ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	THE POSSIBILITY OF HOPE: MEMORY AND AFFECT IN CONTEMPORARY ASIAN AMERICAN AND U.S. LATINX LITERATURE
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Since the 1980s, contemporary U.S. minority writers have returned to the 1960s in their texts. Through memory, aesthetic form, and setting, writers like Maxine Hong Kingston and Cherríe Moraga continue to evoke the era of the 1960s, synonymous with its social and political movements. In short, the literature of our neoliberal present is colored by the spirit of the 1960s. In this moment, why are so many contemporary authors returning to the 1960s in their fiction? How does this return to the past either foreclose or enable possibility in the present? In "The Possibility of Hope: Memory and Affect in Contemporary Asian American and U.S. Latinx Literature," I argue that these writers attempt to garner past moments of possibility to create a strong affective hope in the present. In examining the texts of Asian American and U.S. Latinx writers specifically, I also uncover how minority groups that have been rendered "alien" in the U.S. social and cultural imaginary seek to re-inscribe themselves in the historical moment of the 1960s in order to open up the

potential for hope. My dissertation examines several ways in which writers use space to evoke the spirit of the 1960s: through psychological spaces, physical spaces, and embodied spaces. By considering the turn to the 1960s, I uncover how writing about the past enables hope for the future.

THE POSSIBILITY OF HOPE: MEMORY AND AFFECT IN CONTEMPORARY ASIAN AMERICAN AND U.S. LATINX LITERATURE

by

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Introduction: Affects of Hope

In 2011, Donald Trump made a splash on the media circuit by vocalizing a conspiracy theory that President Obama was not born in the United States and, thus, ineligible to be president. In April 2011, *Time Magazine* quoted Trump as saying, "We have a president who may not have been born in this country. . . . The polls are showing 55% of the Republicans agree with me."[1] What became known as birtherism was an attempt to mobilize xenophobia in the American population. As Alan Abramowitz sums up, birtherism was "clearly intended to appeal to the large segment of Republican voters who were upset about the presence of a black man in the White House."[2] Trump capitalized on the media he was receiving and, ultimately, did not admit that President Obama was born in the U.S. until 2016, a couple months before he was elected president.[3] In Obama's 2004 speech at the Democratic National Convention, he focused on the powerful meaning of his name: "My parents . . . shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or 'blessed,' believing that in a tolerant America your name is no

1. Scherer, "Trump's Political Reality Show."

2. Abramowitz, "White Racial Resentment," 123.

3. Reilly, "Donald Trump Finally Admits."

barrier to success."[4] Despite these hopeful origins, Trump's racist exploitation of Obama's name and his immigrant father led to his political fame.

Unlike Trump, whose political rise appealed to divisiveness, Obama's political fame began with this 2004 speech on the "audacity of hope." Obama described this hope not as "blind optimism," but as the hope of "slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores; the hope of a young naval lieutenant bravely patrolling the Mekong Delta; the hope of a mill worker's son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too."[5] In the 2007 announcement of his presidential candidacy, Obama set the stage for his campaign to be about restoring a sense of unity to the U.S. population, regardless of ethnicity or origin. He implored, "This campaign has to be about reclaiming the meaning of citizenship, restoring our sense of common purpose, and realizing that few obstacles can withstand the power of millions of voices calling for change."[6] Obama campaigned on a platform of inclusiveness, a platform that invigorated the political left with a sense of hope.

Trump continued to undermine the Obama presidency of hope during his presidential campaign by appealing to racial resentment and xenophobia. Trump's attacks against Mexican immigrants highlights these appeals. In his presidential announcement speech, Trump said:

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4. Obama, "Keynote Address."

5. Obama, "Keynote Address."

6. Hartnell, "Re-reading America," 17.

> When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. . . . They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. . . . It's coming from more than Mexico. It's coming from all over South and Latin America, and it's coming probably— probably— from the Middle East. But we don't know. Because we have no protection and we have no competence, we don't know what's happening. And it's got to stop and it's got to stop fast.

Throughout this speech, Trump continued to tie Mexico and China together to illustrate how these countries were, in his opinion, undermining the economic security of the U.S. For example, he argued that these two countries were the cause of U.S. unemployment: "And our real unemployment is anywhere from 18 to 20 percent. Don't believe the 5.6. Don't believe it. That's right. A lot of people up there can't get jobs. They can't get jobs, because there are no jobs, because China has our jobs and Mexico has our jobs." Additionally, Trump pointed to China as devaluing the U.S. currency and claimed, "They're killing us." Finally, he proposed a key platform for his campaign, the border wall: "I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I'll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall."[7] Unlike Obama's presidential speech encouraging unity, Trump laid the foundation for divisive xenophobia that continued throughout his presidency.

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7. Trump, "Presidential Announcement Speech."

Trump's ability to tap into feelings of racial resentment on the right led to his presidential election. In Abramowitz's review of past American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys, he traces the data surrounding racial resentment. The data illustrates that "as late as the 1980s, there was little difference in racial resentment between white Democrats and white Republicans. By 2008, however, there was a yawning gap, and it would grow even wider by 2016."[8] After a thorough review of the data and accounting for all factors, Abramowitz concludes, "What is most significant for explaining the rise of Donald Trump is that the Obama years produced an increase in racial resentment among white Republican voters—an increase that came on top of the rather dramatic increase that had occurred previously."[9] Although the ANES survey only focuses on racial resentment toward Black Americans,[10] Trump's campaign promises to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, his description of Mexicans as criminals and rapists, and his call to ban Muslims from entering the country were designed to appeal to the racial resentments that had grown exponentially since 2008.[11]

Trump capitalized on a feeling of xenophobia that, although heightened with the presence of a Black man in the White House, has been a political undercurrent since the founding of the country. Historically, xenophobic sentiments have informed

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8. Abramowitz, "White Racial Resentment," 130.

9. Abramowitz, 136-37.

10. Abramowitz, 130.

11. Abramowitz, 123.

the racialization of U.S. Latinxs and Asian Americans with an assumption of foreignness.[12] As an example, historian William Wei explains how Asian Americans are "haunted" by the question, "Where are you *really* from?"[13] The notion of being rendered foreign is now a key critical hermeneutic in racial studies of groups in the middle of the black-white binary of race. Arlene Dávila, for example, uses the designation "forever foreign"[14]; Juan Gonzalez, "de facto foreigners"[15]; David Leiwei Lie, "Asian abjection"[16]; Lisa Lowe, "foreigner within"[17]; Mae M. Ngai, "alien citizen"[18]; and Mia Tuan, "forever foreigner."[19] During the Trump presidency, the view of U.S. Latinxs and Asian Americans as foreign has persisted and, in some ways, strengthened, leading to a rise in hate crimes against these populations. Although hate crimes in general are "vastly underreported," they increased by 17 percent between 2016 and 2017.[20] In 2018, the FBI reported that hate crimes "reached a 16-year high" and that violence against Latinos was "outpacing" assaults against

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12. O'Brien, *The Racial Middle*, 129.

13. Wei, *The Asian American Movement*, 44.

14. Dávila, *Barrio Dreams,* 19.

15. Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 81

16. Li, *Imagining the Nation*.

17. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*.

18. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*.

19. Tuan, *Forever Foreigner*.

20. Eligon, "Hate Crimes Increase."

Muslims and Arab-Americans.[21] Additionally, with the recent COVID-19 outbreak—which Trump has referred to as the "Chinese virus," "Wuhan virus," and, most recently, the "kung flu"[22]—anti-Asian sentiment has led to increased hate crimes against Asian Americans. The Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council "documented over 1,000 reports from Asian people of coronavirus discrimination and hate crimes from March 19th to April 1st."[23] As the authors of "Anti-Asian Sentiment in the United States—COVID-19 and History," H. Alexander Chen, Jessica Trinh, and George P. Yang, remind us, "History tells us that minority groups are often targeted during periods of global unrest and economic instability."[24] The Trump presidency has faced, and added to, both global unrest and economic instability. U.S. Latinxs and Asian Americans (among other minority groups) are facing the consequences.

This project brings together the literary productions of Asian Americans and U.S. Latinxs.[25] While these populations have experienced different histories and

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21. Hassan, "Hate-Crime Violence."

22. Guardian Staff, "Donald Trump Calls Covid-19 'Kung Flu.'"

23. Chen, Trinh, and Yang, "Anti-Asian Sentiment in the United States."

24. Chen, Trinh, and Yang.

25. Although there are many other populations in the "racial middle," I focus on these two groups because both share a long immigration history in the United States—almost back to its founding—and both played integral roles during the activist movements of the 1960s, which will play a central role in the project. Population numbers for Arab and South Asian Americans, for example, did not begin to grow significantly until after the 1965 Immigration Act. In fact, according to South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), as recent as 2018, 75% of South Asians in the U.S. are first-generation immigrants. Additionally, this project does not include American Indians because the history of genocide, dispossession, and colonization that this population has faced has led to a unique and complex form of racialization that deserves much more space than I can provide in this project.

forms of racialization, bringing their works into a dialogue illustrates a common goal of seeking inclusion in the U.S. social and cultural imaginary. Alicia Camacho defines the social imaginary as "a symbolic field in which people come to understand and describe their social being." For Camacho, "cultural forms are not a reflection of the social, or merely a detached 'set of ideas,' but rather the means by which subjects work through their connections to a larger totality and communicate a sense of relatedness to a particular time, place, and condition."[26] The cultural imaginary defines what Benedict Anderson calls "imagined communities," of which the nation is the prime example. They are imagined because "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[27] Anderson argues that because of this imagined community "nationality . . . nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind."[28] Thus, the cultural imaginary of a nation gives meaning—a sense of who belongs and who does not belong—to the community. As a kind of cultural artifact, the idea of the nation is malleable. For minority groups who have been rendered foreign, telling their stories as part of the American story is one way to attempt to change the cultural imaginary of the nation. In fact, Anderson argues that, historically, the novel has been a primary way through which the nation was imagined.[29] The literary texts in this project all

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26. Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries*, 5.

27. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

28. Benedict Anderson, 4.

29. Benedict Anderson, 24-25.

seek to inscribe themselves in the U.S. cultural imaginary. Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*, for example, embeds a narrator who is a fifth-generation Chinese American in the heart of the U.S. counterculture: 1960s San Francisco. Susan Choi's *American Woman* and Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams* base their novels on stories that are firmly rooted in the U.S. cultural imaginary—the kidnapping of Patty Hearst and *The Great Gatsby* respectively— but they shift the primary focus to minority populations. Finally, Cherríe L. Moraga's plays and Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* both demonstrate the physical, embodied connection that their characters have to the land and the history of the U.S. Together, the texts in this project demonstrate both the challenges and the possibilities inherent in changing minority representations in the U.S. social imaginary.

To fully understand the racialization of Asian Americans and U.S. Latinxs, it is important to address their histories. Although the immigration histories of these populations are quite different, both reflect the nation's history of xenophobia. Asian American immigration is one mainly of exclusions from full citizenship or from entry altogether. One of the earliest immigration laws to pass in the United States, the Naturalization Act of 1790, puts xenophobic sentiments at the very foundations of the country's establishment by granting citizenship to all "free whites." This law stayed in place until the Naturalization Act of 1870. Even then, citizenship was only extended to "freemen of African nativity or descent."[30] The ruling in 1870 not only continued to bar Asians from U.S. citizenship, but it created severe barriers for the immigration

30. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 19.

of Chinese wives whose husbands were already in the U.S.[31] Later, in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act halted all Chinese immigration for ten years. This law reflected growing anti-Asian sentiments of the time. Between 1850 and 1880, 322,000 Chinese immigrants entered the U.S., mainly in response to labor demands. By the time of their exclusion in 1882, for example, Chinese immigrants made up ten percent of California's population, but they "accounted for a quarter of the state's work force."[32] As Kristoffer Allerfeldt summarizes, "Growing Asian immigration provoked a hostile response," including the fear of the "Yellow Peril," which continued to reemerge throughout U.S. history and to inform the laws surrounding immigration.[33] The 1882 Chinese Exclusion law was extended and upheld in various forms that affected all potential Asian immigrants for decades.

It was not until the Magnuson Act of 1943 that Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and granted Chinese immigrants the right to become naturalized citizens.[34] It also established a quota to allow immigration from China; the first quota was set at 105 immigrants.[35] In 1952, the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act completely abolished the remaining Asian

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31. University of California Regents, "Timeline of Chinese Immigration."

32. Allerfeldt, "Race and Restriction," 54.

33. Allerfeldt, 54-55. In fact, as detailed by Paul Mozur and Edward Wong, during the most recent reemergence of Yellow Peril with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration is considering an immigration ban on all members of the Chinese Communist Party, and the draft of the legislation indicates that current members in the country, along with their families, could be expelled.

34. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 20.

35. University of California Regents, "Timeline of Chinese Immigration."

exclusion acts, replacing exclusion with a strict quota system. Although the repeal of the exclusion acts seemed progressive, Lowe explains that the quota system actually strengthened the categorization of Asian immigrants as non-white. She argues:

> Through the legal enfranchisement of specific Asian ethnic groups as *exceptions* to the whites-only classification, the status of Asians as *nonwhite* is legally restated and reestablished. Thus, the historical racialization of Asian-origin immigrants as nonwhite 'aliens ineligible to citizenship' is actually rearticulated in the processes of legal enfranchisement and the ostensive lifting of legal discrimination in the 1950s.[36]

Finally, with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, all quotas and exclusions were abolished.[37]

The immigration experience for U.S. Latinxs was based on U.S. territorial and economic expansion. After the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded more than one-third of the Republic of Mexico's territory to the U.S. In doing so, the treaty naturalized 75,000 to 100,000 former Mexican citizens as U.S. citizens. This did not mean that they had the full privileges as white U.S. citizens, however. Eileen O'Brien explains that many Mexicans were "disenfranchised due to the refusal to recognize their rightful property claims (and one had to own property to vote)." However, "they were never legally barred from voting as an entire group due

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36. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 20.

37. Lisa Lowe, 7.

to their 'race' in the same fashion as the Chinese."[38] The next major change for Mexican immigrants occurred with the Naturalization Act of 1870. As immigration from Asia was severely restricted with this law, labor supplies in the U.S. were reduced and employers turned to Mexicans to find cheap labor for agricultural and construction work. By 1900, an estimated 100,000 Mexicans had migrated. The 1910 Mexican Revolution added to this number.[39] Between 1900 and 1930, more than a million Mexican immigrants migrated into the U.S.[40] Although the Immigration Act of 1924 completed excluded immigration from Asian countries and established quota systems for Europeans, Latin American countries were exempted from the quota systems.[41] Mexican immigrants would continue to be brought in for their labor between 1942 and 1964 through the Bracero Program, a guest worker program that ended up increasing both authorized and unauthorized immigration. During this time, authorized Mexican immigration rose from 60,000 in the 1940s to 459,000 in the 1960s. Unauthorized immigration also increased from a negligible number in the 1940s to more than 500,000 by 1951.[42]

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38. O'Brien, *The Racial Middle*, 5. O'Brien also explains (3) how the variance in skin tones for Mexican immigrants and their descendants "meant that some persons of Mexican nationality were deemed 'white' and allowed to experience the privileges attached to that racial designation. Indeed, up until 1980, census takers were instructed to mark Mexican Americans down as 'white' unless their phenotype appeared to be 'Negro, Indian, or some other race.'"

39. Gutiérrez, "An Historic Overview of Latino Immigration."

40. Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 102.

41. Tienda and Sanchez, "Latin American Immigration to the United States."

42. Gutiérrez, "An Historic Overview of Latino Immigration."

U.S. imperialism also affected immigration from other Latin American countries. For example, in intervening in Cuba's struggle for independence from Spain during the Spanish-American War of 1898, the U.S. acquired Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.[43] In order to quell Puerto Rican unrest for independence, the U.S. passed the Jones Act in 1917. The Jones Act granted U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans. An unanticipated result of this act was that, as citizens, Puerto Ricans gained free movement within the U.S., and many began moving to the continental U.S.[44] Between 1948 and 1965, Operation Bootstrap integrated the U.S. and Puerto Rican economies, which also increased migration.[45] By 1960, more than 1 million Puerto Ricans were living in the continental U.S.[46] Additionally, political turmoil in many Latin American countries increased immigration numbers in the latter half of the twentieth century. Fidel Castro's 1959 coup in Cuba led to 163,000 Cuban immigrants by 1960 and 683,000 by 1970. Other refugees, mainly from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, added a significant number to immigrants from Latin America. By 1990, the U.S. Latinx population reached 1.324 million.[47]

As of the 2010 census, approximately 14.7 million (about 5% of the total) respondents identified their race as Asian alone, and 50.5 million identified as

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43. Tienda and Sanchez, "Latin American Immigration to the United States."

44. Gutiérrez, "An Historic Overview of Latino Immigration."

45. Toro, "Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap."

46. Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 102.

47. Gutiérrez, "An Historic Overview of Latino Immigration."

Hispanic (about 16% of the total respondents). According to the Census Bureau, the Asian population is the fastest growing population.[48] Despite these significant numbers, as Lowe explains, Asian Americans "retain precisely the memories of imperialism that the U.S. nation seeks to forget."[49] Thus, as Lowe argues, the history of Asian immigration has "placed Asians 'within' the U.S. nation-state, its workplaces, and its markets, yet linguistically, culturally, and racially marked Asians as 'foreign' and 'outside' the nation polity."[50] This statement rings true for U.S. Latinxs as well. The immigration history of exclusion and imperialism for Asian Americans and U.S. Latinxs continues to leave its mark on the social and cultural imaginary of the U.S., rendering these populations as perpetual outsiders.

As the population data above suggests, with events like the Immigration Act of 1965, Operation Bootstrap, and Fidel Castro's rise to power, Asian and Latin American immigrants began to outnumber European immigrants significantly in the 1960s.[51] Concurrently, the U.S. was experiencing the Civil Rights Movement. O'Brien argues that the emergence of these factors "undoubtedly set a model for other disenfranchised and exploited groups in the nation" to create their own activist movements.[52] Because of these simultaneous happenings, Michael Omi and Howard

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48. United States Census Bureau Public Information Office, "2010 Census Shows America's Diversity."

49. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 16-17.

50. Lisa Lowe, 8.

51. O'Brien, *The Racial Middle*, 6-7.

52. O'Brien, 7.

Winant call the 1960s the "great transformation," marking the beginning of a sense of "racial awareness, racial meaning, racial subjectivity." After the political and cultural movements of the 1960s, race could no longer be seen as "a matter of politics, economics, or culture, but of all these 'levels' of lived experience simultaneously."[53] The 1960s saw the rise of Latinx nationalist and panethnic groups like the Puerto Rican Young Lords, Dominican El Comité, Chicano Brown Berets, La Raza Unida, and the United Mexican American Students (UMAS), to name only a handful.[54] Asian American activist groups began during the late 1960s and included student organizations like the Chinese for Social Action, Philippine-American College Endeavor, the Asian American Political Alliance, and Asian Americans for Action (Triple A).[55] Anti-Vietnam War activist groups also emerged such as the Bay Area Asian Coalition Against the War, East Coast Ad Hoc Committee of Asians Against the War in Vietnam, and Asian-American Veterans Against the War.[56] The antiwar movements eventually led to the creation of the Asian American Movement, a pan-Asian movement "based on racial consciousness and radical politics."[57] Wei explains that the Movement gave Asian Americans "an unprecedented means of developing a pan-Asian consciousness, changing them from Asian ethnics into Asian Americans"

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53. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 90.

54. Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire* and Bebout, *Mythohistorical Interventions*.

55. Wei, *The Asian American Movement*.

56. Wei, 40.

57. Wei, 42-43.

with the hope of fighting against their forever-foreign status in the U.S. social imaginary.[58]

Although there were tensions between racial movements in the 1960s, there are powerful moments of solidarity as well. For example, in 1965, the mostly-Latinx National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) and the mostly-Filipino Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) joined forces in the Delano Grape Strike. AWOC leader Larry Itliong approached Cesar Chavez for this coalition. Chavez agreed because, as Lauren Araiza explains, he "realized that only a united workforce could effectively pressure the growers into signing contracts." This coalition made it clear that the "fight for economic justice and equality for farmworkers was truly multiracial."[59] Not long after this alliance, NFWA and AWOC merged to form the United Farm Workers (UFW). Andy Imutan, a Filipino farmer who took part in Delano Grape Strike, describes the emotional effect of this coalition: "It was a very exciting time as we knew the potential when we joined together not as competitors but as true brothers joined in a very legitimate cause."[60] Imutan's testimony highlights the powerful racial coalitions that took place in the 1960s. Additionally, the 1960s saw the beginnings of multiracial coalitions like the Third World Liberation Front and

58. Wei, 45.

59. Araiza, *To March for Others*, 24.

60. Andy Imutan, "What Happened When Mexicans and Filipinos Joined Together."

the Third World Coalition, both collectives made up of Black, Latinx, Filipino, and Asian American activists.[61]

Just as the hopefulness surrounding Obama's presidency was met with prompt obstructive backlash from conservatives, the hopeful era of the 1960s met the same fate. Omi and Winant explain, "By the 1970s . . . through repression, cooptation, and fragmentation, these [1960s] movements experienced a sharp decline, losing their vitality and coherence. . . . Even the moderate gains they had achieved came under attack by an alliance of right-wing and conservative forces."[62] During the 1970s, the nation's economy began to perform poorly. Industries were losing business to foreign competitors while manufacturing plants began to close in the Northeast. The U.S. also faced the "humiliating 'losses' of Vietnam, Nicaragua, and Iran."[63] The nation was forced to face the idea that the U.S. may no longer be "number 1" on the world stage. In line with historical reactions since the founding of the country, conservative forces pointed to the rise in immigrants since 1965, as well as to affirmative action policies, as the reason for job shortages. Additionally, Japan was singled out as a main contributor to foreign manufacturing competition, creating yet another negative climate shift for Asian Americans.[64] Omi and Winant argue that one of the lasting successes of the 1960s, ironically, added to a new form of racism:

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61. Wei, *The Asian American Movement*.

62. Omi and Winant, 95.

63. Omi and Winant, 114-115.

64. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation,* 166.

> With the exception of some on the far right, the racial reaction that developed in the last two decades claimed to favor racial equality. Its vision was that of a "color-blind" society. . . . As the right understood them, racial problems from the 1970s consisted of new forms of racial injustice which originated in the "great transformation." This new injustice conferred group rights on racial minority groups, thus granting a new form of privilege—that of "preferential treatment."[65]

Thus, the right redefined racial equality as one in which racial considerations no longer needed to be made, and they argued that minorities should no longer be given "special treatment."

President Reagan's election continued the state's shift away from the progressive politics of the 1960s. During his political rise, Reagan "had opposed every major civil rights measure considered by Congress," and he called the Civil Rights Act of 1964, "a bad piece of legislation."[66] Reagan's views did not change with his presidency. His platform was one of "American renewal," one that would create a country "where a little six-year-old girl can grow up knowing the same freedom that I knew when I was six years old, growing up in America."[67] In Reagan's speech to accept the Republican nomination for president in 1980, he attributed the economic problems of the 1970s to the progressive policies that came out of the 1960s. He

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65. Omi and Winant, 117.

66. Quoted in Omi and Winant, 33.

67. Quoted in Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties,* 34.

promised to run a "great national crusade to make America great again."[68] Reagan continued his theme of American renewal in his 1984 campaign, where he received "74 percent of the white male vote in the South, 68 percent in the West, and 66 percent in the nation as a whole."[69] In returning to Abramowitz's review of the ANES survey data regarding racial resentment in elections, we see that the data illustrates that the racial resentment gap between white Democrats and white Republicans began to grow in the 1980s,[70] and this gap aligns with Reagan's election.

In Bernard von Bothmer's *Framing the Sixties: The Use and Abuse of a Decade from Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush*, he examines how both conservatives and liberals remember the 1960s and how the era continues to define their current politics. Bothmer concludes that liberal Democrats, "recall the 1960s as a high point of American idealism." In general, the left fondly remembers the optimism of the early 1960s, embodied in the Kennedy presidency and Johnson's Great Society. They also see "nobility" in "the civil rights movement, and the revolutionary civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s." Finally, Bothmer explains that they admire "the spirited attempt by many in the 1960s—especially the young—to stop what they viewed as an immoral invasion of a third world nation," as well as "the women's and environmental movements . . . and the era's loosening of traditional restraints in general."[71] The literature that I turn to in this project also demonstrates a

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68. Reagan, "Acceptance of the Republican Nomination for President."

69. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation,* 133.

