaters as climate patterns, like el Niño, intensify.

If you're going to wander around Los Angeles, you'll need some maps. But, now, the ones in my memory are dated and require frequent updates. The 6th Street Bridge looks different these days, more modern and less Art Deco. The old Hollywood Park racetrack has been

demolished to make way for a state-of-the-art football stadium. Gentrification threatens Wright Road and other neighborhoods near the LA River, which after redevelopment, will become an oasis in the concrete jungle making the areas around it no longer suitable for housing working class communities of color.

Given these changes, how will communities of color not only survive, but beyond that, thrive? As we, individuals, attempt to make sense of change, we will imbue it with our personal narratives. The process—negotiating the gaps between personal recollections and narratives in order to collectively write history—is the destination, itself. *Convivencia*—collective meaning making through the process of *living with* (Gonzalez 270)—leaves indelible marks in those who practice the shared recognition of haunting ghosts.

The Only Lasting Truth is Change

Octavia Butler's 1993 speculative fiction novel, *Parable of the Sower*, follows a determined young Black woman, Lauren Oya Olamina, as she and her community struggle for survival in a suburb of 2024's post-apocalyptic Los Angeles. Corporate greed, racism, economic inequality, and the intensifying effects of climate change have caused society in the United States to collapse. Protected by tanks, helicopters, and armies, state borders act more as national boundaries than they do as representatives of interconnected states. The president is openly racist, sexist, and only interested in capitalist accumulation. Any semblance of democracy has been extinguished by the return of slavery, and corporate overlords have recreated feudalism, buying up most cities and made them into exploitative company towns, where pay is always just less than enough. White enclaves protect their own, and mixed-race relationships can be deadly.

But in Robledo¹⁶, a small suburb somewhere in the San Fernando Valley northwest of Los Angeles, Lauren's community houses families of different races and mixed-race families (though not without racial tensions), all protected by a giant neighborhood wall to separate them from the chaos and destruction beyond.

While Lauren and her community struggle to survive, relying heavily on their garden and fruit trees for survival, living behind a protective wall made them a postmodern gated community; to those left to fend for themselves outside, Robledo was like Beverly Hills. Lauren's father hated the small suburb growing up, but after living in Los Angeles and becoming a college professor, Lauren's father revels living in Robledo, traveling two days by bike once a week to check in at the University. It is during one of these trips that he disappears without a trace, Robledo losing its preacher and de-facto leader. After her father's disappearance, Lauren takes on her father's role as the town's religious leader, preaching in their living room. Lauren begins unveiling little bits of Earthseed, her theories on change, a religion she intended to start that followed a God different than that of her father's. Eventually, people addicted to pyro—a drug that makes burning things pleasurable—crash into Robledo, tearing past the wall and destroying the community. Lauren manages to escape amid the chaos, but when she returns, Lauren's remaining family, her step-mother and three brothers, have all disappeared.

Lauren begins, with the company of two surviving Robledo community members, travelling northward, in search of the fabled lands of Oregon and Washington, which hold jobs, food, and most importantly, water. Following in her father's footsteps as leader, Lauren travels the territory beyond her cul-de-sac, which she has never before left, using old maps that she

¹⁶ When I picture fictional Robledo in my mind's eye, even though Lauren describes it as being near the 118 and the 23 freeways, I see Lynwood and Southeast LA. Robledo is often described as an 'enclave' of LA, which could mean that it is set in the city of San Fernando, which is the only city in its immediate area that is not within LA city limits.

updates en route and spotty radio devices that require frequent maintenance. All the while they travel, Lauren develops Earthseed, preaching along the way, their group taking on followers, fellow vulnerable journeyers without anyone else to support them. Afflicted with ‘hyper-empathy’ syndrome, if Lauren witnesses anyone in physical pain, she herself experiences the same pain; she can “share” other people’s pain. Lauren’s involuntary ability to experience others’ pain gives her away to other ‘sharers,’ who join the group knowing that their inability to fight attackers (lest they incapacitate themselves by viewing the pain they deal) will not be exploited, as it has been used to slavers’ advantage. As they travel, the group battles more pyro-fueled destroyers, and Laruen, one of the few in the group who can both read and write, continues to lead, using the knowledge she gleans from old books and maps. Before long, their multi-racial group makes it to Northern California where they settle and attempt to create a new community called Acorn, where they farm, build their community, and study Earthseed.

Hybrid genre between fictional journal, religious text, and speculative fiction novel, Butler’s 1993 novel joins *This Bridge Called My Back*—the seminal collection of women of color theory first published in 1981—in the genealogy of storytelling-theory where “the very *act* of writing then, conjuring/coming to ‘see’, what has yet to be recorded in history is to bring into consciousness what only the body knows to be true” (Moraga and Anzaldúa xxiv, emphasis in original). Lauren’s religion, Earthseed, and its reverence of change is detailed in what she calls *The Books of the Living*, excerpts of which are interspersed throughout the narrative text of *Parable of the Sower*. Butler, Moraga, Anzaldúa, Alejandro Morales, Anna Deavere Smith, Guadalupe Rosales, and the members of the Ovarian Psycho-Cycles Brigade all take part in the long history of writing yourself, and your community, into being.