70. Abramowitz, "White Racial Resentment," 130.

71. Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*, 221.

fond remembrance of the 1960s. As a study of post-1980s literature, the authors in this project are writing in the era of neoliberalism, an era when progress seems to be stalling and that seems hopeless for progressives. Lisa Duggan explains that neoliberalism began with pro-business activism in the 1970s that "successfully opposed proliferating visions of an expansive, more equitable redistribution of the world's resources." Neoliberalism continued to grow in opposition to the progressive era of the 1960s and to embody a political vision of "national and world order, a vision of competition, inequality, market 'discipline,' public austerity, and 'law and order.'"[72] In order to combat the sense of hopelessness under neoliberalism, the authors in this project turn to the 1960s in their texts, mobilizing the era to create an affect of hope in a moment that feels anything but hopeful.

However, for Asian American and U.S. Latinxs who have been rendered foreign, turning to the 1960s also requires the work of inclusion in the social imaginary of the era. The white student and hippie movements, as well as the African American Civil Rights movement have a large presence in the U.S. social imaginary of the 1960s. The presence of Asian American and U.S. Latinx movements remain less visible. In fact, Bothmer's book on remembering the 1960s mentions almost nothing about U.S. Latinx movements[73] nor the Asian American movement. In Wei's introduction to *The Asian American Movement*, he explains that "though the Movement has been an integral part of the Third World effort to establish an

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72. Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, X.

73. Bothmer mentions César Chavez once (153).

equitable society in the United States, it has remained socially invisible."[74] He cites the lack of a "nationally known leader," like King, as one reason for this. Wei also cites the movement's small size, a direct result of the "discriminatory immigration policies" detailed above. Moreover, he points to the "dichotomous nature of race relations in the United States" where "race has been addressed and understood mainly as a black and white issue."[75] Although the Latinx nationalist movements of the 1960s have had more cultural visibility than the Asian American movement, they still do not hold the same place in the cultural imaginary as the African American Civil Rights Movement. This absence can be seen in educational priorities. For example, it is only in 2016 that California rewrote history standards to include a section on the Chicano civil rights movement.[76] After this change, Duane Campbell celebrated that a system where 51% of the students who are Latino "will finally be encouraged to know the history of Latino civil rights leaders like Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. . . . These topics are currently substantially absent from public school textbooks in the nation."[77]

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74. Wei, *The Asian American Movement,* 3.

75. Wei, 304.

76. Magagnini, "California's New Public School History Standards Reflect State's Diversity."

77. Campbell, "Why California Students Do Not Know Chicano History." My own experience growing up in rural Pennsylvania mirrors these discussions: although I had heard of Cesar Chavez, I did not learn about Latinx movements until college, and I did not know the Asian American Movement existed until graduate school. Had I not studied in the humanities, these knowledge gaps might still remain.

My project examines Asian American and U.S. Latinx literary productions to think through these issues of hope and memory. The writers in this project turn to the 1960s in their texts in a number of ways. Some set their works in the 1960s; others have characters whose lives are directly impacted by 1960s events; others place characters with memories of the 1960s and a drive for activism in a contemporary setting; while others have characters looking for strategies from the 1960s to combat racial inequality in a more contemporary moment. In examining these texts, I ask how this return to the past either forecloses or enables possibility in the present. How do they represent hope as a phenomenological act that shapes social and political life? And how does their writing and language both reflect and create an affect of hope, an affect that promotes the possibility of change? Ultimately, the authors in this study turn to the 1960s to simultaneously re-inscribe themselves in the social imaginary of the U.S. and to create an affect of hope for their readers.

For the purposes of this project, my definition of the era is in line with what historian Arthur Marwick calls the "long" 1960s, an era that encompasses roughly 1958-1974.[78] The extension of the era into the early 1970s is especially important to this study for two reasons. First, as Omi and Winant explain, the great transformation occurred in two stages: first was a "paradigm shift" to the ethnicity paradigm, which "provided an analytics framework by which to assess the situation of blacks" and had a focus on ending racism and ensuring equality. The second stage, which revealed the limits and usefulness of the ethnicity paradigm, was the upsurge of new social

78. Marwick, *The Sixties*.

movements that contested "the *social meaning* of race." These movements extended beyond the African American movement and mobilized other minority groups.[79] As detailed in studies like Wei's *The Asian American Movement* and Bebout's *Mythohistorical Interventions*, the development of some social activist groups during this era did not even begin until the late 1960s or early 1970s. The second reason the long 1960s is important to this project is because of the central role the Vietnam War had in the formation of Asian American and Third World movements. Marwick argues that he extends the era of the 1960s to 1974, a year beyond the formal withdraw of U.S. troops from Vietnam, partly because it was in 1974, with Nixon's resignation and Congress's move to cut aid to Saigon, that "the anti-war movement [felt] it was achieving victory."[80]

A comparative project between Asian American and U.S. Latinx literature is not unprecedented. Notable examples include A. Robert Lee's *Multicultural American Literature: Comparative Black, Native, Latinx and Asian American Fictions* (2003), Nicholas De Genova's collection *Racial Transformations: Latinos and Asians Remaking the United States* (2006), and Crystal Parikh's *An Ethics of Betrayal: The Politics of Otherness in Emergent U.S. Literatures and Culture* (2009). Lee's large-scoped comparative project is a response to a "mainstream" perspective of America (and its literature) that remains "overwhelmingly Eurocentric, Atlantic, east to west, and white-male in its unfolding," even though identity politics of the 1960s have

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79. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 96-97. Italics in the original.

80. Marwick, *The Sixties*, 7.

shown that the phrase "Multicultural American Literature" should be "thought redundant."[81] Taking on a remarkable number of literary texts, Lee attempts to "situate each text within multiple contexts of US culture and ethnicity" while giving "recognition to particularity."[82] He ends his study with an epilogue on the "Fictions of Whiteness" through which all "minority" literatures are constructed as such.

Unlike the large-scale comparative nature of Lee's project, De Genova's edited collection is one of the first to specifically compare Asian American and Latinx political histories and cultures through literary studies. In his introduction, De Genova examines the history of racialization in the U.S. in order to emphasize both the relations between Asian and Latinx identities, as well as their place in the "hegemonic polarity of whiteness and Blackness."[83] De Genova looks to the legal and social past in the country, as well as to the future of national identity. With post-9/11 immigration policies and xenophobia in mind, he posits:

> Do [Latino and Asian identities] disrupt, repudiate, subvert, recapitulate, or endorse the hegemonic U.S. social formations? Do their very efforts to challenge their subjugation by white supremacy become captive to its grinding machinations and even enlisted in the service of sustaining the efficacy and reenergizing the resilience of their own and others' oppression?[84]

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81. Lee, *Multicultural American Literature*, 1.

82. Lee, 16.

83. De Genova, "Latino and Asian Racial Formations" 1.

84. De Genova, 17.

The authors in De Genova's collection take up these questions in essays that compare the colonialization of Asian Americans and U.S. Latinxs, the possibilities and limits of interracial coalitions, and the complex issues surrounding inclusion.[85]

Parikh[86] examines these efforts to challenge subjugation with a study of acts of betrayal in Asian American and Latinx literary and cultural productions. With an examination of Asians and Latinxs as "*national* aliens,"[87] she examines betrayal as a critique of "social conditions by which the minority subject comes into being and of the possibilities for agency and transformation available to that subject once it has come into being."[88] Her "ethico-political" project is made with respect to Jacques Derrida's "democracy to come," which brings together both the deferral of ideal democracy while highlighting the necessary desire for such a democracy. [89] For Parikh, acts of betrayal can lead to new possibilities for relations with the "Other" while simultaneously highlighting the difficultly involved in orienting oneself towards the "democracy to come."

Like all three of the authors above, my project examines how Asian American and U.S. Latinx writers attempt to interrupt the black-white racial binary and to

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85. De Genova.

86. Parikh's essay "The Passion: The Betrayals of Elián González and Wen Ho Lee" was included in De Genova's collection and became the last chapter in her monograph.

87. Parikh, *An Ethics of Betrayal*, 21. This is in line with the genealogy of the "forever foreign" critical studies outlined above.

88. Parikh, 2.

89. Parikh, 6-10.

situate their culture firmly within a U.S. tradition. In line with De Genova and Parikh, I specifically examine the works of Asian American and U.S. Latinx authors. While De Genova asks if attempts to challenge their racialization have any possibility of success, I examine how literature allows readers to recognize these moments of possibility. In fact, for this project, I define hope as the recognition of the possibility for change. In line with Parikh, my project thinks through how literary productions can illustrate new possibilities for relations to each other and the nation. Rather than examining actions, however, I turn to spaces. Specifically, I look at how affect can infuse spaces—psychological spaces, built spaces, and corporeal spaces—to enable a sense of hope in characters and readers alike. I demonstrate how the writers in this study mobilize the era of the 1960s to create this sense of hope.

My project illustrates that turning to the past is not mere nostalgia; as the texts in this study illustrate, the past can play a powerful role in the present and in finding new directions for the future. In Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History," he argues that "articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it 'the way it really was.' It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger."[90] For Benjamin, the past can be appropriated by those in power, but it can also be appropriated in the fight against its use as a tool by the ruling class. For the authors in this project, the "moment of danger" is the present moment in which cultural, racial, and economic gains feel almost unachievable. Calling upon the era of the 1960s allows the writers to attempt to redirect the future by returning to the past.

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90. Benjamin, *Selected Writings,* 391.

They accomplish the work that Benjamin calls for: "Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition from the conformism that is working to overpower it." The authors in this project see the forces of historical erasure and fan "the spark of hope"[91] from the past to create a powerful and redemptive form of remembrance.

In line with Obama's statement from his 2004 speech that hope is not "blind optimism" driven by "willful ignorance,"[92] the authors in this project present a form of hope that is active rather than passive. Rebecca Solnit sums up how the blind optimism to which Obama refers actually forecloses the possibility of change: "The hope that the Publishers Clearing House sweepstakes award will come to you, that the American dream will come true, that electoral politics will reform itself, is hope that paralyzes people's ability to rebel, to reject, to critique, to demand, and to make change."[93] In *Rules of Hope*, psychologists James Averill, G. Catlin, and K. K. Chon argue that while hope is episodic in nature, optimism is a personality trait. They write that hope "is a relatively short-term response tendency, usually initiated and terminated by specific environmental conditions."[94] Optimism, on the other hand, is not a temporary condition and does not situationally adjust.[95] Thus, as philosopher Stan Van Hooft argues, because "the optimistic person is one who believes that

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91. Benjamin, 391.

92. Obama, "Keynote Address."

93. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 13.

94. Averill, Catlin, and Chon, *Rules of Hope*, 93.

95. Averill, Catlin, and Chon, 93-95.

everything will turn out well," hope requires more thought and action than optimism.[96] Additionally, there is more satisfaction when hopes are fulfilled than when the expectations of optimism are met.[97]

Recent scholars have detailed the limits of optimism. In *Cruel Optimism* (2011), for example, Lauren Berlant defines optimism as "the force that moves you out of yourself and into the world in order to bring closer the satisfying *something* that you cannot generate on your own but sense in the wake of a person, a way of life, an object, project, concept, or scene."[98] Berlant cautions that optimism only becomes cruel when "the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially."[99] Central to Berlant's study is the promise of the "good life," the American Dream, which is inherently cruel in a neoliberal era where systems that were designed to support the American Dream have been dismantled. Berlant suggests the genre of the "impasse" as an "aspiration" in regard to cruel optimism. She defines the impasse as "a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things."[100] In other

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96. Van Hooft, *Hope*, 52.

97. Martin, *How We Hope: A Moral Psychology*, 31.

98. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* 1-2.

99. Berlant, 1.

100. Berlant, 4.

words, the impasse provides a moment of slowness in the neoliberal era of anxiety and productivity. This temporal slowing allows for heightened awareness of one's circumstances.

Additionally, the emergence of Afropessimism calls into question optimistic narratives regarding racial progress. Afropessimism highlights antiblackness, or "the notion that the construction of blacks as nonhuman structures the status of all other racial groups," as distinct from other forms of racism.[101] At the heart of Afropessimism is the argument that slavery has endured in new forms and that Blacks remain "excluded from civil society." Because of this exclusion, seeking restitution from the state will necessarily fail.[102] Additionally, any narrative of racial solidarity or coalitions is merely a cooptation of Blackness for a self-serving cause. As Frank Wilderson explains, "At one moment blackness is a disfigured and disfiguring phobic phenomenon; at another moment Blackness is a sentient implement to be joyously deployed for reasons and agendas that have little to do with Black liberation."[103] For Jared Sexton, Afropessimism calls for the displacement of "the ever-expansive inclusionary gesture" and for a "more radical approach": "an ethics of the real, a politics of the imperative, engaged in its interminable downward movement."[104] The challenge, then, is to overcome the "special force that the consolation of

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101. Ray et al., "Critical Race Theory, Afro-Pessimism, and Racial Progress Narratives," 149.

102. Ray et al., 150.

103. Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, chap. 1, Kindle edition.

104. Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism," 3.

transcendence . . . brings to bear on the activity of thinking, no less of speaking and writing, about those whose transcendence is foreclosed in and for the modern world."[105] Afropessimism is the acknowledgment that current optimistic narratives of race necessarily exclude Blackness.

Unlike optimism, hope is an extension of knowledge, knowledge that can be gained through Berlant's "impasse." To be aware of a moment of possibility is to understand why and how that possibility is present in the first place. In *Habits of Hope*, Patrick Shade argues that an "adequate theory of hope" must be practical. For Shade, hopes "need to be related to actual conditions and powers through which they *can* be realized."[106] Echoing Shade, Van Hooft explains that hope "involves a relatively high degree of understanding of the world intermingled with the concerns and desires that we have."[107] In fact, Van Hooft argues that an "ethical requirement" of hope is that it "ought to be realistic." Without being grounded in realism, hope can slip into the blind optimism and wishing thinking detailed above.[108] Although to hope is to be temporally oriented to the future, an understanding of the past is necessary to meet the ethical requirement of being realistic. Solnit explains how an understanding of the past is important in recognizing potentiality: "To recognize the momentousness of what has happened is to apprehend what might happen."[109] Additionally, to

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105. Sexton, 4.

106. Shade, *Habits of Hope: A Pragmatic Theory*, 6. Italics in the original.

107. Van Hooft, *Hope*, 41.

108. Van Hooft, 40.

109. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark,* 12.

understand the past is to realize that progress is not inevitable. As Van Hooft concludes, "Genuine hope . . . recognizes the contingency of history and the precariousness of the outcomes it produces: that *we* produce."[110]

Hope is more than just an understanding of the past and a practical assessment of the present, however. Hope fills the void between what is known and what has the potential to be. Van Hooft explains the leap that hope allows us to take:

> Hope arises at precisely the point where agency leaves off. We entertain hope in respect of those conditions that are necessary for achieving our goals but which we cannot bring about ourselves. Hope covers the gap between effort and outcome and where that gap is extremely small no hope is needed, while where it is huge, hope is all we have."[111]

Hope is necessarily uncertain. As Solnit explains, "hope just means that change is certain and that what we do might matter."[112] Shade's "adequate theory of hope" also embraces this gap in certainty. He argues that hope must be practical in two ways: not only must it be realistic, but it also must be practical "in the sense of [being] productive and expansive." For Shade, hope must lead us to transcend our present condition.[113] In this way, hope can be a habit, an "attentive readiness to possibilities that promise satisfaction."[114] Therefore, hope also requires the readiness to act. Hope

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110. Van Hooft, *Hope*, 92.

111. Van Hooft, 35.

112. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark,* 147.

113. Shade, *Habits of Hope,* 6-7.

114. Shade, 20.

is the recognition of the possibility for change, and we must be ready to act when these moments arise.

As a study on hope, my project is situated within current cultural studies of emotion and affect. One of the main debates in affect theory is the difference between emotion and affect. In *The Feeling of What Happens* (1993), neuroscientist Antonio R. Damasio provides a foundation for one of the more commonly used distinctions between affect and emotion. Damasio explains that an emotional experience has three distinct phenomena: "*an emotion, the feeling of that emotion,* and *knowing that we have a feeling of that emotion*."[115] For a number of scholars in affect theory, the first two phenomena make up affect, whereas the third is the definition of emotion. For example, in *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), Brian Massumi creates a hard divide between the definition of affect and emotion. Massumi defines affect as an unstructured sensation, and emotion as a "qualified intensity" in which a "sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience" takes place.[116] For Massumi, emotion and affect "follow different logics and pertain to different orders."[117] Leaning on Massumi's split between affect and emotion, Marta Filglerowicz identifies a similar, "important aspect" of the difference. She explains, "I identify the delay

115. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, 8. Italics in the original.

116. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 28.

117. Massumi, 27.

between the presence of an affect and one's capacity to become aware of or interpret it as . . . what distinguishes affects from emotions or feelings."[118]

Unlike Massumi and Filglerowicz, other scholars see a more subtle difference between affect and emotion. In *The Particulars of Rapture* (2003), for example, Charles Alteiri defines emotion as a subset of affect. For Altieri, affects are "immediate modes of sensual responsiveness to the world characterized by an accompanying imaginative dimension." He provides pain as an example: pain itself is a sensation, but it "becomes an affect when it takes on a tinge of irritation" in regard to a particular situation. For Altieri, emotion is a subset of affect in which narrative construction establishes "a particular cause," generating "some kind of action or identification."[119] Similarly, Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2009) treats affect and emotion as "a modal difference of intensity or degree, rather than a formal difference of quality or kind." For Ngai, affects are less structured and linguistically organized than emotions, but not lacking in structure or organization entirely. In fact, she uses the terms "more or less interchangeably."[120]

Some scholars in affect theory find the debate between affect and emotion to be unproductive. For example, in Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect* (2004), she describes the transmission of affect as "a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect." Using emotion and affect interchangeably,

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118. Figlerowicz, *Spaces of Feeling*, 11.

119. Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture*, 2.

120. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 27.

Brennan, explains that the transmission of affect "simply" means that "the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another."[121] Although Brennan's focus is on affect, she notes that "there is no reason to challenge the idea that emotions are basically synonymous with affects." Rather, what is important to her work is the understanding that affects are "material, physiological things."[122] Moreover, in "Atmospheric Practices" (2019), social anthropologist Mikkel Bille and human geographer Kirsten Simonsen argue that the insistence on the difference between emotion and affect is counterproductive. They argue that this insistence "tends to reinstall the distinctions between body and mind, or between object and subject, that many of the authors set out to overcome initially."[123] Rather, Bille and Simonsen turn to the study of atmospheres to provide a "nondualist ontology of the body and its environment, and the active/passive circularity in the understanding of emotions" in order to unsettle "the distinction between affect and emotion."[124]

Although I acknowledge the validity of arguments like Brennan's and Bille and Simonsen's, and, like Brennan, see no reason to insist on a distinct definition between affects and emotions, for the purposes of this study, I turn to affect over emotion because of its transactional connotation. As Michele Janette highlights,

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121. Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect*, 3.

122. Brennan, 5-6.

123. Bille and Simonsen, "Atmospheric Practices," 3.

124. Bille and Simonsen, 7.

"affect, as both a verb and a noun, a process as well as a result or manifestation, insists on intersubjective activity and interactional transmission."[125] Similarly, in Jonathan Flatley's study of melancholic affects, he explains the difference between emotion and affect in this transactional way, a way that is particularly productive for the study of affect and literature: "where emotion suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, *affect* indicates something relational and transformative. One *has* emotions; one is affected *by* people or things."[126] These "things" do not necessarily have to be physical objects; rather, they can take the form of ideas or imaginary objects.[127] Therefore, the relationship between the text and the reader, the artwork and the audience, is an affective one. In addition to being apt for the study of literature, the use of the term affect highlights the transactional nature of racialization. As Janette asserts, "Defined then as affective, race is not a noun, something that others have. It is a verb, happening between people—a happening from which no one is exempt. Following this logic, the construction of race is not a victimology but rather a call to accountability for the ways in which we all affectively construct one another."[128] For both literary productions and racialization, a study of affect highlights the relational nature of the event.

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125. Janette, "'Distorting Overlaps,'" 166.

126. Flatley, *Affective Mapping,* 12. Italics in the original.

127. Flatley, 16-17.

128. Janette, "Distorting Overlaps," 166.

Literary productions are particularly suited for an examination of affects of hope. The study of literature can train readers in recognition of moments of possibility. In Joshua Landy's *How To Do Things With Fiction*, he argues that in literary studies, "we could do . . . with ceasing to talk about what a text 'says'—if indeed there is such a thing—and beginning to talk about what it *does*."[129] Landy looks at what he calls "formative texts," texts that go beyond providing knowledge and actually train readers with skills. Not all fictions are formative fictions, but those that are provide "spaces for prolonged and active encounters that serve, over time, to hone our abilities and thus, in the end, to help us become who we are."[130] For Landy, this training is less about content and more about form and process because "formative fictions do their work gradually, sometimes indeed in imperceptible increments, and over a multitude of phases."[131] Therefore, engaging with formative fictions can train a reader over time. For the texts in this project, their forms work synchronously with their content to train readers in recognition of moments of possibility. In David Harvey's study of utopian possibility in urban spaces, he explains that "any spontaneous alternative visionary moment is fleeting; if it is not seized at the flood, it will surely pass."[132] Formative texts can train us to better

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129. Landy, *How to Do Things with Fictions*, 9.

130. Landy, 10.

131. Landy, 12.

132. Harvey, *Rebel Cities,* xvii.

recognize these fleeting moments in order to fan Benjamin's "spark of hope"[133] for the future.

Additionally, the world-building that takes place in literature can inspire us to imagine new possibilities in our own world. To adopt Crystal Parikh's description, art, specifically literature, enables the imagining of "something new and heretofore unthought."[134] The majority of the texts that I turn to in this project are novels because the novel, in particular, allows for the space and freedom of structure to build worlds. In Guido Mazzoni's *Theory of the Novel* (2017), he answers the question "What is the novel today?":

> *The novel became the genre in which one can tell absolutely any story in any way whatsoever.* The boundless multiplicity of forms of life, whether real or possible, can be narrated from inside or outside consciousness, and at the same time any style can be adopted, allowing the variety of the subjective imagination to be revealed.[135]

Mazzoni pinpoints only two structural boundaries for the novel. The first boundary is that it must have narrative form: "in more or less straightforward or unusual ways the novel tells a story." Second, the novel has "*the possibility to make free use of any content and any style*."[136] The novel provides the freedom to do a deep dive into

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133. Benjamin, *Selected Writings,* 391.

134. Parikh, *An Ethics of Betrayal,* 26.

135. Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel*, 16.

136. Mazzoni, 17. Italics in the original.

history, to create alternate histories, to represent the past, to imagine the future, and to create completely different worlds. The lack of boundaries in style and form means that novels can present narratives in new, unexpected ways, changing how readers interact with the page and, thus, the narratives they encounter in the world around them.

In this way, literature holds affective power. As Kendall Walton concisely summarizes, "It goes without saying that we *are* genuinely moved by novels and films and plays, that we respond to works of fiction with real emotion."[137] A reader's emotional response to literature is an important element in the interpretation of it. In Jane Thrailkill's defense of the Affective Fallacy,[138] she argues that "attentiveness to the experience of a literary work need not eradicate meaning . . . if we come to accept that feeling is not opposed to interpretation but is part of it."[139] Like Flatley, Walton, and Thrailkill, José Esteban Muñoz finds powerful affective force in artistic productions. Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* looks specifically at the hopeful affect of literature. He uses the idea of "educated hope" as a methodology to combat the current force of political pessimism, particularly as he sees it in queer scholarship.[140]

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137. Walton, "Spelunking, Simulation, and Slime," 38.

138. As Thrailkill explains in *Affecting Fictions* (1), the Affective Fallacy "was coined in 1946 by the literary critics W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, who contended that 'affective criticism'—criticism that took seriously literature's effects on readers—led to impressionism and relativism." These critics emphasized the separation of the feelings of the body from the cognition of the mind, a separation that the affect theorists in this project illustrate nonexistent.

139. Thrailkill, 14.

140. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia,* 3.

He argues that queerness itself "is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world."[141] Muñoz's idea of hope is intimately connected to temporality. Like Benjamin, Muñoz sees how the past can be appropriated in a way that allows for critique and action in the present with an eye to the future.[142] For Muñoz, hope, embodied in art, is "indispensable in the act of imagining transformation."[143]

The authors in this project turn to the 1960s to create an affect of hope in the post-1980s neoliberal era. They illustrate how affect can permeate psychological, physical, and corporeal spaces. In Chapter 1, "Aesthetic Trips and Community Building in Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey,*" I argue that the novel's unique formal strategies create an affect of hope for its readers. Kingston's novel, published in 1989, is set in 1960s San Francisco. The presence of the counterculture permeates both the content and the form of the novel, which feels like a literary LSD trip and influences the psychology of its readers. The novel is focalized through Wittman Ah Sing, a fifth-generation Chinese American playwright who has taken so many psychedelics that he no longer needs drugs to experience a trip. Within the novel, Wittman writes and stages a play that takes his audience—and the readers—through a fantastical, genre-bending experience of his mind. The play changes the outlook of its participants, encouraging community-building and creating a sense of hope among its actors. The form of the novel mirrors that of the play as Kingston

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141. Muñoz, 1.

142. Muñoz, 17.

143. Muñoz, 9.

utilizes elements of the 1960s counterculture to create an affect of hope in an era when the 1960s has been demonized and progress seems impossible.

In Chapter 2, "Spaces of Hope in Susan Choi's *American Woman* and Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*," I argue that empathetic community-building, inspired by politics of the 1960s, can change the affect of a space from one of repression to one of hope. Both of these novels reveal the dynamic relationship between a space and its inhabitants. The characters in Choi's *American Woman* are forced to go "underground" due to their involvement in the radical anti-war movements of the 1960s. The spaces that they inhabit are ones of confinement, which forces an affective relationship between characters. The atmosphere of these spaces allows for the creation of subjectivity and, ultimately, a new philosophy surrounding communal politics. Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams* details the affective experience of New York City's Spanish Harlem. A former Puerto Rican Young Lord, Willie Bodega, brings the spirit of the 1960s to the neighborhood, which has suffered in the contemporary era of neoliberalism. Although flawed, his investment in the community and his celebration of Puerto Rican culture ultimately changes the affect of the neighborhood. Chino, the narrator, begins the novel with dreams of leaving Spanish Harlem. After his involvement with Bodega, however, he sees promise in the neighborhood. The affective power illustrated in both *American Woman* and *Bodega Dreams* extends beyond the page. By basing the novels on stories rooted in the nation's cultural imaginary—radical anti-war movements and the kidnapping of Patty Hearst for *American Woman*, and *The Great Gatsby* for *Bodega Dreams*—Choi and Quiñonez represent voices of minority Americans as central to the American narrative.

Together, these novels demonstrate the affective power of 1960s politics in building communities that change the atmosphere of a physical space.

Finally, in chapter 3, "Embodied Memory in the Works of Cherríe L. Moraga and Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*," I argue that these texts illustrate the affective power of embodied memories. They demonstrate how engagement with embodied memory can simultaneously allow access to the past while opening up possibilities in the present. For both Moraga and Truong, the 1960s represent lost memories, ones that can be accessed by following the affective presence of embodied memory. In Moraga's nonfiction essay "Sour Grapes: The Art of Anger in América," she illustrates how following embodied memory can provide artists with a path out of nostalgia, particularly nostalgia for the era of the 1960s. Moraga's plays *Heroes and Saints* and *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* demonstrate the type of art she calls for in "Sour Grapes." Both plays represent the affective power of embodied memories in a physical way on the stage. In Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*, Linda, the synesthetic narrator, is a literal representation of the porous relationship between the body and its environment. As a synesthete, Linda experiences tastes when she hears particular words. Thus, her embodied memories are literal tastes on her tongue. At the heart of the novel is Linda's search for a bitter taste from her memory, one that she believes will unlock her memories from her first seven years of life with her parents, who immigrated from Vietnam during the war. By remaining open to the embodied affect of her memories, Linda is able to reconcile with her repressed past. The authors in this chapter represent how the racialized body maps emotional memory, memory that holds affective power in creating a feeling of hope in the present.

Chapter 1: Aesthetic Trips and Community Building in Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey*

Section 1: Introduction

Maxine Hong Kingston's *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989) takes place at the heart of the counterculture: 1960s San Francisco. In this chapter, I argue that this setting is reflected in the novel's form, which ultimately creates an affect of hope for its readers. To begin, I illustrate how the use of psychedelics, popular in the 1960s, influences both the plot and the form of the novel. I then analyze the play that the protagonist, Wittman, writes and stages; the play is a meta-narrative moment that demonstrates how formalizing the feeling of a psychedelic trip can aid in building community. Finally, I illustrate how community-building is the ultimate act of hope in this novel, an act that continues beyond its pages and maintains relevancy even in more contemporary literature like Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015). Overall, this chapter illustrates how art can influence the psychology of its audience, creating an affect of hope.

Wittman Ah Sing, the narrator of *Tripmaster Monkey* and a fifth-generation Chinese American, is a young playwright whose mission is twofold: to create art that builds communities, and to make Chinese American culture an accepted part of mainstream America. To do this, he decides to write a play honoring the history of Chinese Americans, a play that brings back "not red-hot communist Chinese—but

deep-roots American theater."[144] Through his play, Wittman hopes to pay tribute to the nearly-forgotten history of Chinese American theater and the cultural roots of Chinese Americans in the U.S. *Tripmaster Monkey* follows Wittman's life in the Bay Area as he imagines and writes this play. The apex of Wittman's journey is the actual staging of his play in Chinatown.

Wittman's play, based on the Chinese epic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, becomes fantastical as it breaks the bounds of time, space, and the fictional fourth wall, engaging the protagonist and audience alike. In this way, his play is a mirror of Kingston's novel, which sends its readers on a formal acid trip. Kingston begins the novel with an epigraph preparing readers for what they are about to experience: "This fiction is set in the 1960s, a time when some events appeared to occur months or even years anachronistically."[145] With this warning, her readers dive into their own psychedelic experience as they follow Wittman around San Francisco. Just like Wittman's play, the form of novel makes it a challenge to keep track of events and the passage of time.

The ideals inherent in Wittman's play and Kingston's novel—peacemaking and community-building—are supported by their boundary-breaking forms. These goals are also linked to the ideals of 1960s counterculture. In Irwin Unger's 1974 study of the counterculture, he sums up its ideals as "a passion for free expression, a contempt for the cultural values of the middle class, and a common disdain for the

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144. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 141.

145. Kingston, epigraph.

constituted authorities and established institutions."[146] Those involved in various facets of the counterculture generally argued that institutional powers benefitted from controlling the population through capitalism and middle-class values, and engaging in perpetual warfare; in order to change this system, they had to opt out of it. In a more recent study (2011), Timothy S. Miller breaks down the values of the counterculture into five "ethics": the ethics of dope, sex, rock, community, and cultural opposition.[147] In line with Unger's description, Miller explains that all these ethics form a challenge to the prevailing American culture, rejecting "the industrial for the agrarian, the plastic for the natural, the synthetic for the organic" and challenging "the formidable Western tradition of setting the individual on a pedestal."[148] In its ideals, the counterculture prioritized community values over those of the individual.

This idealized view of the counterculture has, of course, been challenged and was not always realized. Thomas Frank, for example, argues that rather than being anti-industrial and anti-capital, the 1960s counterculture was molded by capitalism, just as the world of business was influenced by the counterculture. Frank argues that in line with countercultural ideals, "Consumer capitalism did not demand conformity or homogeneity; rather, it thrived on the doctrine of liberation and continual transgression."[149] In addition to questioning just how much the counterculture and

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146. Unger, *The Movement,* 77.

147. Miller, *The Hippies*.

148. Miller, xiii-xiv.

149. Frank, *Conquest*, 20.

capitalism were actually at odds, scholars have argued that the 1960s counterculture was exclusive in its community building and inherently sexist and racist.[150] For all of these critiques, however, there are scholars like Unger who argue that even if the ideals of the counterculture were not quite realized, they were still foundational to the movement. In fact, writers like Curtis White view the results of the counterculture quite optimistically. He writes, "In my sixty-eight years on the planet, the only political thought that I have seen succeed to any degree in creating conditions where intelligence, mutual caring, beauty, and health counted for more than power and profit has not been socialism, or communism, or democracy, and certainly not capitalism. It has been counterculture."[151] For people like Curtis, the counterculture was about finding communities guided by the ethics laid out by Unger.

Nothing created the feeling of community quite like the use of psychedelics, which were prevalent in countercultural movements. A 1994 study on LSD confirms this. In this study, the main participants "all agreed that tripping is a shared experience that can provide the basis for close personal bonds."[152] Anecdotes about LSD often include feelings of communal unity that radiate outward until one feels a sense of connection with the entire world. For example, in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Tom Wolfe interviewed Clair Brush, a person who unknowingly consumed LSD

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150. See Lemke-Santangelo's *Daughters of Aquarius*, the essays collected in Braunstein and Doyle's *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, Bloch and Umanski's *Impossible to Hold: Women and Culture in the 1960s*, Kelley's *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, and Wei's *The Asian American Movement*.

151. White, *Living in a World*, xvi.

152. MacDonald and Agar, "What is a Trip," 14.

for the first time by drinking spiked punch at a party. Her description of her trip highlights this feeling of community:

> I found a man I knew not very well but with whom I felt simpatico from the first time we met. [. . .] He held me for a long time and we grew closer than two people can be . . . our bones merged, our skin was one skin, there was no place where we could separate, where he stopped and I began. This closeness is impossible to describe in any but melodramatic terms [. . .] the person in question remains very special in my life, and I in his, though we have no contact and see each other infrequently . . . we share something that will last.[153]

Because of this and other seemingly positive effects, LSD advocates distinguished psychedelics from "bad" drugs. In Miller's explanation of the ethics of dope, he explains that for those in the counterculture, "dope was good and drugs were bad."[154] Dope included psychedelics, chemicals that could alter one consciousness and change one's outlook on the world. Edward Rothstein explains that those who used LSD during this era hoped to "descend into madness and emerge enlightened, seeing the world anew."[155] Change in worldview would, in theory, lead to change in politics and in practice. Robert Hunter, author of *The Storming of the Mind* (1971), explicitly tied LSD's ability to ignite innovation and political change: "This major new medium

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153. Wolfe, *The Electric*, 275-76; ellipses in original.

154. Miller, *The Hippies*, 1.

155. Rothstein, "How LSD Altered," para. 7.

carries the message of change, real change, as opposed to a mere change in flags, label, underwear, or oaths of loyalty."[156] For Hunter, real change was the ability to shape one's politics beyond one's culturally-limited view. This change began with creating larger connections between people and expanding one's definition of community.

The formal structures of both Wittman's play and Kingston's novel have similar effects: compelling their audiences to see the world anew and, thus, to expand their imagined community. Both Wittman and Kingston are deeply invested in portraying spaces and communities in ways that highlight the particular histories that bind people together, whether that binding is as small as San Francisco's Chinatown or as large as the globe. Wittman has learned that the use of psychedelics is one of the ways to experience these connections. Early in the novel, we find out that Wittman has experienced so many drug-induced trips that he no longer needs drugs to experience the same effects. He explains, "I practice having hallucinations," and he makes it his way of life.[157] Wittman practices tripping, allowing him to experience how "the margins between human beings, and between human beings and other creatures, disappear" as a way to truly connect with other people.[158] These connections create the foundation for expanding one's sense of community and, therefore, hope for peace.

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156. Hunter, *The Storming*, 99.

157. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 44.

158. Kingston, 88.

This idealistic attitude behind the use of psychedelics is mirrored in the political movements of the 1960s. The Asian American Movement, for example, expanded the definition of community to encompass all Asian Americans, as opposed to a definition based on national or cultural descent. This formation was based on increasing political visibility, with the goal of enacting political change. In Colleen Lye's "Asian American 1960s," she describes this political formation: "This was a cultural nationalism that imagines an identity that was by definition based on political affinity rather than on given ethnic descent, that was in potential and oft in practice inter-ethnic, interracial, and feminist, animated by the achievements of revolutionary movements abroad." [159] As this description suggests, the Asian American Movement's imagined community was global, with a central focus on the Vietnam War and Asians under attack overseas. In fact, Lye explains that opposition to the war framed "racial analogies between disparate kinds of minority oppression that formed the very premise of Third World coalition," a collation among minorities in the United States and with non-white populations abroad.[160]

Lye, in line with many other critics, sees *Tripmaster Monkey* as an archetypal novel of the 1960s.[161] In fact, Lye argues that *Tripmaster* was the first Asian

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159. Lye's "Asian American" 213-14.

160. Lye, 216.

161. For examples, see Monnet's "Maxine Hong Kingston as a Counterculture Writer"; Arthur's "The Chinatown and the City: Kingston, Kerouac, and the Bohemian Bay Area"; Crow's review of *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*; and Nelia C. Seshachari's interview with Kingston, "Reinventing Peace."

American novel to periodize the era.[162] Kingston, herself, acknowledged this in one of her earlier interviews about the novel:

> The 1960s were some of the most important years of my life and they go into forming me and the country the way it is now. I wanted to write a story about that period that came after the beatniks and before the hippies. I think of it as a dark time because Asian American theater was really dark then—there wasn't any. . . . There wasn't a modern Chinese American theater. That was a dark time full of possibilities and I don't think anybody else has written about that period.[163]

In this way, Kingston was influenced by history and its unmet potential. Her novel simultaneously pays homage to the era while using it as inspiration for a new imagining.

Tripmaster Monkey is more than just a reimagined history of the 1960s in its plot, however; its form is also a nod to the era. In an interview with Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Kingston explained how the language of the 1960s inspired her: "This is what I loved about growing up in the Sixties—there was this new language that people were inventing for new psychedelic states, and spiritual states, and for political activities—you know, street theater and things that they were inventing."[164] For Kingston, this new language was full of new possibilities, possibilities that could

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162. Lye, "Asian American," 214.

163. Kingston, "Talking with the Woman Warrior," 77.

164. Kingston, "Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston," 166.

create new literary forms tied to the history and its potentiality. As a result, Kingston's novel is not merely nostalgic for the era of her childhood, nor does it lament missed opportunities. Rather, Kingston looks to the past as an opportunity for inspiration, and she uses this inspiration to mold the overall aesthetics of her book.

In the spirit of inspiration, Kingston created a protagonist who embodies the 1960s spirit and puts his energy into creating art with a social purpose. In an interview with poet Marilyn Chin, Kingston told her, "Somehow we [artists] are going to solve the world's problems with fun and theater. And with laughter. The reason that this is all set in the Sixties, too, is that the monkey was here, in the Sixties."[165] Kingston's monkey is Wittman Ah Sing, a beatnik playwright who sees the world with psychedelic eyes. The playful, experimental form of Wittman's play, as well as the form of the novel in which it takes place, inspire a sense of possibility, a sense of hope, in their audiences.

Section 2: Tripping in San Francisco

The first chapter of *Tripmaster Monkey* introduces the synchronous nature of the setting and the novel's form. Set in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, the narrative is focalized through Wittman as he takes a walk. Realizing that he is not truly experiencing the world around him, Wittman makes the conscious decision to open his senses: "He had walked this far into the park hardly seeing it. He ought to let it come in, he decided. He would let it all come in."[166] Wittman opens his mind,

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165. Kingston, "Writing the Other," 90

166. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 4.

practicing his psychedelic way of living in the world. The narrative itself takes on a third-person stream of consciousness, focalized through Wittman. His thoughts become a word association of literary and pop culture allusions. For example, in thinking about the Golden Gate Bridge, Wittman thinks of death and suicide: "So far, two hundred and thirty-five people, while taking a walk alone on the bridge . . . had heard a voice out of the windy sky—Laurence Olivier asking them something: 'To be or not to be?' And they'd answered, 'Not to be.'"[167] This one sentence refers not just to Shakespeare, but to Laurence Olivier's version, a prime example of the mix of cultural references influencing Wittman's character. As Wittman walks, he allows his thoughts to be guided by everything he sees, hears, and smells, changing subjects with each new sensory intake. Wittman is conscious of his meandering thoughts, and justifies, "Whose mind is it that doesn't suffer a loud takeover once in a while? He was aware of the run of his mind, that's all."[168] Sharon Suzuki-Martinez explains that Wittman is constantly "conscious of how texts create cultural and personal worldviews. . . . He connects texts to texts and texts to contexts." She ties this character trait back to the novel's title with a question: "and what is a con/text but a 'fake book?'"[169] The experience of reading this opening chapter, of following the run of Wittman's mind, becomes a trip, in both senses of the word, through one of San Francisco's landmark parks, and it sets the tone for the novel.

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167. Kingston, 3.

168. Kingston, 3.

169. Suzuki-Martinez, "Trickster Strategies," 166-67.

Wittman's heightened sensory experiences continue to drive the novel's psychedelic feel. For example, when riding a bus on the way to a party, Wittman's seatmate starts up a conversation. As they speak, surrounding lights catch his attention, and his thoughts are promptly distracted from their conversation: "Strange moving lights, maybe airplanes, maybe satellites, were traveling thought the air. . . . This voice kept going on beside his ear." After taking a quick moment to contemplate the lights in the sky, Wittman's attention is called back by the voice beside him, only to be re-distracted by a strange vision: "He looked at the girl again, and she looked blue-black in the dark. He blinked, and saw sitting beside him a blue boar. Yes, glints of light on bluish dagger tusks. Little shining eyes. Not an illusion because the details were very sharp. . . . A trick of the dark? But it was lasting."[170] Wittman's seatmate remains a boar for the rest of the bus ride, even as he touches her "tusk": "Bony. Solid. Therefore, real, huh?"[171] Although sober for this entire scene, Wittman attributes the experience to "drug flashes" altering his perception of reality.[172]

Wittman's character, with his sober hallucinations and sensory overload, exemplifies the pervasiveness of the counterculture of 1960s San Francisco. Rothstein explains that there was "was nothing 'counter' about this culture; it was prevalent." He reflects back on the ubiquity of LSD during this era: "I, and seemingly everyone else I knew, ingested that culture even if not the drug itself, not even realizing how strange

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170. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 77.

171. Kingston, 79.

172. Kingston, 81.

that culture was."[173] Wittman has ingested this culture. His experience of living in the world, and the stream-of-consciousness narrative that is formed from it, reflects the strangeness of it. In fact, Wittman is living at the very center of the counterculture. As Anthony Ashbolt sums up in *A Cultural History of the Radical Sixties in the San Francisco Bay Area*, "[San Francisco] had captured the media imagination by 1966. Hundreds and then thousands of 'flower children' had flocked to San Francisco in search of love, peace, community and self." These flower children, or hippies, whom Ashbolt describes as "a distinctive subcultural product of American society" fled to the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco.[174] This area, along with its proximity to the student movements of Berkeley, made San Francisco a central force of the counterculture. Estimates place about 15,000 hippies living in the Haight by June of 1966.[175]

Even before hippies, the Beat culture, one of the first subsets of counterculture, developed in San Francisco in the 1950s. Unger describes the beat culture as "a kind of bohemia. . . . It had its characteristic dress—the girls wore peasant blouses, wide skirts, and long hair tied in a pony tail or worn loose; the boys wore army clothes or corduroys and had begun to grow beards."[176] San Francisco's City Lights Bookstore became "headquarters" for the Beats.[177] According to Ashbolt,

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173. Rothstein, "How LSD Altered," para. 3.

174. Ashbolt, *A Cultural History*, 86.

175. Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 301.

176. Unger, *The Movement*, 40.

177. Unger, 42.

Beat culture combined "stream of consciousness prose, jazz cadences, mystical philosophy, ecological awareness, drug induced introspection, sexual ambiguity and . . . radical critiques of the social order."[178]

This cultural influence on *Tripmaster Monkey* is evident in its full title: *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*. Not only are tripping and "drug induced introspection" key elements of Beat culture, but the influence of jazz comes through in the idea of the "fake book" as well. Lourdes Bañez defines a fake book as "a book of basic melodies of jazz. This book may include the beginning chords of basic tunes. The musician usually improvises what follows."[179] For Kingston, the sense of possibility inherent in the fake book inspired the structure of her novel. In fact, Kingston has admitted that *Tripmaster Monkey* was originally about 1000 pages long. She decided to cut it down and make it a "fake book" so that others could continue the stories.[180] In an interview with Paul Skenazy, Kingston explains that her novel as a fake book "should be all-continuing."[181] In this way, the jazz influence of *Tripmaster Monkey* works synchronously with Kingston's trademark form: the talk-story. In all of her works, Kingston draws on the Chinese oral tradition of talk-stories. She describes this tradition: "Thousands of years of people . . . passed on history, genealogy, skills by speaking it. And they managed to take this across the ocean and

178. Ashbolt, *A Cultural History*, 39.

179. Bañez, "The Talk Story," 19.

180. Kingtson, "Reinventing Peace," 205.

181. Kington, "Coming Home," 111.

to give it to me. . . . I don't reconstruct it . . . in the sense that I don't invent what was before. I invent the next stage; I go on."[182] Just as Kingston has used the stories that have been passed on to her, she encourages her readers to continue her stories.

The form of the talk-story, as well as its underlying similarities with Beat culture, is evident in Wittman's stream-of-consciousness style of thought and conversation. Ashbolt explains that the "Beats experimented with literary and poetic style, bridged gaps between popular and high culture (through, for instance, jazz-poetry performances) and tried to stretch the imagination of an entire generation."[183] Wittman attempts to do just this, in both his art and his way of being. For example, Wittman's conversations almost always become monologues riddled with allusions to both "high-culture" literature and popular culture. Additionally, when he performs his art, it feels like jazz. After Wittman reads some of his poetry to Nanci, she tells him "You sound black. . . I mean like a Black poet. Jive. Slang."[184] Wittman overreacts to this statement and explains, "I am really: the present-day U.S.A. incarnation of the King of the Monkeys."[185] Wittman is trying to get Nanci to "stretch" her imagination with his performance of poetry in the style of the talk-story. However, he does not realize that her response is trying to demonstrate his performance's connection to jazz,

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182. Kingston, "Maxine Hong Kingston on Memory."

183. Ashbolt, *A Cultural History*, 39.

184. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 32.

185. Kingtson, 33.

as well. This misunderstanding illustrates the underlying similarities between the jazz-influenced Beat culture and Wittman's engaging in the tradition of talk-story.[186]

In addition to the aesthetic influence of the Beats, we can see Beat influence in Wittman's actions, most specifically in his questioning of the social order. For example, when he begins management training at the toy store, he uses the first meeting to argue that the company should donate toys to charity. When he raises a motion on his idea, he is told that "This isn't a voting meeting." Wittman responds, "What do you mean this isn't a voting meeting? I think every meeting in a democracy should be a democratic meeting." In response, Wittman was written up as being "disruptive at meetings."[187] Later, at a conference/sales pitch from Mattel, Wittman gives up trying to change corporate culture entirely. After everyone in attendance sings out "You can tell it's Mattel. It's swell," Wittman reacts, "Oh, god, I don't belong on this planet."[188] Even after Wittman is fired from his job, he continues to question the nature of work under capitalism. At the Unemployment Office, Wittman is asked about his past employment history. When he responds that he was a playwright, the Employment Counselor asks, "Did you get paid for them? Paid for writing plays?" In admitting that he only got paid for sales at the toy store, the

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186. This misunderstanding is mirrored in some early reviews of Kingston's novel. The *Publisher's Weekly* review by Charles Elliott (para. 1), for example, argues that *Tripmaster* is "densely overwritten, tedious and fatally mired in a literary device." What's missing in this critique is the understanding of the cultural influences—both Chinese and U.S. countercultural—on Kingston's style.

187. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 61.

188. Kingston, 62.

counselor suggests that Wittman remain a realist in searching for a job. Wittman, continuing his fight against the social order, responds, "I am a realist. . . . It's the business of a playwright to bring thoughts into reality."[189] Wittman's stance against what is socially acceptable as a career highlights his philosophical alignment with the Beats.

Finally, the physical descriptions of Wittman present a clear image of his association with the Beat culture. The narrator describes, "The ends of [Wittman's] moustache fell below his bearded jawbone. He had tied his hair back, braided loose, almost a queue but not a slave queue, very hip, like a samurai whose hair has gotten slightly undone in battle."[190] On his date with Nanci, they walk around North Beach and he takes her to City Lights Book Shop, which he didn't even know was famous "until the *Howl* trial, which he had cut school to attend."[191] As they walk to the bookstore, he admires Nanci's "old-fashioned Beat chick" look and talks endlessly about Jack Kerouac.[192] When he asked Nanci why she did not return home to Los Angeles after finishing college at Berkeley, he feels a sense of community with her, one that establishes their ties to Beat culture: "People who have gone to college . . . people who wear black turtleneck sweaters have no place. You don't easily come home, come back, to Chinatown, where they give you stink-eye and call you a saang-

189. Kingston, 240.

190. Kingston, 12.

191. Kingston, 21.

192. Kingston, 20.

hsü lo, a whisker-growing man, Beatnik."[193] In this moment, Wittman's bonding with Nanci links their physical appearances to their countercultural philosophies.