Like Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *la facultad*, which is "the learned capacity to read, renovate, and make signs on behalf of the dispossessed" (61), or Avery Gordon's description of hauntings as "a special way of knowing what has happened or is happening" (Gordon 63), when a travel-mate challenges Earthseed as something "made up," Lauren describes Earthseed as the result of her analysis of "other people," herself, "everything [she] could read, hear, see, all the history [she] could learn" (Butler 217). Taking a pebble in her hand, Lauren explains how one could easily analyze its contents and make determinations on the results; in this way, Lauren sees the religion Earthseed not as her creation, where she is a messiah, but as something that existed before her, which came to her through observation, analyzing the physics of how things interact. Dissatisfied with the national narratives of rebuilding the United State back into greatness, Lauren listens as the ghost "speaks, barely, in the interstices of the visible and the invisible" (Gordon 23). Thus, Earthseed brings with it hauntings of not only the past, but the future as well, prefiguring, for Lauren, humanity's future to leave earth and take root among the stars. While even some of her followers doubt how reaching the stars could ever be possible given the collapse of the nation, Lauren reaches toward a new reality, altogether, imagining new technologies for collective survival instead of reaching backwards in order to recreate a past that no longer exists.

I summarize this provocative piece of Afrofuturistic speculative fiction to demonstrate that the stories held within fiction have more to do with what we consider reality—what *is*—than they do what *is not*. The stories we tell shape the reality around us. William Calvo-Quirós, in his essay "The Emancipatory Power of the Imaginary: Defining Chican@ Speculative Productions," describes the generative potentialities of Chican@ speculative fiction (CSP) as constructing a new world "first constructed in the imagination but never completely disassociated from the

‘real’” (39). Distinct from mainstream speculative fiction, these speculative works are developed as “tactics for emancipation and self-governance” that “deeply [intertwine] sociopolitical and historical oppressive experiences and [engender] a unique typology of speculative productions that emerge from the margins for the margins” (Calvo-Quirós 40). Thus, CSPs, and the texts which I study, are an “epistemic endeavor,” “cultural productions that grant access to the complex ways in which Chican@s make sense of what is happening around them and interpret their histories of resilience and intellectual resistance” (Calvo-Quirós 40). Hopeful worldbuilding texts acknowledge the oppressions that face communities of color without positing them as “passive victims but rather active agents constantly trying to make sense of their reality,” so that the alternative ways of knowing and being are rooted in an understanding of the oppressions of colonial history, while also documenting and facilitating “clandestine intellectual maneuvers to retain collective memory and in situ knowledge to navigate the conditions that oppress” (Calvo-Quirós 40) communities of color. In other words, the ability to create an alternative world that is built collectively “requires an understanding of the monstrous real” (Calvo-Quirós 51). In this way, the texts I study are oriented towards a new real, towards new worlds, while also centrally concerned with the process of constructing these alternative collective understandings.

They tried to bury us; they didn't know we were seeds. Though this phrase was used as early as the 1990s by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, an autonomous community named after the peasant revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, it gained popularity in 2014, when 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College were disappeared in the Mexican city of Iguala by state and organized crime forces working together.¹⁷ The phrase speaks to the attempted cover-up of the students' senseless murder, which only sparked massive protests in

¹⁷ The phrase has a complicated history, with Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos claiming the original phrase, “What didn't you do to bury me / but you forgot that I was a seed.”

Mexico and internationally, leading to a renewal in nation-wide protests in Mexico. Like Lauren's Earthseed, which imagines a new reality where living collectively among the stars could be possible, this popular refrain remakes the burial ground into collective growth. This refrain serves to encapsulate the process of indelible practices of hopeful worldbuilding—the collective writing of a new narrative embedded in historical context—as it both acknowledges past trauma, while gesturing towards a new collective present.

Both this current project, *Indelible Practices of Hope*, and the texts studied within, situate themselves as part of a long genealogy of writing yourself—your community—into being. The texts I study bring together the rasquache and the technological, examples of what Catherine S. Ramirez defines as Chicanafuturism, “cultural production that attends to cultural transformations resulting from new and everyday technologies (including their detritus); that excavates, creates, and alters narratives of identity, technology, and the future; that interrogates the promises of science and technology; and that redefines humanism and the human” (Ramirez “Deus ex Machina” 77-8). In hopeful worldbuilding as facilitated by speculative cultural production, “the real is perceived as *temporal*, as a stage toward a world that is based on the premise of equality and social justice” (Calvo-Quirós 39, emphasis added). Through their relational approaches to history and the relationships between past, present, and future, the texts studied within this project highlight “the ubiquity and capaciousness of alternative futurisms and the need for peoples across time and space to scrutinize the present, reexamine the past, and envision the future” (Ramirez “Time Machine” xi). *The Rag Doll Plagues*, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, @Veteranas_and_rucas, @Map_pointz, and the cultural practice of the Ovarian Psycho-Cycles Brigade all put forth a speculative project that invites participants to recreate the present by adapting understandings of the past, in order to make real new ways of being in the future.