Because the novel is focalized through Wittman, who is deeply shaped by the place and time in which he lives, the novel's form also becomes an embodiment of its setting. The chapter "Twisters and Shouters" is the epitome of novel's form affectively evoking its setting. In this chapter, Wittman attends a friend's house party. Here, each room is almost like a different party within itself.[194] In one room, people are tripping on psychedelics. Wittman looks in on them from the hall and thinks, "So this is how the psychedelic state looks from the outside, that is, through the eyes of a head straight from ear to ear."[195] Because Wittman himself is sober, readers also begin this scene "straight," observing with sense of objectivity. However, the description of the trippers quickly shifts from a general observation of their appearance to inhabiting their point of view:

> The stoned heads didn't look especially strange, a little high and red-eyed maybe, but they were smoking too, and topping mescaline and/or lysergic acid with god knows what else. . . . They were not outwardly extraordinary; they were not actually flying around the room or going through the changes from amoeba on up. They were looking Neanderthally at the fire because we were

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193. Kingston, 10-11.

194. This party scene is reminiscent of Thomas Pynchon's "Entropy," published in 1960. In this short story (2568), a different activity is taking place in every room. In one, people are taking Benzedrine pills, in another, a "15-inch" speaker is described as people listen to "27 watts' worth" of *The Heroes' Gate at Kiev*.

195. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 87-88.

> cavemen for a long time. Then it will be a campfire on the lone prairie because we were cowboys for a generation (and more, counting the movies). And then—atomic flashes.[196]

The pronouns of this description begin in the third person, and the narrator points out that the trippers were not physically reflecting their mental experiences. Readers are thus removed from this psychedelic experience. In a few sentences, however, the pronouns shift to second person, and "we"—as in the trippers, Wittman, and readers—become wrapped up in the trip, experiencing human evolution. The shifting form of language includes everybody in the experience of the trip.

The experience of tripping in this chapter harkens back to Kingston's epigraph that the 1960s were "a time when some events appeared to occur . . . anachronistically."[197] For those at the party, time and history are not linear. Technology—like the movies and bombs mentioned in the previous quotation—has only enhanced the feeling of being out of one's time. In fact, while some trippers experience evolution at a quick pace, another room of the party experiences the end of time while watching *Dr. Strangelove,* the iconic film about the Cold War. They watch the ending when the bomb is dropped: "Mushroom clouds. It was the last scene in *Dr. Strangelove*—the graceful puffing of H-bombs. Poof. Poof. Poof. 'We'll meet again. Don't know where, don't know when, but I know we'll meet again some sunny da-a-ay.' . . . The End. The End. The End means the end of the world."[198] At this point

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196. Kingston, 88.

197. Kingston, epigraph.

198. Kingston, 96.

in *Dr. Strangelove*, nuclear holocaust is inevitable due to the trigger of the impossible-to-disarm Doomsday Machine, and world leaders have begun to plan how they might survive to repropagate humanity. In addition to reflecting the cultural feeling of living in a time of constant threats of war, this film is a summation of the trips that the party-goers have, from nuclear destruction to the (re)start of human life. *Dr. Strangelove* unites everyone—both stoned and straight—who lives in the culture immersed in the Cold War and heading into Vietnam. Even the "Neanderthally" trippers in the other room feel as if they are in movies, experiencing "atomic flashes," connecting everyone at the party.

Later, this cultural feeling becomes a lived experience as someone plays the sounds of WWII on the loudspeaker as a prank. Tripped out and unaware of what's happening, the party attendees, both sober and stoned, react to the noise as if it is real. Readers, not yet provided with the explanation for the noise, are also pulled into the trip:

> But suddenly a whistling started up, higher and higher, then a supersonic jet war fighter plane crashed through the sound barrier right there inside the house. . . . What the fuck was that? Oh, my god, they've gone and done it. This is it. Blown up the planet. Nothing left but noise. The Bomb. . . . People laughed and giggled, holding their faces. Some of them might have been screaming. . . . And the skull and the planet split into bowls like mush brains.[199]

199. Kingston, 110-11.

Readers experience these sounds and events as focalized through the panicked party-goers. Feelings of confusion and dread become part of the reading experience. It is not until the next paragraph that readers are informed: "What it was were the sounds of World War II playing full blast out of the loudspeakers, of which there were twelve."[200] This prank is reminiscent of the Merry Pranksters, Ken Kesey and his group of followers who performed "Acid Tests" throughout the bay area in the 1960s. For these tests, the Merry Pranksters would gather rooms full of people and create sensory overload—through music like that of the Grateful Dead, films, strobe lights, randomly-placed microphones plugged into to an overload of speakers, etc.—while using LSD. According to Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* a nonfiction, first-hand account of the Merry Pranksters, one would pass the test if one "could take LSD for the first time and go through all that without freaking out."[201] At this point in Kingston's novel, characters and readers alike experience the panic induced by an acid test, bringing them closer together through this shared experience.

The novel makes the connection between community-building and psychedelics explicit when Wittman's consumption of psychedelics—for the first and only time in the novel—leads to the first group discussion of his play; until this moment, his play has been a solitary notion. The morning after the party, Lance cooks his "magic" omelet that contains psychedelic mushrooms.[202] Wittman takes two

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200. Kingston, 111.

201. Wolfe, *The Electric*, 233.

202. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 131.

servings, not to get stoned, but simply because "he was hungry." At first, Wittman feels like he is crashing, like "somebody's bringing [him] down."[203] He turns this feeling around, however, when he pulls out the manuscript of his play and begins to tell everyone about it. He points to his desire to bring back Asian American theatre, and others start to become excited about his idea. Suddenly, Wittman's play starts to become realized. The narrator injects:

> Anybody American who really imagines Asia feels the loneliness of the U.S.A. and suffers from the distances human beings are apart. Not because lonesome Wittman was such a persuader but because they had need to do something communal against isolation, the group of laststayers, which included two professional actors, organized themselves into a play.[204]

Eating the drug-laced omelet motivates Wittman to share his vision, and it allows his friends to enter it and make it their own. In fact, they start to improvise based on Wittman's idea right then and there. When Wittman leaves after breakfast, it is on a feeling of hope: "A feeling went through Wittman that nothing wrong could ever happen again—or *had* ever happened. It's very good sitting here, among friends. . . . My chosen family. We're about to change the world for the better."[205]

These trippy moments reproduce the affective feel of the sixties; most importantly, they illustrate the community building enabled by a trip. In this way, the

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203. Kingston, 133.

204. Kingston, 141.

205. Kingston, 149.

role of the tripmaster is crucial since their job is to create a positive experience for those who are tripping. In fact, the role is so important that in 1964 Timothy Leary and Ralph Metzner compiled a guidebook for tripmasters: *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. They write, "A psychedelic experience is a journey to new realms of consciousness," and in this journey, a guide is necessary to "enable a person to understand the new realities of the expanded consciousness."[206] Leary and Metzner explain that it is the tripmaster's role to guide those having a psychedelic experience through three stages: one of liberation and transcendence, one of hallucination, and one of re-entry from the trip. One of the guide's most important roles is to create a positive re-entry. Leary and Metzner argue that to avoid paranoia and negativity during re-entry, the guide should enhance the sense of community and tell trippers to: "put your trust in your companions and exercise sincere love towards them. . . . The exercise of love is very important; do not forget this!"[207]

At the party in *Tripmaster*, one of Wittman's friends, Charley, acts as a tripmaster for a group of attendees who want to ensure that they have a positive trip. He enables the sense of companionship that Leary and Metzner call for in their manual. Charley's skill as a tripmaster is described through Wittman's witnessing:

> Charley was beautifully keeping his charges from wigging out. He got them to be inhabiting the same movie. Here we are, miraculously on Earth at the same

206. Leary and Metzner, *The Psychedelic Experience*, 11.

207. Leary and Metzner, 86.

> moment, walking in and out of one another's lifestories, no problems of double exposure, no difficulties crossing the frame. Life is ultimately fun and doesn't repeat and doesn't end.[208]

With a nod back to the communal *Dr. Strangelove* experience, the characters are walking in and out of each other's lives at the same moment, embodying the same movie. Again, the pronouns shift from third-person "them" to second-person "we," bringing the readers into the frame as well. The description of such a harmonious trip mirrors Todd Gitlin's description of the 1960s in the introduction to his memoir, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. Gitlin writes, "Life is always lived in common . . . but in the Sixties it seemed especially true that History with a capital H had come down to earth . . . and that within History . . . people were living with a supercharged density: lives were bound up with one another, making claims on one another, drawing one another into the common project."[209] Although the partygoers experience History with a capital H in terms of the Cold War and the threat of bombs, there is also great possibility in this connection. With the help of a tripmaster like Charley, "we" can get through the trip in a meaningful way.

Like the partygoers, readers are not on their trip alone. Although the novel is focalized through Wittman, the ominous narrator is the ultimate tripmaster.[210] Her voice guides readers as they move from chapter to chapter. At the end of "Trippers

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208. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 103.

209. Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 7.

210. In fact, in "Asian American 1960s" (215), Lye describes the narrator as "intrusive."

and Askers," for example, she tells readers, "Our Wittman is going to work on his play for the rest of the night. If you want to see whether he will get that play up, and how a poor monkey makes a living so he can afford to spend the weekday afternoon drinking coffee and hanging out, go on to the next chapter."[211] Most importantly, the narrator shifts the point of view when necessary—and it is usually necessary when Wittman's ego and sexism needs to be challenged. For example, after Wittman and Taña have sex for the first time, the narrative shifts abruptly from Wittman's to Taña's point of view: "Taña thought about complimenting Wittman on how nice and soft his penis was. But he was such a worrier over masculinity that he'd take it wrong."[212] This is the first time that readers are provided with another person's view of Wittman. Later, when Wittman asks Taña if she'll make French onion soup for him, the narrator steps in to call out his sexist assumption about Taña's responsibilities as a wife: "This monkey man of hers has lessons coming to him."[213]

In this way, the feminist leaning of the narrator provides a necessary guide for both readers and Wittman. Kingston described the narrator as a woman who "is actually pushing Wittman Ah Sing around, telling him to shut up." This feminist narrator has her roots in Chinese mythology. Kingston explained that the narrator is inspired by Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Compassion, who "takes a rock and throws it on top of the monkey for 500 years." For Kingston, the narrator does this to Wittman, keeping him in place by giving him "different difficult human situations to contend

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211. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 35.

212. Kingston, 157.

213. Kingston, 213

with." These situations become "wonderful opportunities" for Wittman to grow.[214] In this way, the narrator acts as a guide through Wittman's–and, therefore, the reader's—trip. She helps both Wittman and the reader get through the trip in a way that creates a positive sense of possibility for personal and communal growth and change.

Section 3: Theatrical Tripping

Wittman's play is the ultimate example of how the sensation of tripping can inform aesthetics, and, therefore, infuse the audience with a positive sense of possibility. The play is an epic review, one in which the fourth wall disintegrates. It becomes a space in which the actors and audience alike come together to create a piece of temporal art, defining themselves as individuals, and as individuals within a community. Wittman's script allows for creation, growth, and change. This was a conscious decision on the part of the playwright, one that he explains at the first rehearsal: "We have so much story, if we can't tell it entirely on the first night, we continue on the second night, the third, a week if we have to. He hands out Xeroxes of the script, which has lots of holes for ad lib and actors' gifts."[215] In presenting this malleable artistic work, Wittman has many lofty goals, including the creation of authentic characters for Asian Americans, reestablishing Asian American theater, giving the women in his family a peaceful space for their vaudeville routine,[216] and

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214. Kingston, "Writing the Other," 88.

215. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 277.

216. Wittman's mother and aunties performed for war rallies during World War II. In reflecting on how they have no work without war (190), Wittman tells Taña, "The highpoint of a life shouldn't be a war. . . . I have to make a theater for them without a war."

creating a community for people feeling as lost as he does. At the first rehearsal, Wittman is fully supported by his community. In reflecting on how many people came to rehearsal, he thinks, "They came because what Bolesalvsky said is true: 'Acting is the life of the human soul receiving its birth through art.' Everyone really does want to get into the act."[217] The play is a means of bringing these souls together.

In fact, so many people come to be a part of the play that even Wittman finds himself growing in unexpected ways. One of the first events at the initial rehearsal was the unexpected arrival of a kung fu gang. The leader of the gang, Little Dragon, comes with his own script to incorporate into the show. The kung fu gang happens to be composed of "F.O.B.s," (fresh-off-the-boat immigrants) and Wittman, fully invested in creating an American identity, judges them as such: "F.O.B.s run in a gang, no cool American independence."[218] Little Dragon takes over the rehearsal, running through his script as Wittman and the rest of the cast watch. Moments of Little Dragon's script foreshadow the mind-expanding experience of the play to come. Wittman describes one moment in which Little Dragon morphs in front of everyone's eyes:

> Suddenly, the Little Dragon did the most amazing thing. He sucked in his cheeks and puckered his lips into a tight 8. He knelt and concentrated himself into a ball, from which his hands were flapping. . . . Those tiny thalidomide wings flew him up. He landed in a crouch, and looked at everyone with

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217. Kingston, 276.

218. Kingston, 279.

> inhuman eyes. It was the weirdest, most foreign thing an American audience will ever see; that man changed into a bee.[219]

This moment stretches Wittman's imagination, as well as his desire to maintain control over the artistic process, and he decides to merge Little Dragon's script with his own.

Like this mind-expanding moment with Little Dragon, Wittman's play is designed to give the audience a new theatrical experience. The basis for the play is the Chinese epic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms,* a 14th-century historical novel, attributed to the author Luo Guanzhong. Kimberly Besio and Constantine Tung describe the novel as "vast and sprawling, covering a span of over a hundred years and with over 1000 named characters appearing within its pages."[220] The novel includes battles, schemes, relationships, and is made up of both history and legend. This "vast and sprawling" story is a fitting foundation for Wittman's play, which is full of so many characters, stories, and allusions that it is impossible for the audience to follow everything. For example, during the third night of the play, the audience simultaneously watches "trappers, hunters, and prospectors" in the Yukon, a cast of characters in the "Great Bright City," "bad Caucasians" planting dope in a grocery store, a puppeteer performing on the street, Rudyard Kipling walking through San Francisco's Chinatown, and so much more.[221] The story itself gets lost as the narrative moves between characters and settings. This, for Wittman, is the point: "As in real

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219. Kingston, 280.

220. Besio and Tung, *Three Kingdoms*, xvii.

221. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 296-99.

life, things were happening all over the place. The audience looked left, right, up, and down, in and about the round, everywhere, the flies, the wings, all while hearing reports from off stage. Too much goings-on, they miss some, okay, like life."[222] Wittman's play is not a neat story delivered for audience consumption; rather, it is designed to engage the audience's mind and senses.

Wittman achieves this effect by translating his "naturally high" worldview into the form of his play;[223] in other words, he guides his audience through a trip. The hallucinatory feel of his play comes through in moments that become almost fantastical. One example of this occurs as chaos breaks out:

> At the climactic free-for-all—everybody fights everybody everywhere at once. The hundred and eight bandits and their enemies (played by twenty-five actors) knock one another in and out all entrances and exits. . . . Everybody chased one another outside and battled on 22nd avenue among the cars. Audience hung out of window. Ten thousand San Franciscans, armed with knives and shouting, "Death to capitalists," attack the railroad office, and set fire to Chinatown.[224]

As more events occur simultaneously, and as the fourth wall continues to break down, the audience is overwhelmed with sights and sounds, simulating the feel of an acid trip.

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222. Kingston, 298.

223. Kingston, 133.

224. Kingston, 301.

The aesthetic trip that is Wittman's play is remarkably like the hallucinatory experiences described in *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964), the manual for tripmasters written by Leary and Metzner. Leary and Metzner help prepare tripmasters by describing some of the most frequent forms of hallucinations that occur when one takes psychedelics. They title one of these forms "The Magic Theatre," in which the hallucinators experience the world as if they are in a magical play. They describe:

> The play of forms and things becomes the play of heroic figures, superhuman spirits and demi-gods. . . . Heroes, heroines, celestial warriors, male and female demi-gods, angels, fairies—the exact form of these figures will depend on the person's background and tradition. Archetypal figures [appear] in the forms of characters from Greek, Egyptian, Nordic, Celtic, Aztec, Persian, Indian, Chinese mythology.[225]

Wittman's play is just this—an eclectic mix of the archetypal forms of his background. Appearances are made by the heroic characters of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and other characters from Chinese mythology. But appearances are also made by early Asian American writers like Jade Snow Wong, Edith and Winifred Eaton (a.k.a. Sui Sin Far and Onoto Watanna), as well as cultural figures like

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225. Leary and Metzner, *The Psychedelic Experience*, 69-70.

Rudyard Kipling, the Soong Sisters,[226] Anna Chennault,[227] and John Wayne. Just as the entire novel of *Tripmaster Monkey* has been filled with allusions to the literature and culture of Wittman's background, so is his play. The audience and readers alike get to experience the world as represented from Wittman's point of view.

Critics argue that the aesthetic chaos of the play redefines the genre of theater and the expectations surrounding Asian American literature. For example, Derek Parker Royal argues that Wittman's play goes beyond "experimental theater" to be something more radical:

> [Wittman] brings to his stage a pastiche of discursive genres that, taken together, radically undermine any traditional notions of theater: family drama, comedy, improvisation, performance art, dramatic monologue, narrative epic, social protest, autobiographical confession, song and dance, and what Jean-Paul Satre would call *litérature engageé*, just to name a few.[228]

While Parker comments on the genre-bending nature of Wittman's play, Wu Na argues that the inherent radicality of Wittman's play subverts the idea of hybridity in

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226. Carrie Gracie explains that the Soong Sisters were three women from Shanghai whose father sent them to study in the U.S. in the early twentieth century. All three sisters married Chinese politicians and exerted political influence on through their husbands.

227. John A. Farrell explains that Anna Chennault, born Chen Xiangmei in 1923 in Beijing, was a war correspondent during World War II. The journalist met and married an American general, Claire Chennault toward the end of the conflict. Like the Soong Sisters, Chennault wielded political influence, first through her husband and then through her own means after his death. Chennault was an insider in the Nixon administration and helped to sabotage efforts to end the Vietnam War.

228. Royal, "Literary Genre as Ethnic Resistance," 142.

Asian American literature. Rather than reading Wittman's play as a hybrid of American and Chinese cultures, Na asserts that the play goes beyond hybridity: "instead of presenting a stable, unitary vision, the play celebrates a protean, unquantifiable one, which cannot be apprehended from any individual perspective."[229] In other words, it is impossible to break Wittman's play into "Chinese" and "American" parts; rather, it is uniquely Chinese American.

In reflecting on the genre-breaking accomplishments of Wittman's play, I argue that it is the formalization of tripping that achieves these effects. In many ways, Wittman's play embraces the counterculture's "ethics of dope," which, as Richard Alpert describes, has led the way for "a whole new model of the human brain. . . . You can travel anywhere, back into childhood, back through evolutionary history, cosmic history, down your own bloodstream or nervous system."[230] Wittman creates a piece of art that provides a space for his audience to travel, witness history, and become a part of the show. The trippy form of Wittman's play is what narrotologists would describe as "unnatural." In fact, Jan Alber defines an unnatural narrative as one that "denotes physically impossible scenarios and events . . . as well as logically impossible ones."[231] Unnatural narratives must also be unconventional. Genres like science fiction may not follow the laws of physics, but they would not necessarily be considered unnatural because they still follow generic conventions. Unnatural

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229. Na, "Beyond the Celebration," 266.

230. Quoted in Miller, *The Hippies*, 2.

231. Alber, "Impossible Storyworlds," 80.

narratives, on the other hand, do not present readers with the expected. Brian Richardson explains that the unexpected elements produce a "*defamiliarization of the basic elements of narrative*."[232] This defamiliarization forces the audience to rethink their understanding of narrative forms, expanding their minds and forcing them to be more flexible. In this way, they work to "make sense of the impossible and rethink the domain of the possible."[233] In regard to Wittman's play, Yan Gao describes this sense-making work as a sort of game for the audience. She writes, "The arrangement of unfamiliar materials. . . in run-on episodes renders Wittman's narrative sufficiently difficult and confusing as to elevate the reader's function in the reading game to an unusually privileged condition."[234] In other words, the reader must work hard to make sense of Wittman's play, and individual readers may come to different conclusions, depending on where their focus lays. This notion of exercising the mind ties directly back to the idealistic use of psychedelics. In *The Storming of the Mind*, Hunter asserts that the "mind trains with drugs. . . . It exercises its muscles and gets itself ready to take the leap into the future."[235] By taking his audience on a theatrical acid trip, Wittman has helped train his audience's minds in preparation of a future full of possibility.

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232. Richardson, "What is Unnatural," 34. Italics in the original.

233. Alber, "Impossible Storyworlds," 83.

234. Gao, *The Art of Parody*, 113.

235. Hunter, *Storming*, 99.

Section 4: Expanding Minds and Communities

The possibility of building an Asian American community is one of Wittman's main goals for his play. He hopes to inspire this goal in his cast and his audience alike. As a "naturally high" person who has experienced many psychedelic trips, Wittman is now constantly aware of the connections that he has with the people and places around him.[236] Part of Wittman's awareness is an understanding of the history that binds the community together. Therefore, Wittman's goal with his play is to help the audience see these historical connections as well. By writing a play that takes his audience on an aesthetic psychedelic trip, Wittman hopes his play will expose and strengthen the community that exists among them all.

Wittman believes that art, particularly the performing arts, can achieve this community building; however, he feels that contemporary American art has failed the Asian American community. We get a sense of these beliefs at the beginning of the novel when he first discusses theater with Nanci. She complains how all the acting roles for her are stereotypical images of Asians; they are never fully-formed characters. As she speaks, he thinks, "I've got to wrest the theater back for you."[237] Additionally, when Wittman and Nanci go into City Lights Bookstore, Wittman blissfully imagines all the famous poets who used to hang out in this spot, but he realizes the severe lack of Asian American writers in this imagining. The narrator sympathetically interjects: "He, poor monkey, was yet looking for others of his

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236. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 133.

237. Kingston, 25.

kind."[238] To find others of his kind, Wittman looks to his history. For example, at the breakfast after Lance and Sunny's party, he describes the theatrical ritual of the Forty-Niners:

> Our great-great-grandfathers, brought it [theater] to the Gold Rush. Every matinee or evening for a hundred years, somewhere in America, some acting company was performing . . . then it disappeared. I don't know why. The theater has died. . . . I want to bring it back—not red-hot communist Chinese—but deep-roots American theater. We need it.[239]

Wittman understands that knowing and celebrating a community's culture and history is key to strengthening—and growing—that community.

Throughout *Tripmaster*, Wittman recognizes the history of his community everywhere he goes. For example, when he walks from North Beach and into Chinatown with Nanci, Wittman's thoughts are on how the buildings reflect the immigration history of this area: "You can't pick out just exactly which Italian store or Chinese store or red or red-white-and-green festooning it is that demarcates the change, but suddenly or gradually—depending on how closely you're keeping a lookout—you are in the flak and flash of Chinatown." From there, Wittman focuses on the banners hanging about the street, banners indicative of the precarious status of Asian Americans:

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238. Kingston, 21.

239. Kingston, 141.

> A red banner strung above the street announces the Double Ten parade and its sponsors, the Chinese-American Anti-Communist League and the Six Companies. They'll leave the banner up there all this month before Double Ten and afterwards into winter. To show Immigration and the HUAC [the House Un-American Activities Committee] hot communists that we Chinese-Americans, super Americans, we too better dread the red-hot communists.[240]

Through Wittman's prospective, readers no longer see just a banner in Chinatown; rather, they experience the history of Chinese immigration, legalized American racism, and American anti-Communism. The banners force recognition of the tricky ethnic and political balances that Chinese Americans must make as minority citizens in the United States. As Lisa Lowe explains: "The life conditions, choices, and expressions of Asian Americans have been significantly determined by the U.S. state through the apparatus of immigration laws and policies, through the enfranchisements denied or extended to immigrant individuals and communities, and through the process of naturalization and citizenship."[241] In this case, Wittman sees the Chinese American community doing all they can to separate themselves from the communist tinge of their ancestral country. This separation is especially important to do at this point in history because it is only with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that restrictions on Asian immigration loosened.[242]

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240. Kingston, 26.

241. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts,* 7.

242. See the introduction to this work for a detailed history of immigration restrictions.

Asian immigration history continues to reemerge in the narrative of Kingston's novel. For example, when Wittman is in line at the Unemployment Office, he finds himself waiting behind an elderly Chinese woman, Mrs. Chew. She tells him that he reminds her of "the boys from China I met on Angel Island," an island off the coast of San Francisco that was used to hold immigrants from 1910 to 1940. Mrs. Chew explains how some of the women waiting on Angel Island would hang themselves from the showers. She explains how the other women "wouldn't try to stop her because she had her reason—she failed her interrogation or she couldn't bear the waiting any long or nobody came for her or she was being deported."[243] This story highlights why, just moments earlier, Mrs. Chew is insistent on teaching Wittman the "right" answers for the unemployment card. She tells him to memorize ten answers because "One wrong answer, they send you inside the office" for "interrogation."[244] In her dealings with government processing, from immigration to unemployment, Mrs. Chew has learned that one wrong answer can have terrible consequences.

This lesson has been foundational to Wittman's experience, too. At his parents' home, there is a model village that illustrates just how prepared Asian immigrants had to be for government interrogation. When explaining the model to Taña, Wittman calls it a "memory village," and explains, "Should the I.N.S.—Immigration—raid this room, looking for illegals, they can take this model as evidence and report our asses. Everyone who claimed to have come from here studied this model and described it to

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243. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 234.

244. Kingston, 231.

Immigration. It is not a model *of* anything."[245] Everyone in Wittman's family who immigrated into the U.S. memorized the details of this model. Even Wittman, who is a fifth-generation American, knows the details of the memory village. Not only does he have the physical attributes of the model memorized, but he knows detailed information and stories behind the model. For example, he knows that twenty trees in one particular field belonged to his great-great uncle, and his grandmother dropped a water jar near the temple because boys were whistling at her.[246] The importance of this memory village and its role in helping people through immigration interrogation continues to shape Wittman's outlook on government interaction. Although Wittman is an American citizen, his family's past experiences illustrate his precarious position as someone who is perpetually outside the American narrative, someone who can be interrogated as an outsider at any time.

Historically, the Cold War and anti-Communist sentiment only served to strengthen the insider-outsider contradiction illustrated by the memory village. During the Cold War, containment of China was the de facto policy for the U.S. relationship with China. Beginning in 1949, the U.S. used economic and political influence to try to prohibit China's global influence and expansion. The U.S. put into place strict embargoes and created military alliances with China's neighbors. Additionally, Americans were prohibited from visiting China, and Chinese in the U.S. were forced to cut ties with their families abroad.[247] The containment efforts

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245. Kingston, 192.

246. Kingston, 192.

247. Wang, "Roots and Changing Identity," 199.

continued the political tradition of exclusionary policies. It also heightened the insider-outsider contradiction for Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. This contradiction is why Wittman insists on reminding that he is a fifth-generation American,[248] and why he insists on bringing back theater that is "not red-hot communist Chinese—but deep-roots American theater."[249] The systematized anti-Asian bias and national exclusion is also why citizens of San Francisco's Chinatown feel compelled to create and advertise a group called the Chinese-American Anti-Communist League.[250]

There are moments throughout the novel in which Wittman's insistence of his American-ness reflects his own internalization of his country's systemic racism. Readers get a glimpse of this in their introduction to Wittman as he walks through Golden Gate Park. He walks by a family of Chinese immigrants and judges their looks:

> Mom and shambled-legged kid were each stuffed inside of about ten homemade sweaters. Their arms stuck out fatly. . . . Next there came scrambling an old lady with cane. She also wore one of those do-it-yourself pantsuit outfits. On Granny's head was a cap with a pompom that matched everybody's sweaters. The whole family taking a cheap outing on their day offu [*sic*]. Immigrants. Fresh Off the Boats in public. . . . So uncool. You

248. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 41.

249. Kingston, 141.

250. Kingston, 26.

> wouldn't mistake them on sight if their pants weren't so highwater, gym socks white and noticeable. . . . Can't get it right. Uncool. Uncool. The tunnel smelled of mothballs—F.O.B. perfume.[251]

Wittman's fight against being treated as an outsider in his own country leads him to judge recent immigrants whose looks and actions, in his opinion, call attention to their outsider status and feed into stereotypes about Asians.

Wittman's internalized racism continues to make him feel that other Asian's actions reflect upon him and the entire community. For example, when reminiscing on his time in college, he thinks, "Good thing that when he was in school, an American of Japanese Ancestry had played on the Cal football team, and there had been a couple of A.J.A. pompon girls too. Otherwise, his manhood would have been even more totally destroyed than it was."[252] In other words, Wittman is glad that other Asian Americans called more attention to their American-ness than their Asian-ness to work against the outsider stereotype of the community. Wittman sees this as a personal reflection on himself. Wittman's internalization comes through at the Mattel conference as well. Here, Wittman notices that all of the Asian Americans sit together "near the front. They've set up the section where we're all supposed to come and sit, which they'd done to the school cafeteria of every school he ever went to."[253] In Wittman's eyes, grouping together only serves to call more attention to the separate

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251. Kingston, 5.

252. Kingston, 6.

253. Kingston, 59.

status of Asian Americans. Because of this, he has spent his whole life distancing himself from his community. In school, he sat on the opposite side of the library from the group of Asian Americans,[254] and he even becomes upset when an Asian American girl sits next to him—the only other Asian American—on the bus.[255] When reflecting on his desire to remain separate from Asian cultural groups, he sums up the attitudes he held in school, and still holds today: "I am not going to the prom with the only Chinese girl in class. I am not going to be the one to room with the foreign-exchange student."[256]

In Wittman's fight against Asian American stereotypes, he has created a contradiction within his own life. He distances himself from those of his community because he does not want to be judged as a homogeneous group that is seen as foreign; however, this distancing has made him feel as if he is lacking community. When he first walks into the Mattel conference, he does not see any other Asian Americans and thinks, "Where was the fraternité? Wherever I go, I do the integrating. My very presence integrates the place."[257] Yet moments later, when the group of Asian Americans walk in and sit together, he views their grouping with negative judgement and keeps his distance from them. Wittman's contradiction—to long for and simultaneously distance himself from—the Asian American community is the

254. Kingston, 118.

255. Kingston, 73.

256. Kingston, 59.

257. Kingston, 57.

result of internalized racism. W.E.B. Du Bois famously describes internalized racism as double consciousness in his work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). For Du Bois, double consciousness is the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." According to Du Bois, an African American cannot have a true sense of self because their own self-consciousness is tied directly to how others—particularly white Americans—perceive them. Du Bois continues, "One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[258] Further scholars have illustrated that this sense of two-ness is experienced—in diverse and varying ways—among other racialized groups. For example, Monica M. Trieu and Hana C. Lee conducted a recent sociological study surrounding internalized racism in the Asian American community. After conducting 52 "in-depth" interviews,[259] they conclude that Asian Americans "engage in practices that perpetuate IRO [internalized racial oppression]" by "reacting to, and reproducing negative stereotypical perceptions of Asian identity" like desiring blonde hair and blue eyes, and "using the anti-immigrant term *FOB*, "[260] an expression Wittman himself uses. Throughout his narrative, Wittman demonstrates his negative self-perception, yearning for community yet distancing himself from groups that could

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258. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 3.

259. Trieu and Lee, "Asian Americans," 67.

260. Trieu and Lee, 79. See also Wang's "'Double Consciousness,' Sociological Imagination, and the Asian American Experience."

highlight any cultural differences that can be seen as "negative" through the dominant group's gaze.

Wittman's sense of "twoness" is reflected even in his own name. Before Wittman gets married, we learn that his father "tried to name him after" Walt Whitman.[261] Scholars have analyzed the connection between Wittman Ah Sing's name and Walt Whitman's name and poems, highlighting the connection by creating portmanteaus (e.g., "One's-Self Ah Sing," "Ah Sing the Body Electric," etc.").[262] One of the more striking Whitman-Wittman connections in the novel occurs as readers learn of the origin of Wittman's name. This moment highlights Wittman's similarity, yet difference, from the poet. After Wittman climbs Coit Tower, he is overlooking the San Francisco Bay, including Angel Island, and thinking about his ancestral connection to this place. He imagines it "waiting for us to come back and make a theater out of the Wooden House, where our seraphic ancestors did time. Desolation China Man angels."[263] At this point, Wittman uses the words of Whitman to say "a mantra for" Angel Island:

> *Facing west from California's shores,*
> *Inquiring, tireless, seeking what is yet unfound,*
> *I, a child, very old, over waves, towards the house of maternity, the land of migrations, look afar,*

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261. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 161.

262. See Arthur, "The Chinatown," 250, for example.

263. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 161.

Look off the shores of my Western sea, the circle almost circled. . . ."[264]

This selection is from Whitman's "Facing West from California's Shores," which evokes the idea that the expansion of the U.S. has reached its end with the Pacific Ocean. Whitman's poetry and early journalistic writing supported U.S. expansion and imperialism.[265] As a journalist, Whitman advocated for expansionist policies while simultaneously arguing that American culture and the Anglo-Saxon race were superior.[266] Betsy Erkkila argues that Whitman's "expansionist political policies" carry into his poetry.[267] In "Facing West from California's Shores," the speaker is almost melancholic that expansion has ended at the shore. The speaker looks west, beyond the shores of the U.S., and names Asian areas like "Hindustan," "Kashmere," and "the spice islands."[268] David Simpson argues that although Whitman brings in images of Asia into his poetry, as he does with "Facing West," it has no complexity; rather, it becomes an "image, a symbol for a solitary reverie" for the ethnocentric speaker.[269] The poem ends with parenthetical, restless questions, "(But where is what

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264. Kingston, 162.

265. Erkkila, "Whitman and Empire." See also Simpson, "Destiny Made Manifest."

266. For example, Erkkila quotes (59) an editorial Whitman wrote at the end of the Mexican War of 1848: "What has miserable, inefficient Mexico—with her superstition, her burlesque upon freedom, her actual tyranny by the few over the man—what has she to do with the great mission of peopling the New World with a noble race? Be it ours, to achieve that mission!"

267. Errikila, 60.

268. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 186.

269. Simpson, "Destiny Made Manifest," 194.

I started for so long ago? / And why is it yet unfound?)"[270] These questions underscore the idea that although the U.S. has finished its geographical founding, it is still trying to find its character and identity. The speaker is likewise restless, and his thoughts beyond the shore work to highlight his ethnocentrism.

With Wittman using these lines as a mantra, the poem takes on new meaning. Like Whitman's speaker, Wittman himself is feeling unrest and discontent, particularly in terms of finding his community and being seen as a part of the cultural fabric of the U.S. However, as Wittman faces West, he understands the complexity and history of the relationship between the U. S. and Asia. Wittman faces his ancestral homeland and Angel Island, the prison-like island his ancestors faced when migrating. Unlike the speaker of Whitman's poem who describes Asia in an increasingly exotic manner, Wittman is of both shores. In quoting a canonical American poet like Walt Whitman in this particular location, Wittman Ah Sing is illustrating an identity that is both firmly American with an acknowledgement to his Chinese ancestry. He is also bringing an awareness to Whitman's ethnocentrism.

The connection between Wittman and Whitman continues with the form of the novel. Just as Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is full of the author's songs in poetry form, *Tripmaster Monkey* is almost entirely Wittman Ah Sing's "songs" on various topics. In fact, critics like James T. F. Tanner go so far as to argue that the entire plot of *Tripmaster Monkey* is only there to provide "sufficient expanse for [Wittman's] solitary musings," in line with Whitman's poetry.[271] Additionally, many scholars

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270. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,* 186.

271. Tanner, "Walt Whitman's Presence," 61.

point out that the titles of many of Kingston's chapters are based on Whitman's poems.[272] The title of Chapter 1, "Trippers and Askers," for example is taken right from a line in Whitman's "Song of Myself": "Trippers and askers surround me,"[273] which is exactly what happens to Wittman at the party. The title of Chapter 2, "Linguists and Contenders," is also taken directly from the same poem: "Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through / fog with linguists and contenders, / I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait."[274]

More significantly, both Whitman and Wittman share similar idealistic goals with their art.[275] As Tanner explains, both artists are "concerned with the creation of a democratic community," which is based on "two things: respect for the individual and concern for the social order." Tanner highlights, however, that for both writers, "above all else, the self must be preserved while the community, one hopes, gradually evolves."[276] The theme of a democratic community comes through in both Whitman's poem and Kingston's chapter titled "A Song for Occupations." Whitman's "A Song for Occupations" is about the idea of equality among laborers. He writes, "Neither a servant nor a master I, / I take no sooner a large price than a small price. I will have my own whoever enjoys me, / I will be even with you and you shall be even with

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272. See Tanner, 64-68; Arthur, 250; and Patricia P. Chu, 122 to list a few.

273. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass,* 53.

274. Whitman, 54.

275. If we look beyonnd Whitman's white supremacy, that is.

276. Tanner, "Walt Whitman's Presence," 68.

me."[277] Wittman's "Song for Occupations" takes place at the Unemployment Office. There, he not only questions the lack of equality between occupations, but he goes even further to question the meaning of labor itself. When the unemployment officer asks Wittman if he got paid for writing plays, Wittman must remind himself that in this capitalist society, "If you don't make money, it doesn't count as work."[278] Still, Wittman stands up for himself as an individual instead of yielding to societal expectations of work. After his experience with the unemployment office, Wittman dedicates himself to the business of writing his play.

Wittman's (and Whitman's) idealistic artistic goals are embodied in his play. The goal of equality and community is first highlighted when Wittman discusses his idea with the poet from Yale. He says, "As a playwright and producer and director, I'm casting blind. That means the actors can be any race. . . . I'm including everything that is being left out, and everybody who has no place."[279] Wittman imagines a play that is racially equal, as well as one in which artistic hierarchies blur. During the breakfast after Lance's party, as Wittman's friends begin to go through the play and make additions of their own, Wittman realizes that equality is one of his goals: "Wittman thought whaddayaknow, I've written one of those plays that leave room for actors to do improv, a process as ancient as Chinese opera and as far-out as the

277. Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 353.

278. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 239.

279. Kingston, 52. This ideal is realized when the play is staged: the roles of the three Chinese warriors are played by a Chinese American, a Japanese America, and an American of European background.

theater of spontaneity that was happening in streets and parks. Everyone is a poet-actor adlibbing and winging it."[280] Later, Wittman realizes that in creating a play in which everyone can be involved, he is helping to build a community. In fact, in Trieu and Lee's study on internalized racism in the Asian American community, their recommendations to shift attitudes align with Wittman's goals. Their study illustrates that "it was exposure to three factors—ethnic and racial history, ethnic organizations, and coethnic social ties—that led to changes toward positive self-perceptions."[281] Wittman's play crucially checks all three of these factors and becomes an ideal way to create a positive sense of self and a positive sense of community for all those involved. As Wittman writes, the narrator highlights the importance of his labor: "[Wittman] spent the rest of the night looking for the plot of our ever-branching lives. A job can't be the plot of life, and not a soapy love-marriage-divorce—and hell no, not Viet Nam. To entertain and educate the solitaries that make up a community, the play will be a combination revue-lecture." The narrator ends the chapter by welcoming readers into this theatrical community by speaking directly to them: "You're invited."[282]

Section 5: Conclusion

The form of Kingston's novel mirrors that of Wittman's play—both are episodic, trippy, and challenging to follow—and the goal of simultaneously

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280. Kingston, 141.

281. Trieu and Lee, "Asian Americans," 78.

282. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 288.

entertaining and training the audience is inherent in both works. In an interview with Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Kingston describes her model for the novel, and it is a model that aligns with Wittman's play, too:

> For *Tripmaster Monkey* my model was the monkey stories, Sun Wukong, the Monkey King. I like the form of that saga because [in] this oral tradition every night the theater, or the storyteller, can tell one episode or two episodes or maybe three or four. No more than that. But then the next night you hear another episode. These episodes are all out of order; there isn't a linear sequence. You can go to the theater and maybe you'll see an episode that you never saw before and then you can figure where it might belong in the sequence in which you heard it. The listener or the reader, you, can put them into a sequence that you experience.[283]

Like these storytellers, Kingston writes in a way that engages her audience. She does not write a narrative that can be easily consumed. Rather, the reader must work to make meaning. Patricia Chu describes this writing style of Kingston as an "interactive reading strategy that emphasizes the texts' collaboration with various communities of readers." Chu, borrowing Roland Barthes' term, explains that Kingston favors "writerly texts," texts that "readers help to 'write' over 'readerly' texts, which readers passively consume."[284]

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283. Kingston, "Reading Back, Looking Forward," 164.

284. Patricia P. Chu, "*Tripmaster Monkey*," 120.

A formally challenging text like Kingston's engages the reader on several levels. First, as Gao describes, it gives the novel a "game-oriented nature."[285] This game-like experience aligns with how Alber describes unnatural and innovate narratives as "playfields for interesting thought experiments."[286] Beyond creating a sort of game or puzzle for the reader, a novel like Kingston's—and a play like Wittman's—has ethical implications. In forcing readers to actively engage with the storytelling, especially a story that does not align with expectations, innovative writers train minds to think about narratives in ways they might not have otherwise. This training then shapes the narrative of reality outside the page of the book or the theater. As Agniezska Soltysik Monnet frames it, these works are "consciousness-raising and consciousness-expanding."[287] This idea connects to the "fake book" nature of the novel, as described in the subtitle. Not only does Kingston's novel work as a sort of puzzle, but she also hopes that it is a starting point for the audience's own acts of creativity. In Paul Skenazy's interview with Kingston, he connects this goal to Wittman's play:

> It seemed to me that it was the parallel for you as a writer to what Wittman was trying to do by putting the community into the play and insisting that there was a place for everyone. And it underlined what you said in other

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285. Gao, *The Art of Parody*, 129.

286. Alber, "Impossible Storyworlds," 93.

287. Monnet, "Maxine Hong Kingston," 179.

> interviews, that you wanted people to write stories about the stories you write — that *Tripmaster* should be an urging to other creations.[288]

Part of the challenge of Kingston's novel—and her protagonist's play—is a challenge to continue the storytelling, to continue the creativity.

The innovative forms of both the novel and the play within the novel have led to critic misunderstanding. The reception to Kingston's novel was quite mixed. *The New York Times*, for example, argued that Wittman's character ultimately fails at community building:

> For all his talk of community building, Wittman, like his namesake, sings a Song of Himself. No one else achieves any reality in his telling. "I.I.I.I.I.I.I.I.," the aria of Monkey in "The Journey to the West," his favorite Cantonese opera, is the refrain Wittman wants to make his. No more head-bowing me-talk, the "me no likee" talk of Hollywood movie Chinese. For Wittman there is only a resounding I.[289]

Criticism was not only geared toward Wittman as a character, but also toward the form of the novel. For example, Charles Elliott writes that *Tripmaster Monkey* is "densely overwritten, tedious and fatally mired in a literary device," and "while much of the book is propelled by a bitter comic vision, many passages bog down in literary allusions, Wittman's often jejune introspection and the seemingly interminable scenes wherein the Monkey King holds center stage."[290] These critics miss the point of the

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288. Quoted in Kington, "Coming Home," 111.

289. Schreiber, "The Big, Big Show of Wittman Ah Sing," para 6.

290. Elliott, Review of *Tripmaster Monkey,* para. 1.

novel. Rather than engaging it as a "fake book," they become bogged down by the form. Rather than seeing the influence of the "talk story," as well as the author's mirroring of a psychedelic trip, they describe the narrative as meandering.

For all the critics who misunderstand the novel, there are many who have put the work in that the novel demands. In *Art of Parody*, for example, Yan Gao explores the influences, particularly the Chinese influences, on the form of *Tripmaster Monkey*. She quotes Kingston's thought process behind the novel: "'I'm going to die soon.' I thought, 'and I have hundreds of stories to tell. What am I going to do with all of that?' But what if I could write a fake book in which I suggested plots and in a few sentences sketched out entire novels? Then when people read them, they can improvise from those basic plots and they can finish the stories for me."[291] In line with my argument, Gao then connects the form of Kingston's novel to her protagonist's play. Gao writes, "Kingston's explanation may to some extent account for the abrupt truncation of some of her stories; more to the point, it foretells the degree to which her project functions in congruent simultaneity with Wittman's production."[292]

Similar to reactions to Kingston's novel, the critics within the novel also misunderstand Wittman's play. As Wittman reads some of the reviews to his actors, his frustration grows:

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291. Quoted in Gao, *The Art of Parody,* 144.

292. Gao, 144.

> I am sore and disappointed. Come on, you can't like these reviews. Don't be too easily made happy. Look. Look. 'East meets West.' 'Exotic.' 'Sino-American theater.' 'Snaps, crackles and pops like singing rice.' 'Sweet and sour.' Quit clapping. Stop it. What's to cheer about? You like being compared to Rice Krispies? Cut it out. Let me show you, you've been insulted. They sent their food critics. They wrote us up like they were tasting Chinese food.[293]

Wittman points out that all the reviews rate the play on a scale of how exotic it is for the "American audience,"[294] as if the play were not written by an American.

Kingston herself has had this same argument with critics. In 1982, her essay "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers" was published as a response to critics who focused only on the "exotic" nature of *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston writes,

> Now, of course, I expected *The Woman Warrior* to be read from the women's lib angle and the Third World Angle, the *Roots* angle; but it is up to the writer to transcend trendy categories. What I did not foresee was critics measuring the book and me against the stereotype of the exotic, inscrutable, mysterious oriental. About two-thirds of the reviews did this.[295]

Kingston argues that Asian American writers do not want to be defined as exotic, and they also don't want to be defined as not-exotic. Rather, they want to do away with

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293. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 307.

294. Kingston, 308.

295. Kingston, "Cultural Mis-readings," 55.

this standard of measure. She writes, "To call a people exotic freezes us into the position of being always alien—politically a most sensitive point with us because of the long history in America of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, the deportations, the law denying us citizenship when we have been part of America since its beginning."[296] Kingston's essay is a call for recognizing Asia American writers as American and as human.

In *Tripmaster Monkey*, Kingston's argument is channeled through her protagonist as she gives Wittman the final chapter, "One-Man Show"—Wittman's song of himself—as a platform for his response to critics. In line with Kingston's argument, Wittman tells his actors, "To be exotic or to be not-exotic is not a question about Americans or about humans."[297] He then points to future steps to change the cultural conversation around Asian American art, starting with visibility: "We [Asian Americans] need to be part of the daily love life of the country, to be shown and loved continuously until we're not inscrutable anymore."[298] Later, Wittman argues that Asian Americans are essentially being gaslighted by their own country: "We're not inscrutable at all. We are not inherently unknowable. That's a trip they're laying on us. Because they are willfully innocent. . . . They willfully do not learn us, and blame that on us, that we have an essential unknowableness."[299] One of Wittman's

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296. Kingston, 57.

297. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 308.

298. Kingston, 321.

299. Kingston, 310.

solutions is a call for more television air time. It is important to him that Asian Americans are not only seen in the space of the media, but they must be seen in a temporal sense, daily and continuously, to have create an affect on the social imaginary. Although this play helped Wittman find his own community of Asian American artists, he also wants them all to be viewed as part of the U.S. community. In responding to his critics, he asserts, "There is no East here. West is meeting West. This was all West. All you saw was West. This is The Journey *In* the West."[300] This argument could be a response to reviewers of *Tripmaster Monkey* as well. Critic Jane Yang, for example, asserts that Wittman "remains somewhere in a third space between the two cultures, having absorbed part of both but having also subverted both."[301] Wittman's response to Yang would be that he is actually not in a "third space," but is, rather, another example of the form American culture can take. Kingston makes a similar argument earlier in her "Cultural Mis-readings by American Reviewers." She writes, "Another bothersome characteristic of the reviews is the ignorance of the fact that I am an American. I am an American writer, who, like other American writers, wants to write the great American novel. *The Woman Warrior* is an American book."[302] Kingston's essay and Wittman's monologue call for reviewers to expand their idea of American culture.

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300. Kingston, 308.