A Snapshot of Space

In 1995, both National Football League (NFL) teams, the Raiders and the Rams, left Los Angeles, largely due to a sub-par stadium. After the teams' departure, talks immediately began to finance a new stadium in Los Angeles, in order to lure a NFL team back to the city. Indeed, many discussions around my family's dinner table during the 1990s and 2000s weighed the threat of displacement, as each year brought news of developers' plans to raze our neighborhood, or nearby communities of color, for a stadium. After two decades of talks, construction for the Los Angeles Stadium at Hollywood Park began in 2015. The historically Black neighborhoods of Inglewood, the area surrounding the stadium, have already begun to be displaced as development and gentrification drive up the price of rent, forcing businesses to close and families to move farther and farther from the city center.

Across the river from Wright Road, the Hollydale Regional Park, with renovations completed in phases between 2013 and 2015, provides vital greenspace for the communities around this portion of the South LA River (even if it is next to the freeway). As opposed to my memories of the park in the 1990s, with its yellow-green lawns capped by electrical lines overhead and train tracks by the river, the park's greenery now recreates natural landscapes, native plants abounding. Despite the barrier presented by the train tracks that run parallel to the river, the park now leverages its viewing proximity to the LA River and its adjoining bike path, instead of hiding it away. The Second Annual South East LA Arts Festival at the LA River will take place at this park in July 2019, organized mostly by the office of Representative Anthony Rendon, who also is a main participant in the Lower LA River revitalization projects. Rendon's office is well aware of the displacement that free-market development can bring low-income communities and plans to combat gentrification through a "Anti-Displacement Toolkit that

informs residents about displacement issues, developing policies, and inclusionary housing” and “ongoing meetings with each city’s council and senior staff to address how each city can combat displacement” (Guerrero). With Rendon’s meetings and informational pamphlets at the ready, gentrification in South East Los Angeles stands no chance.

If Los Angeles is Borges’ Aleph, a space where all other spaces exists, where it all comes together, then the city is in constant flux, always negotiating gaps, in a process of becoming. Thus, to write about Los Angeles is an exercise in reading the silences captured in the moment of a snapshot. Where writing necessitates a consecutive order to ideas, it also conjures, calls into being alternative ways of understanding history and of seeing the world. Collective worldbuilding requires that these alternative visions of the world be reconciled into each other, gaps in personal narratives used as maps to places unacknowledged. Thus, Chela Sandoval’s concept of the differential consciousness—the medium “through which the equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist, and separatist modes of oppositional consciousness become effectively converted, lifted out of their earlier, modernist, and hegemonic activity,” akin to the “clutch of an automobile, the mechanism that permits the driver to select, engage, and disengage gears in a system for the transmission of power” (58)—becomes necessary for traversing the mountainous social landscape of Los Angeles. As one personal narrative is juxtaposed with another, one that is almost-the-same but different in meaningful ways, we must shift between the different gears of resistance, constantly unthreading and rethreading the collective narrative. Living with contradictions is unavoidable.

As members of the Ovarian Psycho-Cycles Brigade push back against gentrification in East LA and struggle retain their cultural history in a changing landscape of hipster tenants and increasing rents, they face many opponents. Beyond the expected developers and gentrifiers who

denounce OCP's no tolerance policy for class-exclusionary practices, artists who have exhibited at galleries in the East Los neighborhood have also been surprised to know that some members of the community see galleries as a precursor to gentrification. Groups like "Defend Boyle Heights," worry that expensive high-rises and pricey restaurants will follow from increases in trendy upscale spaces, like art galleries. Members of the community are conflicted between enjoying the activities that now occur in their neighborhood, while also worrying about how long they will get to enjoy the area's growth.

Indelible Practices of Hope, a snapshot of relationships between Los Angeles in the 1990s and in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, can only capture an interrupted timescape. As the city undergoes change and development, as the Lower LA River is revitalized, as the new Crenshaw Metrorail line connects stereotyped Inglewood to Downtown's core, stories will be told and retold again, differently each time. The collective worldbuilding strategies in this project seek to uncover the historical ghosts that haunt us, by attending to theory in the flesh, allowing for the creation of new hopeful ways of knowing and being based in lived experience. The process of collectively reaching across the gaps in personal experience and narrative is what produces the indelible effects of new visions of reality, where communities create the world around them in their own vision. Later snapshots will be connected in history to this candid shot of interrupted motion during the turn of the century, providing greater context to the future's social relations, possibilities for new visions of reality, and indelible practices of hopeful worldbuilding.

Thus, the answer to this epilogue's question — ¿Y qué? *So what?* — is found in the power of the snapshot. The interrupted action of a candid shot invites the viewer to speculate on the actions immediately before and after; reading a snapshot requires thinking about its subject

contextually and relationally. Instead of taking narratives for granted, both one's personal story and so-called official history, the collective negotiation of the contradictions between stories prompts attention to the gaps, from where new knowledge can be dislodged. This relational reading practice needed to make sense of candid shots also describes the process by which the texts studied within this project invite audiences to relate their personal narratives to the legacies of colonial history.

The answer, then, is not so much a *what*, not a product, but a process, a how. *So, how?*
Pues, con cuentos colectivos.

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