301. Yang, "'The Tao Is Up,'" 104.

302. Kingston, "Cultural Mis-readings," 57-8.

Although *Tripmaster Monkey* takes place at the end of the 1960s, its message is apt for 1989, the year in which it was written. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan rose to power by painting himself as a solution to the "problems" of the 1960s. Bothmer sums up Reagan's relationship to the 1960s:

> In the 1960s and 1970s Reagan strongly and repeatedly criticized big government, liberals, and the era's permissive social ethos. His rhetoric as president was quite consistent with his previous public statements. Throughout his political life he argued for a return to a pre-1960s America. Once elected president in 1980, Reagan continued his assault on "the sixties." He called for an "American renewal" and vowed to do all he could to overturn what he viewed as the sins of the decade, which, he said, had damaged American education, morality, and the economy and had promoted crime and drug abuse.[303]

Kingston's novel brings readers back to the 1960s to counteract this view of the era and to act as a reminder of its ideals of community, equality, and creativity. John Lowe briefly touches on this notion when he describes the novel as "figuring a desire to restore the purifying, decentering, and often creative explosions of the turbulent decade in an age (the eighties) when Reagan's 'morning in America' seemed more like midnight" to writers.[304] Setting *Tripmaster Monkey* in the 1960s is more than just nostalgia, however. Rather, it allows for a re-appropriation of past forms to open up history for change. In resurrecting the 1960s, Kingston channels tripping, and the way

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303. Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*, 28.

304. John Lowe, "Monkey Kings," 112.

it alters consciousness, to inspire a sense of community, possibility, and creativity in a neoliberal moment.

Kingston's novel is not only apt for the 1980s, but its message continues to ring true in the contemporary moment. We can see its relevancy in a contemporary novel like Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer* (2015). Nguyen, a former student of Kingston's at UC Berkeley, is deeply invested in the connections between literature and peace. He and his parents came to the United States as refugees from Vietnam. Much like *Tripmaster Monkey*, Nguyen's novel takes on themes of war, memory, and their artistic representations. Specifically, it focuses on the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the lives of refugees in the United States.

The nameless narrator of *The Sympathizer* is a Communist mole, working undercover with "the general," who is heading a counterrevolutionary invasion of Vietnam from the United States, where they are living as refugees. Like Wittman, Nguyen's narrator is a man of duality: he is the illegitimate son of a young Vietnamese mother and a French Catholic priest, who never claimed him publicly; he has been educated in the United States and can navigate Western culture, yet he spies for the Communists. The novel, which takes on the form of the narrator's confession, opens with a description of this duality: "I am a spy, a sleeper, a spook, a man of two faces. Perhaps not surprisingly, I am also a man of two minds. I am not some misunderstood mutant from a comic book or a horror movie, although some have treated me as such. I am simply able to see any issue from both sides."[305] The

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305. Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 1.

narrator's dual nature is also his downfall. Ultimately, his ability to understand Western culture calls into question his Communist loyalties, and he finds himself in a Communist re-education camp, writing his confession that is the novel. As Louise Steinman describes, the narrator's "crime, or part of it, is sympathy for the suffering on both sides of the conflict."[306]

Similar to *Tripmaster Monkey*, *The Sympathizer* has a unique form, a picaresque of episodic memories in the style of a confession. The narrator's confession is a puzzle, making readers work to determine the context of the confession, as well as the validity of the narrator's memories—both what has been remembered and what has been forgotten. Additionally, Sarah Chihaya argues that the confession itself embodies multiple forms: "Formally, the novel . . . performs multiplicity with a showman-like flair, moving unpredictably from genre to genre . . . a spy novel, a war novel, an immigrant novel . . . historical fiction, a confessional novel, a farce, and a tragedy, with added dashes of the epistolary novel, drama, allegory . . ." and her list continues. She argues that no genre is "privileged . . . but they exist alongside and amid each other."[307] This juxtaposition of genres provides a fitting platform for the narrator's slippery character, putting readers in the mind of the narrator, forcing them to be of "two minds" as well. At moments, readers find themselves cheering on the counterrevolutionaries, feeling sympathy for these once-important men who find themselves in a strange country, feeling useless. In other

306. Steinman, "Maxine Hong Kingston and Viet Thanh Nguyen."

307. Chihaya, "Slips and Slides," 365.

moments, readers are disgusted by their actions, which include assassinations against perceived enemies in what seems like a futile mission. Sometimes readers are cheering for the narrator's success, while other times we feel he deserves the sad fate that has befallen him. Just as the genres "exist alongside and amid each other," the narrative structure allows for these conflicting views to exist, without privilege, within the mind of the narrator and readers alike. Chihaya argues that this form reflects an "ethics of recognition," an uncomfortable empathy that "that acknowledges the multiplicity of both perpetrator and victim."[308] The novel makes it impossible for readers to label specific characters or politics as "good" or "bad." Such a complicated ethics of recognition can only be presented in a complicated form, one that keeps readers actively engaged.

In addition to being "writerly" works that actively engage their readers, both *Tripmaster Monkey* and *The Sympathizer* are concerned with the role of art in creating cultural memory. Both Wittman and the nameless narrator are similarly concerned with how Asians are represented in American culture. When the narrator finds himself presented with a film script about the Vietnam War called *The Hamlet*—a hardly-disguised version of *Apocalypse Now*—he uses the opportunity to try to correct the simple representation of the Vietnamese in the movie. One of his biggest critiques is the non-human way that the Vietnamese characters are presented. He asks the director, the "Auteur":

> Do you think it would not be a little more believable, a little more realistic, a little more authentic, for a movie set in a certain country for the people in that

308. Chihaya, 369.

> country to have something to say, instead of having your screenplay direct, as it does now, *Cut to villagers speaking in their own language*? Do you think it might not be decent to let them actually say something instead of simply acknowledging that there is some kind of sound coming from their mouths?[309]

The narrator is hired as a consultant for the film, and his work is encouraged by his handler, Man, as a necessary act of patriotism. The narrator explains, "Perhaps the movie itself was not terribly important, but what it represented, the genus of the American movie was. . . . What mattered was that the audience member, having paid for the ticket, was willing to let American ideas and values seep into the vulnerable tissue of his brain and the absorbent soil of his heart."[310] The narrator has a number of victories in his consulting work: the Auteur included more Vietnamese characters with dialogue, and the narrator convinced him to cast Asian actors in these roles. Ultimately, however, the film still presented a mainly orientalist representation of the Vietnamese, and the narrator is not even recognized in the credits. As Rody explains, this subplot allows Nguyen to "actively interrogate the political violence of representation."[311]

Although the novel ends in a seemingly hopeless way for the narrator—his work on the film was a failure, and he is forced to flee the country to which he has dedicated his life—it ends with a proclamation of hope. As the narrator and his

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309. Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 132.

310. Nguyen, 173.

311. Rody, "Between 'I' and 'We,'" 397.

comrades are fleeing the reeducation camp, he exclaims: "And even as we write this final sentence, the sentence that will not be revised, we confess to being certain of one and only one thing—we swear to keep, on penalty of death, this one promise: *We will live!*"[312] This proclamation of hope seems to come out of nowhere. In a conversation between Nguyen and Kingston, Kingston summarizes the bleakness of the novel's end: "The country is lost. War is lost. Peace is lost. War is useless, and it is impossible not to take sides, and the story ends with the narrator in his rucksack . . . and they are getting out of the country . . . they're just going to escape and they are just asked to wait until a just cause comes again, but we don't know that a just cause will come because one hasn't come before." Through all this hopelessness comes the hopeful proclamation, which Kingston describes as a statement of "mere survival."[313] Leading up to this moment, however, the pronouns in the narrator's text shift from the first-person "I" to the second-person "we." Rody comments on the surprise of this shift: "It is unusual, to say the least, for a fictional protagonist to arrive in his ending not at a new place but at a new pronoun."[314] Although it can be argued that the narrator's mental state is breaking under interrogation at this point in his confession, the pronoun shift also signals a sense of collectivity, a sense of community, just as the shifting pronouns did in *Tripmaster Monkey*.[315] In Nguyen's own article about his work, "Dislocation is My

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312. Nguyen, *The Sympathizer,* 382. Italics in the original.

313. Quoted in Steinman, "Maxine Hong Kingston and Viet Thanh Nguyen."

314. Rody, "Between 'I' and 'We,'" 402.

315. In yet another connection to Wittman and *Tripmaster Monkey*, Rody (400) describes the narrator's "we" as "Whitmanian."

Location," he confirms that this "we" is more than just a mental breakdown. Nguyen writes, "The 'we' of the novel's conclusion is also the collective 'we' of revolution and solidarity, much missed, and much more suspect, in contemporary American literature."[316] The narrator powerfully describes the "we" who make up his community of refugees:

> Tomorrow we will find ourselves among strangers, reluctant mariners of whom a tentative manifest can be written. Among us will be infants and children, as well as adults and parents. . . . Among us will be men and women. . . . Among us will be the light skinned, dark skinned, and every shade in between. . . . Collectively we will be called the boat people, their name disturbs us. . . . But we are not primitives, and we are not to be pitied. . . . we still consider ourselves revolutionary.[317]

In this context, the narrator's "*We will live!*" is a powerful statement of hope and community-building in the face of such adversity. Such a message could not be more important in the contemporary political climate. In a conversation between Andrew Lam and Nguyen, Lam highlights the political nature of creating these communities through literature:

> I think it's kind of ironic in the sense that here we are at a time of really troubled history of our contemporary America, while the political definition of what an American is kind of shrinking, right? And we have this sort of racist

316. Nguyen, "Dislocation," 432.

317. Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*, 381-82.

> White House with "Build the Wall" as a chant. And you have two Vietnamese refugees sitting on stage talking about literature.[318]

Nguyen's creation of a community within his novel and through his readership becomes a hopeful act of resistance.

Like the end of *The Sympathizer*, *Tripmaster Monkey* concludes with a small but powerful act of hope. Although Wittman is dissatisfied with the reviews of his play, his monologue is not the final word in the novel. Rather, the kissing scene ends the novel on a powerful moment of community and possibility. After his monologue, Wittman, in an act of "democracy," has all his actors go around the circle and kiss one another. He explains, "In a democracy, Star Quality can be achieved. And it can be conferred; I can love anybody. I'm learning to kiss everyone equally."[319] His actors happily take part in this moment of connection with their fellow cast members. This act of kissing highlights the community that Wittman has built with his play. It is also an act of potentiality, embodying the potential for love and connection among people. Despite reviewers' misunderstandings, this moment highlights Wittman's success.

For Kingston and Wittman, the goal of community formation is tied directly to pacifism. In the middle of Wittman's final monologue, the narrator interjects her thoughts on how Wittman's play connects to this larger goal:

> Our monkey, master of change, staged a fake war, which might very well be displacing some real war. Wittman was learning that one big bang-up show

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318. Lam, "Viet Thanh Nguyen," 9.

319. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 329.

> has to be followed up with a second show, a third show, shows until something takes hold. He was defining a community, which will meet every night for a season. Community is not built once-and-for-all; people have to imagine, practice, and re-create it.[320]

For Wittman and Kingston, the goal is to widen the circle of one's community until war against any other human is no longer imaginable. This starts with small steps, like staging a play night after night. This worked for Wittman, who realized after staging of his play that the brothers in the *War of the Three Kingdoms* still lost, despite all their heroism and strategy. The end of their glorious battle was still defeat. The narrator explains that by "studying the mightiest war epic of all time, Wittman changed . . . into a pacifist."[321]

Kingston herself takes up Wittman's mission beyond the pages of *Tripmaster Monkey*. In an interview with Paul Skenazy after this novel was published, she explained the inclusion of Wittman's monologue: "That is why I wrote the show and then I wrote the speech, coming afterwards, because he's saying he's not satisfied yet. There's more work to be done. You need to answer his answers."[322] Kingston continued this work, returning to the character of Wittman two more times with the publications of *The Fifth Book of Peace* (2003) and *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life* (2011). In both of these texts, Wittman continues his search for community with a

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320. Kingston, 306.

321. Kingston, 340.

322. Kington, "Coming Home," 142.

goal of pacifism. In *The Fifth Book of Peace*, Wittman moves to Hawaii with Taña and their son. There, he had "something to write—the poem, the play that would stop the war."[323] In *I Love a Broad Margin to my Life*, an aging Wittman journeys to China, creating a new feeling of community with his ancestors' country. Kingston's life work—especially her return to the character of Wittman—highlights how the feeling of potentiality, the creation and maintenance of hope, is work that must be practiced continually. This feeling is embodied in the last sentence of *Tripmaster Monkey* when the narrator speaks to Wittman and, one could argue, the reader. Looking toward the future, the narrator tells us, "Dear American monkey, don't be afraid. Here, let us tweak your ear, and kiss your other ear."[324] With this final kiss, the feeling of possibility continues.

323. Kingston, *Fifth Book of Peace*, 72.

324. Kingston, *Tripmaster*, 340.

Chapter 2: Spaces of Hope in Susan Choi's *American Woman* and Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*

Section 1: Introduction

Susan Choi's *American Woman* (2003) is a fictionalized version of the 1974 kidnapping of Patty Hearst by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), a U.S. radical left-wing organization whose members committed acts of violence in the 1970s. The majority of the novel is told from the perspective of Jenny Shimada, a character based loosely on Wendy Yoshimura, who was a radical activist associated with the SLA. The novel begins with Jenny in hiding as a fugitive because of her role in bombing government buildings. Soon, Jenny finds herself in the middle of the kidnapping, acting as a caretaker for two kidnappers—Juan and Yvonne—and Pauline, the Hearst figure who has come to identify with her captors. The majority of *American Woman* takes place in a New England farmhouse, one of a number of locations in the novel that acts as a spatial expression of the characters' affective experiences. Like the farmhouse, the physical spaces in *American Woman* highlight the affective power of community as the characters form relationships to each other and their surrounding environments.

Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams* (2015) tells the story of Julio "Chino" Mercado, a young Ecuadorean and Puerto Rican American who lives in New York City's Spanish Harlem. Through his drug-dealing friend, Sapo, Chino crosses paths with Willie Bodega, a former Young Lord who has returned to his old neighborhood in an attempt to revitalize it. *Bodega Dreams* is a retelling of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The*

Great Gatsby. Like Jay Gatsby, Bodega uses his wealth to build an empire with the goal of impressing a past love. Like Nick Carraway, Chino becomes Bodega's confidant and is witness to his fall. Central to both *The Great Gatsby* and *Bodega Dreams* are the neighborhoods in which the stories take place. Before Chino meets Bodega, he sees Spanish Harlem as a prison to escape as soon as possible. After Bodega, Chino sees his neighborhood as something for which he can be proud. Bodega's work changes the affective experience of Spanish Harlem, and Chino comes to see the neighborhood's possibilities, inherent in its residents.

Together, *American Woman* and *Bodega Dreams* illustrate the affective power of communities in spaces once associated with repression and negativity. While Choi's novel offers insight into political formations and their influential abilities, Quiñonez's novel illustrates the power of cultural and artistic celebration. Moreover, both novels illustrate affective experiences as taking place through characters' relationships with their surrounding physical environments. Additionally, both novels are tied to activist movements of the 1960s and 1970s and thus to the ideals of the era. At the heart of Choi's novel are radical groups from this era. Before connecting with the kidnappers, Jenny is part of a small, unnamed group who has taken to bombing government buildings to protest the Vietnam War. During this era, there were about a dozen of radical groups—including the SLA—participating in hundreds of similar bombings. Bryan Burrough describes these radicals in a way that parallels the rise and fall of 1960s optimism: "The underground groups of the 1970s were a kind of grungy, bell-bottomed coda to the protests of the 1960s; their members were mostly onetime

student leftists who refused to give up the utopian dreams of 1968."[325] In addition to representing radical organizations like Jenny's group of bombers and the SLA, *American Woman* also portrays the Asian American Movement in stark contrast to the violent effort of the radicals.

In *Bodega Dreams*, Willie Bodega is a former member of the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican nationalist group founded in Chicago in 1959, but active as a social activist organization mainly between 1968 and 1972. During this time, chapters of the Young Lords emerged around the United States, and Jose Martinez founded the New York City chapter in 1969.[326] Juan Gonzalez, a cofounder of the Young Lords, describes the goals of the organization and other Latino nationalist movements of the time: "Inspired by the black power and anti-Vietnam War movements at home and by the anticolonial revolutions in the Third World, especially the Cuban revolution, most [movements] offered a utopian, vaguely socialist vision of changing America, and all of them called for a reinterpretation of the Latino's place in history."[327] The basis of the Young Lords' social activism was their thirteen-point platform, which included liberation for Puerto Ricans and "all third world people," education in their own language and culture, control of their own institutions, and socialism.[328] To achieve these goals, their main focus was education of Puerto Ricans. In *Bodega Dreams,*

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325. Burrough, "The Bombings."

326. Jeffries, "From Gang-Bangers to Urban Revolutionaries," 288-91.

327. Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 174.

328. Viet Nam Generation, Inc., "13 Point Program."

Willie Bodega's ideology is clearly influenced by his time with the Young Lords, and he tries to recreate some of the key elements of the thirteen-point platform in his development of Spanish Harlem.

In both *American Woman* and *Bodega Dreams*, 1960s politics play out in key spaces. In Choi's novel, Wildmoor, a crumbling New England estate; the farmhouse hideout; the courtroom; and internment camps take on pivotal roles in the formation of Jenny's politics. The communities she encounters in each of these spaces both influence and are influenced by their physical location. In Quiñonez's novel, the neighborhood of Spanish Harlem maintains a ubiquitous presence. The spaces within the neighborhood, including Julia de Burgos high school and the museums that Bodega supports, have a strong affective presence on the community. Many of the spaces represented in both novels have negative associations. The courtroom and internment camp in *American Woman*, for example, are historical spaces of dehumanization and repression for Asian Americans. In *Bodega Dreams*, Chino introduces El Barrio as a place where "fires, junkies dying, shootouts, holdups, babies falling out of windows were things you took as part of life."[329] However in both novels, new community formations begin to create a positive affect within these spaces. Both texts reveal the dynamic relationship between a space and the people inhabiting it. With pervasive and well-defined spaces, both Choi's and Quiñonez's novels illustrate how empathetic community-building can infuse space with an affect of hopeful possibility. Additionally, both texts illustrate the affective power of

329. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams*, 5.

literature itself. Based on stories embedded in the space of the U.S. cultural imaginary, both texts make minority points of view central to the American narrative.

Section 2: Domestic and Political Spaces in American Woman

American Woman is inspired by the events of the Patty Hearst kidnapping, which took place in February 1974 when the heiress was taken by the SLA as a political act. In May 1974, a few months after Hearst publicly declared her sympathies with her kidnappers, six SLA members died in a house fire after a shoot-out with the Los Angeles police. Hearst, along with SLA members Bill and Emily Harris, were not present at the fire, and they sought refuge in a motel in Anaheim, where they watched the fire on television. The three fugitives contacted sportswriter and activist Jack Scott, who connected them with Wendy Yoshimura and found them a place to hide: a farmhouse in Pennsylvania. Yoshimura had already been in hiding, with help from Scott, after her lover Willie Brandt was arrested for bombings around the Bay Area. With Hearst and the Harrises, Yoshimura took on a caretaker role since she was not as recognizable as the three SLA fugitives. The four fugitives eventually left Pennsylvania and regrouped back in California. In April 1975, the SLA committed a bank robbery in which a bystander was killed. Yoshimura and Hearst were driving switch cars for those involved in the robbery, so they did not take place in or witness the murder.[330] After the robbery, Yoshimura and Hearst shared an apartment with two other acquaintances for a little over a week before they were

330. In an interesting turn of history, Eric Bailey ("4 sentenced to Prison") details how sentences were handed out to four former SLA members for this murder in 2003, the same year *American Woman* was published.

arrested by the FBI. Although most of the media coverage was on Hearst's arrest and trial, Yoshimura was embraced and publicly supported by the Asian American community.[331]

In *American Woman*, Choi takes this basic story but changes the timeline by giving Jenny and Pauline a "lost year" between the shooting and their arrest. She also sets the shooting in the northeast rather than back in California. This extra year allows Jenny to spend more time with the SLA fugitives, an intimacy that is heightened by the small spaces that they inhabit together. Like the intimate spaces of Jenny's time underground, many of the spaces in Choi's *American Woman* are ones of confinement, both figurative and literal. Wildmoor and the farmhouse provide space for Jenny and the fugitives to hide from authorities, limiting their movements beyond these homes. The courtroom and internment camps represent literal historical confinement of Asian American rights, in general, and Japanese American freedoms, more specifically. These enclosed areas provide Jenny with a space for deep introspection. Additionally, the enforced intimacy of these spaces allows for, in Marta Figlerowicz's words, close "ongoing negotiations and exchanges between the self and its communities."[332] In studying Jenny and her communal interactions in *American Woman*, I argue that the confined spaces increase Jenny's awareness of affective exchanges—between characters, and between characters and spaces—allowing for the attempt to make sense of herself and her relationships to others. Jenny's

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331. Scanlan, "Domestic Terror," and Patricia P. Chu, "The Trials of the Ethnic Novel."

332. Figlerowicz, *Spaces of Feeling*, 4.

strengthened sense of self leads her to seek out communities and spaces with a more positive affect than those of her past.

The opening of *American Woman* highlights the powerful presence of space in the novel. The first pages follow Frazer as he drives through the Hudson Valley in his search for Jenny, who has gone into hiding after William's arrest. The opening sentences are devoid of Frazer's—or any other person's—presence and are solely focused on the place: "Red Hook is little more than the junction of a couple of roads, with a farm store, a church and a graveyard, a diner. And the post office, a small square cement building with RED HOOK NY 12571 spelled out in metal letters across the flat gray façade."[333] The place name of "Red Hook" not only opens the novel, but the post office description reiterates the specific setting in the next sentence. The small town of Red Hook, along with its graveyard and emphatically small buildings—a farm store, rather than a grocery store; a diner rather than a restaurant— establishes the presence of enclosed and intimate spaces. This heavy emphasis on place continues throughout the novel. In fact, in Penny Vlagopoulos's study of the fugitive underground spaces in the novel, she describes *American Woman* as having "obsessive focus on space, from the winding roads and farms of the Hudson Valley to the barren but claustrophobic safe house in the middle of a lost land, connected to nothing."[334]

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333. Choi, *American Woman*, 3.

334. Vlagopoulos, "The Beginning of History and Politics," 129-30.

These small, enclosed spaces force Jenny to confront her past and attempt to make sense of it. When Frazer finds Jenny, she has been hired to help restore Wildmoor, a crumbling, New England estate. Jenny describes her life at Wildmoor as "exceedingly small, finite, knowable. A world of twenty-off people or less, all living the rhythms of a distant time, more like her vague ideas of 1933 or even 1893."[335] To add to the finite feeling, Wildmoor as a physical structure seems to be on an island of its own. When Frazer first sees the house, he describes it as such: "The house is neither huge nor grand but eccentric, delicate, badly deteriorating and slightly sunken in the overgrown grass, as if adrift on a pale yellow sea."[336] Additionally, the people at Wildmoor do not know Jenny, nor do they attempt to know her, so her interactions remain shallow and provide no escape for her thoughts. As a fugitive, Jenny has created an alias for herself as Iris Wong, and she created "an autobiography that was neither too exciting nor too bland, too local nor too foreign, too complete . . . nor too full of strange holes." The work that went into Iris's backstory is soon found to be unnecessary because "Dolly [Wildmoor's owner] had never asked for it."[337] Jenny even took precautions to change her alias' ethnicity from Japanese to Chinese, but this is also unnecessary, as Dolly always refers to her as the "Oriental" girl who is restoring the property.[338] Jae Eun Yoo points out how Jenny "deliberately hides

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335. Choi, *American Woman,* 67.

336. Choi, 10.

337. Choi, 68.

338. Choi, 12.

behind the stereotypical images and thereby intensifies them" in this small town where only stereotypes of minorities exist.[339] Similarly, Patricia Chu argues that the "compelling interest" of the novel's plot is that "in hiding one's existence from the eyes of the state," Jenny must work against the ethnic political strategy of "becoming visible" by performing to her expected stereotype.[340] This contradiction, as Yoo writes, "tortures" Jenny."[341] In such a shallow, knowable environment with people who see her as a mere stereotype, Jenny is left alone with her own reflections.

The confined state of Wildmoor is one example of an affective atmosphere in the novel. Ben Anderson explains that affective atmospheres are "a class of experience that occur before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities. . . . atmospheres are the shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge."[342] In other words, affective atmospheres are the spaces in which human and non-human affects merge, creating a sense of identity, feeling, and experience. For Anderson, affective atmospheres are "interlinked with forms of enclosure—the couple, the room, the garden—and particular forms of circulation—enveloping, surrounding and radiating. Atmospheres have, then, a characteristic spatial form – diffusion within a sphere."[343]

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339. Yoo, "American vs. Woman," 102.

340. Patricia E. Chu, "The Trials of the Ethnic Novel," 542.

341. Yoo, "American vs. Woman," 102.

342. Ben Anderson, "Affective Atmospheres," 78.

343. Ben Anderson, 80.

These enclosed, intimate spaces blur the line between the affect of those who inhabit them and the feeling of the space itself. In an enclosed atmosphere, as Cameron Duff explains, "affects are autonomous . . . in that they reside neither in individual places nor in individual bodies but rather in the dynamic and relational interaction of places and bodies."[344] In Theresa Brennan's landmark *The Transmission of Affect*, she opens with a key question highlighting the feeling that Anderson describes: "Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere'?" Brennan explains that the atmosphere "literally gets into the individual. Physically and biologically, something is present that was not there before."[345] Anderson would argue that the reverse is true, as well: the individual literally gets into the atmosphere. Although Brennan does not explicitly point this out, her word choice of "room" in her opening question highlights the role of enclosed spaces. Readers would be less inclined to identify with her question had she used the word "building," for example, or even a generic word like "place." As Figlerowicz argues in her study of domestic spaces in modern literature, enclosed spaces bring awareness to the way affective experiences make their way into one's consciousness, allowing for the creation of subjectivity.[346]

344. Duff, "On the Role of Affect," 886.

345. Brennan, *Transmission,* 1.

346. Figlerowicz, *Spaces of Feeling*.

We can see the affective work of Wildmoor's atmosphere most strongly in the scene where Jenny is listening to radio reports of Watergate alone in one of its bedrooms. As the newscaster begins their report, Wildmoor's presence looms:

> The Watergate hearings began her first summer at Wildmoor. She listened to them as she worked, finally painting the upstairs bedrooms. . . . The radio she listened to was a cheap little transistor she'd found in the stables. . . . It could hardly hold on to a signal. . . . [she] tweaked and adjusted it constantly while she never stopped painting. The little radio taking on siftings of paint like an outward expression of static.[347]

Through the paint scrapings, Wildmoor is physically merging with the reports of Watergate. Additionally, the presence of the other inhabitants of Wildmoor adds to the atmosphere—not a politically-charged atmosphere, however, but the reverse. The people surrounding Jenny at Wildmoor are on their own island, even in regard to something as big as Watergate. They seem to not care, or maybe not even know, that the event is taking place. Even the radio—full or static and falling apart like its home—seems to want to tune out the news. Jenny thinks, "Sometimes Watergate felt surreal as a dream, because she had no one with whom to discuss it. . . . For them [the inhabitants of Wildmoor] there was no vivid convulsion in the lift of the nation. There was no odor of change on the air. There was not even the melancholy of national shame that the 'average American' felt. Theirs was a nation transcending such

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347. Choi, *American Woman*, 70-71.

temporal things."[348] This atmosphere of indifference dampens any political excitement Jenny starts to feel.

The affective atmosphere that Wildmoor and its inhabitants create in this moment is one that forces introspection for Jenny. The indifference of Dolly to Watergate—or anything political—stands in contrast to Jenny's past radical activism. For Jenny, nothing was more important than national politics, and her past actions were an attempt to exert political influence. She and William bombed buildings to try to stop the Vietnam War. They felt they could fight violence with violence. In fact, Jenny identifies her past self through her radical activism. She thinks, "Before, in her previous life, she had been a bomber." Jenny, her boyfriend William, and a small group of radicals had bombed government buildings, "mostly draft offices, always deep in the night when no one would be killed." At the time, "they'd known nothing better seized attention than violence, and that the rightness of theirs would be obvious, dedicated as it was to saving lives. They'd meant to persuade the most hawkish, resistant Americans, and been sure that they could."[349] While at Wildmoor, however, Jenny's optimism regarding their method of changing minds begins to waver. Jenny realizes that her "life at Wildmoor was the first time she was ever submerged in that part of the country she and William had meant as their audience against which they'd fought with such hope, and so little success."[350] Forced into

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348. Choi, 71.

349. Choi, 67.

350. Choi, 67. Jenny and William's audience were the "silent majority," which Matthew Lassiter (4-5) explains is Nixon's designation of the white voters that he

close quarters with her intended audience, Jenny starts to realize the futility of her past actions.

The affective atmosphere of Jenny's past life as a bomber also stands in stark contrast to her life at Wildmoor. Jenny recalls one memory of her past in which the atmosphere was politically-charged, unpredictable, and, fittingly, took place in a wide-open space. After planting a bomb in a San Franciscan building, Jenny regrouped with William and their fellow radicals on an apartment roof to watch the bomb go off. The roof's wide-open space added to the delirious, dizzy affect of the moment. As they waited for the explosion, they drank alcohol, smoked marijuana, and "thoroughly lost track of time." At one point, when Jenny tried to express her worry and discuss the deeper implications of the moment, William "teased" her, telling her, "You just worry."[351] Then, as a "sated drunkenness" overtook them, William began to touch Jenny sexually, halting any introspection she may have had.[352] Finally, when the bomb went off, Jenny began to "shake, violently," but

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strategized to "conceal class divisions among white voters" while maintaining a "color-blind" politics of individualism against affirmative action policies.

In President Nixon's "Silent Majority Speech," he called upon the silent majority to support the War in Vietnam in 1969. Nixon said, "To you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support. I pledged in my campaign for the Presidency to end the war in a way that we could win the peace. I have initiated a plan of action which will enable me to keep that pledge. The more support I can have from the American people, the sooner that pledge can be redeemed; for the more divided we are at home, the less likely the enemy is to negotiate at Paris. Let us be united for peace. Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that."

351. Choi, *American Woman,* 228.

352. In fact, Deborah Katz argues ("Listen to Your Body," 332) that as Jenny's sexual contact with William fades, so does her radical subjectivity."

William interrupted whatever she was feeling by reminding her why they did what they did, "as if she is a child": "Think of that being dropped onto people. . . . Balls of fire dropped down onto children. Little children who look just like you."[353] Jenny became angry at William's condescension, but there was no opportunity to reflect her anger. Contrary to Jenny's experience at Wildmoor, everything about this moment created an atmosphere that prevented introspection.

Like Wildmoor, the farmhouse that Jenny and the SLA fugitives use as a hideout lends itself to introspection. It has a distinct atmosphere due to the juxtaposition of a typical domestic space inhabited by extreme radicals. In fact, Jenny's first day at the farmhouse epitomizes Teresa Brennan's question: "Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere'?"[354] When Jenny walks into the farmhouse, she describes it as "eerily silent."[355] Although the house has all the usual items one would expect to see—curtains, furniture, etc.—Jenny realizes the eerie feeling is because "She didn't know where the fugitives were. . . . Whether they were upstairs, downstairs, or behind the closed door."[356] The atmosphere of the house is affected by the fugitives' presence, even if Jenny cannot see them. When she sees dust marks in the attic indicating that a bed has recently been moved, Jenny is disturbed, thinking, "Somehow this small confirmation that she

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353. Choi, *American Woman,* 230.

354. Brennan*, The Transmission of Affect,* 1.

355. Choi, *American Woman,* 96.

356. Choi, 94-95.

wasn't alone was less reassuring than startling, like the footprint on the sand in *Robinson Crusoe.*"[357] At the farmhouse, the affect of the atmosphere and the affect of the unseen fugitives are indistinct. As Ben Anderson explains, affective atmospheres may "proceed from and are created by bodies," but "they are not . . . reducible to them." This "quasiautonomous" experience of atmospheres creates "a kind of indeterminate affective 'excess' through which intensive space-times can be created."[358] We see the affective excess in this moment in the farmhouse. After walking through the house, Jenny sees the belongings she brought with her, and they are almost unrecognizable. Although she has done nothing other than slowly walk through the small house, she feels that "Frazer seemed to have brought her here, left her here, eons ago."[359] The eerie atmosphere is unsettling, to the point that it destabilizes Jenny's experience of time.

Weeks later, after Jenny has adjusted to the atmosphere of the farmhouse, the presence of a complete outsider heightens her awareness of the space. When the owner, Bob, stops by to check in on his tenants, his presence creates a strong tension. Figlerowicz describes this phenomenon: "Because we often do not immediately discern our affects, they lay us open to the people around us. The gap between our affective expression and our awareness of it makes us vulnerable to our environments."[360] In her own study of modern literature, Figlerowicz sees how "an

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357. Choi, 95-96.

358. Ben Anderson, "Affective Atmospheres," 80.

359. Choi, *American Woman,* 97-98.

360. Figlerowicz, *Spaces of Feeling,* 2.

outward environment, or another person, prompts characters and speakers to recognize [this] gap between their affective effusions and the introspective awareness that they have of these affects."[361] When Bob walks through the house, Jenny's awareness of the space heightens: "They had been living here with no thought for whomever the house was owned by, as if the house would vanish into the ground the instant they moved out. Now she saw the accumulated damage of months, the blackish-purple splash of spilled wine on the couch, the ashes and dirt that had darkened the carpet, the beer bottles kicked in the corners." Jenny's awareness extends beyond the physical elements of the house, however, and she becomes deeply aware of the physical traces of extreme radicalism: "the barn, with the block-mounted gun and the silhouette shot full of holes . . . the pasture, where the grass was stamped flat in an oval-shaped course."[362] Jenny's heightened awareness of her current atmosphere leads to a realization: the radical atmospheres in which she has surrounded herself have changed her personality. When Bob kindly says goodbye, Jenny is surprised that he does not seem more suspicious of what he's just seen. She realizes, then, how her environments have changed how she interacts with strangers: "Jenny tried to remember that most people trust. . . . It's people like us, she thought, who mistrust everyone."[363]

Residing in this intimate space with the fugitives forces Jenny to confront her own radical past in juxtaposition to their current activities. As Vlagopoulos points

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361. Figlerowicz, 3.

362. Choi, *American Woman,* 193.

363. Choi, 194.

out, when Jenny "confronts the corrosive potential of the underground . . . she is able to scrutinize the ethics of violence—and by extension, the radicalism of the era as a whole."[364] In a space like the farmhouse, Jenny cannot help but confront the radicalism of the SLA. Through political discussions with the fugitives and in witnessing their actions, Jenny finds both similarities and differences between herself and them. She sees her past radicalism embodied in their extremist language, but it no longer holds weight for her. To Jenny, the fugitives seem young and immature. She thinks, "Frazer would have laughed at her if she'd said this to him. Juan and Yvonne were only a few years younger than she was, twenty-two or twenty-three. Pauline had just turned twenty."[365] In thinking about their ages, she realizes just how similar she used to be:

> At twenty-three she'd been beginning her life underground, and she couldn't say she hadn't also been undisciplined, and terrified, and aflame with self-pity. She'd done and said stupid things out of anger, and an almost suicidal urge to be caught. And herself at twenty? That was the first year she'd known William, before which she had known almost nothing.

Although Jenny sees her past self in the fugitives and in Juan's radical speech, she feels completely separate from that self now: "Both these ages of hers, looked at now, seemed like children to her. She was amazed that each one was herself, and not so

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364. Vlagopoulos, "The Beginning of History and Politics," 137.

365. Choi, *American Woman,* 109-110.

long ago."[366] Being enclosed in the house with the fugitives, in an atmosphere of such anger and radicalism, allows Jenny to separate her current self from her past self.

As Jenny is alone with Juan, the most radical of the group, we see her develop an even clearer sense of herself and understanding of her past. When Juan insists on riding with Jenny to town, they run into Thomas, the Black teenage grocery worker with whom Jenny has connected on her grocery runs. Juan offers to give Thomas a ride home, and once in the car, he begins to recruit Thomas, despite Jenny's pleas for him to stop. Juan tells Thomas that Jenny is his "sister-in-arms" and that Thomas should help them out. Juan gets Thomas to point out the bank that the fugitives eventually rob. This scene is reminiscent of one of Jenny's memories of William discussing recruitment:

> Once William had said, of winning people to the cause of revolution, You have to get them while they're tender and young. He'd mostly been joking, but for a while afterward she'd imagined an invisible eye on the young, not yet shut, the way that the skull of a child is supposed to be not fully fused—so that being permeable to the world was a physical thing, that no matter how hard you tried not to, you lost as you aged.[367]

Being enclosed in the car as Juan acts in line with William's "joke," causes Jenny to have a physical reaction: her "stomach was . . . clenched with dread."[368] This reaction is for two reasons: her worry that Thomas will get wrapped up in the fugitive's

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366. Choi, 110.

367. Choi, 160-61.

368. Choi, 202.

radicalism and, more so, her growing awareness that this is exactly how William recruited her into his cause.

Although Jenny's time with the William's group of radicals, at Wildmoor, and at the farmhouse feel like three different lives, the one underlying element is that Jenny is continuously treated as an outsider due to her ethnicity. This treatment is most obvious during her time at Wildmoor, in which Dolly refers to her only as the "Oriental girl."[369] However, it runs throughout her time with William and the fugitives as well. With William's group, Jenny becomes the main bomb maker because of her skill. Rather than praising her skill, however, William focuses on her hands, which become a synecdoche for her entire person: "*Little hands!* William had often said that. *Little hands but big deeds*."[370] William is not the only man to objectify Jenny's hands. Similarly, Frazer remembers thinking how Jenny could be a "professional sign painter" due to her deft hands. In the past, before Jenny had to go into hiding, Frazer needed a banner for a protest. He remembers Jenny telling him, "'I'll do your sign'—a flat statement not a question or an offer. . . . The banner, of course, had been spectacular. Because flawless, remarkably authoritative."[371] Between Jenny's precise restoration skills, her sign painting, and her bomb-making, the novel calls attention to Jenny's skill with her hands and other's reliance on it. Betsy Huang argues that this "is surely a deliberate design on Choi's part to illustrate

369. Choi, 12 and 56.

370. Choi, 197.

371. Choi, 22-23.

the irony that, even in the business of radical resistance, the Asian American is still the model minority, providing expert labor with quiet compliance and consistent execution."[372] The people around Jenny continue to treat her as a model minority, as an outsider with almost unnatural skill who never quite resembles the rest of the group.

As Jenny is given space for introspection, she becomes increasingly self-aware of how she has been treated as a model minority. When she thinks about William's attention to her hands, she thinks, "*Little hands.* Something about this memory made her cringe now."[373] In this moment, Jenny cannot identify why this memory makes her cringe, but it's the same reason that she gets upset when William reminds her why they are bombing buildings: "'Think of that being dropped onto people. . . . Balls of fire dropped down onto children. Little children who look just like you.'"[374] In both instances, Jenny is rendered child-like, with her smallness and race emphasized. Audrea Lim argues that the stereotype of the model minority is tied directly to emphasis on Asian women's obedience and fragile size. She writes, "The model-minority myth exists alongside another dangerous and limiting idea. . . . Asian women are seen as naturally inclined to serve men sexually and are also thought of as

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372. Huang, *Contesting Genres*, 90. Ellen Wu explains (*The Color of Success,* 2) that the stereotype of the "model minority" was created in the 1960s to designate Asian Americans as "a racial group distinct from the white majority, but lauded as well assimilated, upwardly mobile, politically nonthreatening, and *definitely not-black*." Italics in the original.

373. Choi, *American Woman,* 198.

374. Choi, 230.

slim, light-skinned and small, in adherence to Western norms of femininity."[375] When Jenny was working with William, she was proud of her "little hands." But now that she's had space and time for introspection, she begins to recognize the problematic nature of William's statement.

The change in Jenny between her time with William and her time at the farmhouse is evident in how she responds to Juan's objectifying comments. In a twist of irony, Juan has assumed the "leader" role of the group as the radicals fall into the heteronormative roles they say they are fighting. As the leader, Juan continues to throw out judgements about the women around him as if he is helpfully coaching them in the revolution. His comments to Jenny nearly always focus on her race. However, as Vlagopoulous argues, "Juan's understanding of race in the U.S. is simplistic at best, essentialist and racist at worst."[376] To Jenny, he says things like, "You must be a good shot. Oriental people always have exceptional aim. They're inherently good marksmen," even though she tells him she has never held a gun.[377] In his attempt to recruit her into their group, he continues to make appeals based on her race. He tells Jenny, "You owe your people your leadership. You can't go denying

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375. Lim, "The Alt-Right's Asian Fetish." For more on the model minority, see Osajima's "Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Imagine in the 1960s and 1980s," Paul Wong et. Al's "Asian Americans as a Model Minority: Self-Perceptions and Perceptions by Other Racial Groups," Frank H. Wu's *Yellow: Race in American Beyond Black and White*, Nicholas Hartlep's *The Model Minority Stereotype: Demystifying Asian American Success*, and Ellen Wu's *The Color of Success*.

376. Vlagopoulous, "The Beginning of History and Politics," 136.

377. Choi, *American Woman,* 189.

your race. You don't just owe the revolution in general, you owe your people in particular," and "your skin is a privilege. Your Third World perspective's a privilege." Rather than feeling honored, as she might have in the past had William said this, Jenny forcefully responds, "stop saying I'm from the Third World when I'm from California."[378] Jenny, both aware of her privilege and her American identity, insists on being seen as an individual, not a stereotype. She pushes Juan to imagine a more complex, informed version of activism and allyship, one that actually acknowledges and, thus, works beyond racism and sexism. Juan continues to ignore her assertions, however. With Juan, we see how radicalism worked to exclude Asian Americans by treating them as non-American. As Huang argues, characters like William and Juan expose "the ways in which antiwar protest narratives paradoxically exclude Asian figures of resistance in their very fight against anti-Asian U.S. foreign policies."[379] Rather than developing a more nuanced sense of global politics, in discourses like William's and Juan's, there is only the insistence that Asian Americans are more foreign than not.

After spending time in atmospheres like Wildmoor and the farmhouse, Jenny's doubts surrounding her past develop into clear revelations. Finally, Jenny realizes the flawed justification she and William had for their actions: "She and William had set out with their bombs to expose the real evil of government violence, not to recommend violence to everyone else. Then the ground started tilting beneath them,

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378. Choi, 140.

379. Huang, *Contesting Genres,* 91.

or perhaps it was they who had tilted the ground; perhaps they had been wrong to fight Power on its terms, instead of rejecting its terms utterly."[380] When she is in prison—another enclosed space that provides plenty of time for introspection—the "perhaps" part of this thought is erased, and she has an unequivocal judgement of her past:

> In the past, with William, she'd believed high intentions gave her the right to use violence; the same violence she abhorred in her government, and even among other comrades whose aims weren't significantly pure. But it wasn't intentions, however lofty or petty, that mattered, but how things turned out. When she shined that harsh light onto all of her acts, her bombings no longer seemed exalted.[381]

In tracing Jenny's reflections on her past life as a bomber, we see how her thoughts become increasingly explicit from the start to the end of the novel.

Jenny's ability to make sense of her past occurs simultaneously with her attempt to make sense of her Asian American subjectivity. In prison, she can finally put the way that she has been treated as an Asian American into words: "She felt like a token for the first time in her life. 'The model minority,' the one extended privileges as an example to the rest of her less worthy kin." Jenny is aware of the paradox embodied in the way she has been treated. She is held up as an example of how a person of color *should* behave; however, when compared with Pauline, a privileged

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380. Choi, *American Woman,* 198.

381. Choi, 352.

white woman, she is still treated as a minority: "Pauline would 'get the book thrown at her' yet somehow be redeemed, or rather shown to require no redemption, while Jenny would 'get off easy,' for somebody like her." The difference between how the media treats the two women, Jenny realizes, creates an unbridgeable rift between them, one that "would come to seem increasingly social, inevitable and ordained."[382] As Lim explains, the model minority stereotype paints Asian Americans as "hard-working, high-achieving and sufficiently well-behaved" in order to paint all other minorities as troublesome. However, in reality, "Asians are rarely considered white."[383] Jenny's treatment in the past and with the media illustrates this paradox, and it is one that she has finally come to understand.

Jenny's clarity in prison is preceded by the beginning of her finding an Asian American community—or, rather, by an Asian American community finding her. After her very publicized arrest, most of the media focused on Pauline, and "Jenny was mentioned just a handful of times overall, and always fleetingly." Despite this, the local Asian American community saw her name and came out to support her:

> In the first quiet hum of what became a significant murmur those few people contacted others of similar background to Jenny, if not similar frame of mind. . . . These people, slowly but steadily, had begun finding their way to George Elson's small Oakland law office. . . . They were all Filipino-, or Chinese-, or Korean-, or Japanese-Californian-American. All had concerns

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382. Choi, 355.

383. Lim, "The Alt-Right's Asian Fetish."

> and suggestions, in some cases complaints, all insisted on donating money, and now they were calling George Elson around the clock to put in their two cents' worth about what he should do to help Jenny, and so far Elson's secretary had received almost nine thousand dollars.[384]

When it was time for Jenny's trial, this same group of people came out to support her: "Every day the courtroom was full of the Japanese and Filipino and Korean and Chinese faces. . . . They wore buttons that simply said JENNY. It was the tireless support of these people . . . which the judge cited as his reason for sentencing her to the minimum."[385]

In this moment of activism, the presence of the Asian American community changes the atmosphere of the courtroom, a place representative of generations of repression for this same group of people.[386] Most recent to Jenny's story, the legal history of Japanese Americans like Jenny and her father had been even more fraught with the internment of first- and second-generation Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. In fact, Mai Ngai argues that the "internment of Japanese Americans during World War II stands as the most extreme case of the construction and consequences of alien citizenship in American history." Although Japanese Americans remained citizens in legal terms, the government "in effect . . . nullified their citizenship, exclusively on the grounds of racial difference." In 1942, the

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384. Choi, *American Woman,* 353.

385. Choi, 359.

386. See earlier sections of this work for a detailed overview of the legal history of Asian immigrants in the United States.

government removed 120,000 Japanese immigrants from their homes and placed them in internment camps based on the suspicion that they were all inclined to be disloyal, even though two-thirds were citizens. Ngai explains, "Today we call this racial profiling."[387] Internment lasted until 1945, and the U.S. did not offer reparations to victims until 1988.[388] This legal history weighs heavy in the courtroom's atmosphere. With the presence of an Asian American community actively supporting Jenny, however, the courtroom takes on an atmosphere of hope, which ultimately affects the outcome of the trial.

Not all critics read this courtroom scene in a positive light. Rather, some have focused on Jenny's response to the support, which is indifferent at best. Jenny, who has only surrounded herself with white radicals in her political life, is confused by the support of the Asian American community. When the judge gives her a light sentence because of their support, she thinks, "she did nothing to earn or retain it, she simply received it dumbstruck, as she would any miracle." Jenny notes that she was given a light sentence because of her supporters, not because of "any unusual worth of her own."[389] In Patricia E. Chu's take on this moment in the novel, she argues that Choi is highlighting both the sincerity and the absurdity of Jenny's supporters. Chu writes, "Choi gives a sincere nod to the building of that [Asian American] politic while at the

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387. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 175.

388. Even reparations did not come easy. As Bilal Qureshi points out in "From Wrong To Right," "The law won congressional approval only after a decade-long campaign by the Japanese-American community."

389. Choi, *American Woman,* 359.

same time emphasizing elements of the absurd—'JENNY' buttons? These . . . button-making, Asian face-wearing crowds have convinced Jim, Jenny, and the judge to participate in ethnic politics, as Choi tells it, seemingly for no good reason."[390]

While I agree with parts of Chu's argument, I think it's important to recognize that the participation in ethnic politics occurs for "no good reason" as *Jenny* tells it, not as Choi tells it. Rather, I think the novel wants readers to compare this small moment of activism with that of the earlier radicalism, especially in terms of effectiveness. Although the bombings in which Jenny participated and the exploits of Juan, Yvonne, and Pauline received more attention, the impact of their actions—other than destruction—is questionable. As Jenny realizes during her time at Wildmoor, they actually haven't changed the minds that they set out to change. The Asian American activism in the courtroom, however, has a concrete effect in Jenny's sentencing, as admitted by the judge. Although this happened not through any "unusual worth" of Jenny's, this moment is larger than Jenny, just as the legal history of Asian Americans is larger than Jenny. I argue that this moment in the courtroom demonstrates, if briefly, a seemingly less radical but more effective form of activism that creates a hopeful atmosphere in opposition to the atmospheres of anger and suspicion in Jenny's past.[391]

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390. Patricia E. Chu, "The Trials of the Ethnic Novel," 549.

391. In "Wendy Yoshimura and the Politics of Hugging in the 1970s," Grace Yeh details how the Asian American community embraced Wendy Yoshimura during her trial in a similar way as Choi fictionalizes for Jenny. Mike Iwatsubo lead the Wendy Yoshimura Fair Trail Committee (WYFTC), a committee that worked not only for Wendy, but to use Wendy's trial to further the political goals of the Asian American community. Yeh explains (191) that the WYFTC embraced Wendy because she "was a person who could not only embody the history of the loss of civil

Although the novel is not explicit in this, I believe that witnessing the community in the courtroom makes Jenny more aware of alternate political formations to the radical ones she has only known in her past. After her trial and time in prison, she finds new roommates who choose to live in ways that are non-violently political. Even Jenny describes their way of living as "a different world": "living communally, buying their staples in brown paper bags, pushing the compost around with a hoe, were their forms of resistance."[392] Unsurprisingly, the atmosphere of their home stands in stark difference to the atmosphere of the farmhouse. Jenny feels at home in this space right away, particularly in the dining room, "a three-sided space off the kitchen with a giant bay window." Jenny "fell hard for that window, with its view of the rosemary plant in the yard and beyond it, the lime tree."[393] Her roommates see Jenny's affect change when she walks into the dining room and invite her to turn the dining room into her bedroom, offering to help with a partition.[394] The calm, inviting space of this new home is a reflection of its inhabitants, and its inhabitants add to the warm atmosphere of the space. In this space, Jenny's introspection is no longer on her past, but rather turns to her future as she begins to imagine how she might raise a child.

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liberties and rights because of her Asian ancestry but who was also, and perhaps more important, notorious."

392. Choi, *American Woman,* 362.

393. Choi, 360-61.

394. Choi, 361-62.

Additionally, it is after the support of the Asian American activists that Jenny reconnects with her father, Jim, and the pair reconnect to their Japanese American past. While in prison and throughout her trial, Jenny refuses to see her father, with whom she had not spoken in years. In fact, it is her involvement in the antiwar movement that led to the falling out with her father. Jim is angry with his daughter's political actions, calling them arrogant and naïve. His anger surprises her, because it is his past that sparked her political actions: "Her discovery of what he'd endured [during internment] was the beginning of her discovery of history and politics, of power and oppression, of brotherhood and racism, and finally, of radicalism."[395] By the end of the novel, having realized the flaws of her radical actions, Jenny starts to understand her father's position. It is not until after her trial, however, that she agrees to see her father and they rekindle their familial relationship.

Finally, it is also after the trial that Jim agrees to attend a Manzanar reunion. Like the courtroom, Manzanar, is a site of repression and violence. While interned at Manzanar during the war, Jim struggled with the loyalty oath, which asked two questions: "1) Will you serve the U.S. in the army—if you are allowed? Will you renounce loyalty to Japan?"[396] Before he completes his oath, he is beaten up by a pro-Japan gang and, having been involved in the fight, is sent to a "Camp for Incorrigibles," which was more like a jail than Manzanar. Toward the end of the war, when the government invites Japanese Americans to enlist, Jim refuses to do so and is

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395. Choi, 163.

396. Choi, 320.

transferred to a real federal prison for draft evasion.[397] Jim's memories of this time are so strong that he distances himself from the Asian American community for the rest of his life—blaming them for his legal troubles and not wanting to be part of a community with those who ostracized him. Jim's story is evocative of John Okada's 1957 novel *No-No Boy*, in which the protagonist answers "no" to both loyalty questions and refuses to enlist. The protagonist is ostracized by the Japanese American community. Okada's novel was likewise ostracized. It did not become popular until it was discovered by a group of Asian American writers in the 1970s. Chu demonstrates how the fall and rise of Okada's novel mirrors internment's influence on Asian American politics:

> The significance of the internment to Asian American critical thinking can hardly be overstated, first as a moment of the failure of the universalism of American democracy specific to Asians and then as a historical moment reclaimed to produce Asian American identity politics in a way that (eventually) cast the no-no boys as forerunners of the 1970s movement that would become contemporary Asian American cultural politics.[398]

For Chu, alluding to Okada is Choi's way of replacing "the less 'ethnic' narrative of Jenny's political life with a specifically 'Asian' one."[399]

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397. Choi, 321.

398. Patricia E. Chu, "The Trials of the Ethnic Novel," 547-48.

399. Patricia E. Chu, 547.

Just as Okada's novel is eventually embraced by the Asian American community, so are Jim and Jenny. During Jenny's trial, Jim is forced to interact with the Asian American supporters: "They clustered resolutely around him, invited him to eat in their homes, brought him casseroles when he demurred."[400] In line with Patricia Chu's argument regarding these activists in the novel, Yoo argues that "the pan-Asian support Jenny receives does not have any lasting impact on her . . . [it] does not change her self-image significantly, nor does she enthusiastically embrace the community."[401] However, although Jim and Jenny do not "enthusiastically embrace" this specific community, I believe that their visit to Manzanar illustrates that they are, in fact, eventually moved to embrace the Japanese American community. As Vlagopoulos explains, "It is not essential sameness that binds Jenny to her father and to her supporters in the courtroom, but a claim to both a shared story of dispossession and a narrative of resistance."[402] Jim's return to Manzanar with Jenny illustrates a recognition of this shared narrative. On their drive to Manzanar, Jim tells Jenny, "I don't want to do this."[403] Yet when they arrive, they see "the small forms of people moving purposefully on the floor of the desert beneath the vast peaks, setting up a rude stage, unfolding long portable tables for food." The people have already begun to change the atmosphere of Manzanar, and Jim's attitude is changed. He says to

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400. Choi, *American Woman,* 359.

401. Yoo, "American vs. Woman," 111.

402. Vlagopoulos, "The Beginning of History and Politics," 144.

403. Choi, *American Woman,* 366.

Jenny, "Hey . . . I lived here." After she replies, "I know," he suggests, "Let's go help them set up."[404] These ending lines demonstrate Jenny's recognition of Jim's story, and indicate the empathic connection they have to Japanese American history and its community.

The final space in *American Woman*, that of the internment camp, is the most significant space of the entire narrative. It is Jim's experience there that led Jenny into her life of radicalism, and it is the space that reunites them as a family with their community. With this ending, the atmosphere of Manzanar is no longer one of repression, but one of community and hope. As Margaret Scanlan writes, the ending reveals a "new bond between [Jenny] and her father, both rebels, prisoners and survivors, now part of a larger community that values its distinctive history."[405] In telling both Jenny's and Jim's stories, Choi brings to light narratives that have been part of repressed history: Wendy Yoshimura's, the Asian American presence in the movements of the sixties and seventies, and the history of Japanese internment.[406] Manzanar's role in Jim's life had been hidden from Jenny, both by Jim's refusal to discuss it and by the U.S. school system for the first half of her life.[407] Jenny's familial ties to Manzanar were also hidden from readers until almost halfway through the novel. Thus, Manzanar becomes a physical reminder of repressed histories, and its

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404. Choi, 369.

405. Scanlan, "Domestic Terror," 268.

406. Huang, *Contesting Genres,* 92.

407. As detailed in the novel (163), it is only in Japan that Jenny learns about internment.

presence at the end of the novel becomes a political act of return to a collective historical memory. In returning to Manzanar, the former internees face their past and reclaim the space as their own. Thus, they transform the space from one of repression to one of community, creating an affect of hope.

Section 3: Cultural and Artistic Spaces in Bodega Dreams

In Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams,* the neighborhood of Spanish Harlem—El Barrio—has a strong affective atmosphere. In fact, Bridget Kevane goes so far as to call Spanish Harlem "one of the most important characters in the novel."[408] The narrator of *Bodega Dreams*, Julio "Chino" Mercado, has an attentive awareness of his neighborhood's pervasive atmosphere. He details the affective power of the spaces he inhabits as he moves around El Barrio and New York City as a whole. It is not until he meets William Irizarry—known as Willie Bodega—that Chino begins to realize that El Barrio's residents have just as strong of an effect on the neighborhood as the neighborhood has on them. Bodega, a former Young Lord and "relic" from the 1960s, "a time when all things seemed possible,"[409] suffuses the neighborhood with a sense of change and gives its residents, particularly Chino, a new vision of the possibilities inherent in El Barrio. Although Bodega's plan comes to an end with his murder, his vision continues and morphs to meet the new era ahead. In following Chino's relationship with El Barrio before and after meeting Bodega, I argue that Bodega's

408. Kevane, *Latino Literature*, 142.

409. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 33.

celebration of El Barrio's culture through neighborhood landmarks, as well as his economic investment in the neighborhood, though flawed in many ways, ultimately creates an atmosphere of hopefulness for its residents.

Willie Bodega brings the spirit of the 1960s to a neighborhood that has suffered in an era of neoliberalism. As Bodega's business partner and lawyer, Edwin Nazario, explains to Chino, "This is not the sixties. The government isn't pouring any money in here anymore."[410] Arlene M. Dávila details how the economic policies of the 1960s helped to support communities. She explains how Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty "was predicated on community-based disbursement of funds, which were easily centralized," and these antipoverty programs led to the growth of "ethnically organized public social-service infrastructures." This allowed Puerto Ricans in East Harlem to take control of their own economic development.[411] With the rise of neoliberalism, however, free markets and privatization became hallmark economic policies and, as Nazario points out, government funds were drastically reduced. Sean Moiles explains that these forces contribute to gentrification "because they allow private companies to control what was formerly controlled by the city or the state." During the Reagan administration, the support of neoliberal policies led to sharply rising rent and homelessness, which occurred "in tandem with the construction of luxury condominiums and reductions in social services."[412]

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410. Quiñonez, 107.

411. The War on Poverty was not without flaws, however. As Dávila points out (33), the centralization of community funds "led to one of the strongest welfare-funds-driven political clans in the city."

412. Moiles, "The Politics of Gentrification," 116.

In her study of gentrification of El Barrio, Dávila illustrates just how devastating these social service reductions are to East Harlem. In 2004, the year Dávila's work was published, 93.6 percent of the population were renters and up to 62 percent was dependent on publicly-subsidized housing. Both numbers are among the highest in New York City.[413] Dávila specifies that two major neoliberal trends have hit East Harlem the hardest: the federal change from direct subsidies for constructing public housing to the use of tenant vouchers, and the city's transfer of government-owned housing to private developers and management. The results of these changes are "higher rents and less affordable housing."[414] The implementation of these policies has led to almost no housing options for residents whose income is too high to qualify for what scant public assistance is left but who cannot afford rent at privately-owned structures. This issue has added to the idea that for East Harlem residents, the American Dream involves leaving the neighborhood. As Dávila explains, "Since the 1960s . . . many Puerto Ricans have purposely left New York. . . . Upward mobility was synonymous with leaving El Barrio for Puerto Rico, Connecticut, New Jersey, the Bronx, or just about any suburb. Many had no intention of returning."[415] This trend is underlined by Chino and Blanca's dream to earn their college degrees and move out of the neighborhood.

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413. Dávila, *Barrio Dreams,* 7-8 and 28.

414. Dávila, 28.

415. Dávila, 38.

Chino is acutely aware of how neoliberalism has affected his neighborhood. He describes, "Harlem needed a change and fast. Rents were going through the roof. Social services were being cut. Financial aid for people like me and Blanca who were trying to better themselves was practically nonexistent. The neighborhood was ready to boil."[416] The change in the neighborhood from the 1960s to the setting of the novel is evident in the residents' reactions to Bodega's death. In a conversation with Chino about his dreams for the neighborhood, Bodega predicts that if something ever happened to him, "people will take to the streets. Bro, there will be Latinos from 125th Street to 96th Street with congas and timbales twenty-four hours a day stopping traffic, overturning cars, setting fires, yelling 'Free William Irizarry!'"[417] Bodega continues to imagine the neighborhood as it was in the 1960s. However, when Bodega is actually murdered, nothing like this happens. Chino narrates, "When he was killed, no cars were overturned. No fires were set. No cops were conked. Nothing. The people in Spanish Harlem had to go to work. They had families to feed, night schools to attend, businesses to run, and other things to do to improve their lives and themselves."[418] In the era of neoliberalism, there is no time to protest; rather, people have to keep working to live.

Bodega's philosophies for El Barrio are rooted in his past activism from the 1960s. As a member of the Young Lords, Bodega participated in their social activism,

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416. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 38.

417. Quiñonez, 30.

418. Quiñonez, 203-04.

guided by their Thirteen Point Program to improve the lives of Puerto Ricans, both migrant and mainland-born. Bodega paints a picture of the group for Chino:

> The Young Lords were beautiful, Chino. El Barrio was full of hope and revolution was in the air. We wanted jobs, real jobs. We wanted education, real education, for our little brothers and sisters, b'cause it was too late for us. We wanted lead paint out of our buildings, window guards so our babies wouldn't go flying after pigeons, we wanted to be heard.[419]

The Young Lords received community support by cleaning the streets, and then they started political activism.[420] The activism of the Young Lords went hand-in-hand with the rise of the "Nuyorican"—a portmanteau of New York and Puerto Rican—aesthetic movement. Antonia Domínguez Miguela explains how with the Young Lords, "the Nuyorican group tried to uplift the community by redefining the term 'Nuyorican' as a positive one that described a new experience and a language for the Puerto Rican diaspora in New York." The goal was to celebrate their culture, giving El Barrio the feeling of a "refuge" rather than a "trap" from which residents needed to escape.[421]

Bodega carries the mission of both the Young Lords and the Nuyoricans into the neoliberal age with his attempts to reform the neighborhood both economically and culturally. In short, Bodega's plan is to use money earned from drug trafficking in

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419. Quiñonez, 32.

420. Quiñonez, 32-33.

421. Domínguez Miguela, "Literary Tropicalizations," 166.

several ways. First, to buy property to provide nice yet affordable housing to the residents of East Harlem. Second, to financially support the growth of a professional class in El Barrio by paying college tuition for promising residents. And third, to create and maintain spaces of cultural significance like museums. Bodega tells Chino that he is building a "Great Society." When Chino laughs and says, "that sounds like something out of the sixties," Bodega responds, "I'm a throwback, m'man. . . . I'm glad you picked up on that, Chino."[422] At the heart of Bodega's dream is to use the spirit of the 1960s to combat the trends of gentrification that Dávila outlines in her study. Nazario explains to Chino, "All those white yuppies want to live in Manhattan, and they think Spanish Harlem is next for the taking. When they start moving in, we won't be able to compete when it comes to rents, and we'll be left out in the cold. But if we build a strong professional class and accumulate property, we can counter that effect."[423] Through economic investment in both the space and its people, Bodega dreams of turning El Barrio into a refuge for its Puerto Rican residents. Domínguez Miguela argues that although Bodega is modeled on Jay Gatsby, the heart of his dream sets him apart:

> Bodega seems to fit the model posed by Jay Gatsby, but his dream differs from Gatsby's in that it responds to his community's social and economic needs. As Jay Gatsby was the hero and the epitome of the American Dream in the twenties, Bodega represents the possibility of achieving a different Puerto

422. Quiñonez, *Bodegda Dreams,* 31.

423. Quiñonez, 106-07.

> Rican dream in the barrio. The American Dream of social success and economic power clearly contrasts with the social ideals at the heart of Bodega's dream of transforming the barrio.[424]

The influence of the 1960s on Bodega's plans make his dream not just one of private gain but also one of social change.

Bodega's plan changes the affective atmosphere of El Barrio. Before Chino meets Bodega, the affect of East Harlem weighs heavy on him. He describes his neighborhood:

> You lived in a place where vacant lots grew like wild grass does in Kansas. Kansas? What does a kid from Spanish Harlem know about Kansas? All you knew was that one day a block would have people, the next day it would be erased by a fire. The burned-down buildings would then house junkies who made them into shooting galleries or become playgrounds for kids like me and Sapo to explore. After a few months, the City of New York would send a crane with a ball and chain to wreck the gutted tenements. A few weeks later a bulldozer would arrive and turn the block into a vacant lot. The vacant lot would now become a graveyard for stolen cars.[425]

Chino connects this environment directly to the behavior of the younger residents of El Barrio. He begins this descriptive paragraph of the neighborhood by discussing why he sought out fights as a child: "It was always easy to get into fights if you hated

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424. Domínguez Miguela, "Literary Tropicalizations," 174.

425. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 5.

yourself. . . . Your life meant shit from the start. . . . It was easy to be big and bad when you hated your life and felt meaningless."[426] In this case, Chino's feelings are reflected in his surroundings, and his surroundings reflect his feelings.

In Steve Pile's study of psychoanalysis and the space of the city, he argues that locations have a physical and psychological affect, and that particular locations carry the negative weight of emotions that both residents and outsiders map onto them. Pile examines the relationship between "power, fear (expressed as shame, embarrassment and disgust) and desire" as it is repeatedly mapped on specific areas such as "the sewer, the slum, the rat," etc. He argues that "each location 'speaks' at once social and psychic, simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic categories of fear and disgust."[427] This simultaneous "speaking" creates an emergent affect. Chino is aware of the psychological mapping of his neighborhood. He reflects, "Manhattan at night seen from its surrounding bridges is Oz, it's Camelot or Eldorado, full of color and magic. What those skyscrapers and lights don't let on is that hidden away lies Spanish Harlem, a slum that has been handed down from immigrant to immigrant, like used clothing worn and reworn, stitched and restitched by different ethnic groups who continue to pass it on."[428] In Chino, we see that he has internalized the disgust that has been repeatedly mapped onto the neighborhood of El Barrio and is therefore reflective in its affect.

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426. Quiñonez, 4.

427. Pile, *The Body and the City*, 178.

428. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 161.

The institutions of El Barrio also add to its negative affect. Pile examines how the monuments of a city establish a presumption of power relations. He writes, "Monuments say what they want to say and, by doing so, they make space incontestable, both by closing off alternative readings and by drawing people into the presumption that the values they represent are shared. Monuments may embody and make visible power relations, but they do so in ways which also tend to make and/or legitimate and/or naturalise those relationships."[429] Although Pile is discussing physical statues, I believe that the same argument could be made for the naming of institutional landmarks. In the case of El Barrio, we see how the school's name establishes power relations. Chino explains that the white teachers had "most of the power" in the school—power over the Hispanic teachers—because they had seniority. Most were "teaching before the Board of Education finally realized that the school was located in Spanish Harlem and practically all of the students were Latinos, and so changed the school's name from Margaret Knox to Julia de Burgos."[430] The power of the white teachers is reflected in the school's original name, honoring a Scottish noblewoman. Although the city tries to correct this representation by renaming it to Julia de Burgos. The teachers do not want to disrupt the power relations, so they do not teach the students about Julia de Burgos. Chino explains:

> To all the white teachers we were all going to end up delinquents. . . . The whole time I was at Julia de Burgos, I had no idea the school was named after

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429. Pile, *The Body and the City,* 213.

430. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 6.

> Puerto Rico's greatest poet, had no idea Julia de Burgos had emigrated to New York City and lived in poverty while she wrote beautiful verses. She lived in El Barrio and had died on the street. But we weren't taught about her or any other Latin American poets, for that matter. As for history, we knew more about Italy than our own Latin American countries.

The atmosphere of the school—one that does not value the ethnicity of its students—has a strong effect on them: "So, since we were almost convinced that our race had no culture, no smart people, we behaved even worse."[431] The tone of this atmosphere goes hand-in-hand with the power relations established by its original name. As Kevane argues, Chino's experience with his school illustrates "Quiñonez's belief that a lack of knowledge about one's cultural heritage contributes to a collective self-hatred."[432]

The atmosphere of El Barrio is so stifling that Chino, in line with Dávila's research, views personal achievement in terms of his ability to leave his neighborhood. After his time at Julia de Burgos, Chino is accepted to the High School of Art and Design in the Upper East Side. The affect of the new surroundings change Chino's outlook: "I now left East Harlem every day and without my quite knowing it, the world became new."[433] Duff argues that affect "*is the principal mechanism threading urban places together*,"[434] and that walking in a city both produces and

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431. Quiñonez, 6.

432. Kevane, *Latino Literature,* 140.

433. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams* 12.

434. Duff, "On the Role of Affect," 891. Italics in the original.

reflects this: "To walk in the city is to be affected by the city, just as one's walking affects the city that this walking produces. The poetics of place generated in this walking is as much a function of practice, of a doing and a making, as it is a function of feeling and affective modulation."[435] As Chino walks from East Harlem to the Upper East Side, his affect changes "without [his] quite knowing it." We see this change in affect as Chino navigates the city. When he goes to Queens with Nazario, for example, he reflects, "When we reached Queens I felt taller. Manhattan humbles you. Many times when I walk around Manhattan I feel as if I'm walking among giant sequoia trees in the California Redwoods. . . . In Queens you're Gulliver among the Lilliputians."[436] As Chino senses the change that occurs in leaving El Barrio, he begins to dream of leaving permanently.

Bodega's investment in El Barrio's culture begins to change the atmosphere of the neighborhood and, therefore, begins to change Chino's attitude toward it. Two spaces that embody this change are El Museo del Barrio and the Salsa Museum, both of which have benefitted from Bodega's support. When Chino walks into both of these museums, the atmospheres automatically affect him. In El Museo del Barrio, he thinks, "It felt good to be there." He notes several elements that put him at ease: "The floors were shining, the walls a cool, soothing white, and the titles of the paintings were written in Spanish, with the English translation as a secondary thing. . . . El Museo del Barrio was the only museum where I could look at the paintings without

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435. Duff, 884.

436. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 155.

having a guard follow me from wing to wing."[437] Chino experiences a similar atmosphere when he walks into the Salsa Museum: "I forgot about everything and wrapped myself in the glory days of salsa."[438] The museums have a meditative, reparative effect on Chino.

In Jaime Mundo's reading of the museums in *Bodega Dreams*, he sees them in a more negative light and argues that they place the culture of the past in a space of irrelevancy. He cites Diana Taylor, who explains "Museums have long taken the cultural Other out of context and isolated it, reducing the live to a dead object behind glass."[439] Mundo argues that in the case of the novel, "The image of the museum as a closed space confining culture contrasts with the perspective of East Harlem in the novel as an open, fluid space."[440] In the case of El Museo del Barrio and the Salsa Museum, however, I would argue that Taylor's reading does not necessarily apply. Rather, these are museums curated within the culture from which their artifacts come, by people of the same culture. Even in Chino's response to the Salsa Museum, we see that the context is not lost at all. Chino explains:

> This place had a deep association with my parents' time, when the neighborhood was still young and full of people and not projects. It was a symbol of past glory, of early migration to the United States and the dreams

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437. Quiñonez, 78-79.

438. Quiñonez, 104.

439. Quoted in Mundo, "*Bodega Dreams*," 40.

440. Mundo, 40.

> that people brought over along with the music. Back then it [salsa] was a different dance music than the one in my time. The salsa music was new and always evolving into something else, but it always returned to its *afro-jíbaro-antillano* roots.[441]

Chino's knowledge on the subject of salsa illustrates that these museums are not closed areas for dead objects but rather a celebration of a living culture's past. The items in these museums may be contextless objects for outsiders, but their intended audience is the people of the El Barrio. Chino's affect changes in these areas, and the museums also affect the entire neighborhood. They stand in stark contrast to Chino's experience at Julia de Burgos where the students experience no celebration of their own culture. As Kevane argues, "Chino initially calls Bodega a relic of the past but we learn along with Chino, he is quite the opposite. Bodega knows about Puerto Rican contributions to the United States, knows that they are perceived as third-class citizens, and knows that they are not going to receive respect unless they create it."[442] Supporting museums in El Barrio is one way to respect the culture and to influence its residents.

The museums are just a small part of Bodega's plan; a larger part is providing economic support to the residents in order to create a Puerto Rican professional class in El Barrio. First, Bodega provides nicer apartments with lower rents. As Domínguez Miguela explains, "The barrio's apartments make their inhabitants feel confined and physically oppressed. Thus, the physical space of the houses that Bodega gives back

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441. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 104.

442. Kevane, *Latino Literature,* 136.

to the community becomes a more fundamental symbolic Puerto Rican space where a definite home/identity can be established on American soil." Additionally, Domínguez Miguela notes, "It is important to notice that this very issue is what makes Chino establish a relationship with Bodega, when the latter provides a larger apartment for Chino and Blanca."[443] Thus, housing is the beginning of the change in Chino's atmosphere. While simultaneously providing cheaper, yet nicer, housing for the residents of El Barrio, Bodega is funding college education for promising residents. By doing so, he is creating a professional class who can start to afford property in El Barrio. Nazario explains this plan to Chino: "Willie likes financing Latinos who are going to college to study law, medicine, education, business, political science, anything useful. He plans on building a professional class, slated to become his movers and shakers of the future."[444] The goal is to halt white gentrification and to eventually gain political strength to support the neighborhood through more legal means. Additionally, by supporting the development of Latinx professionals who then stay in the neighborhood, the affect of institutions like the public school will start to change.

Although Bodega's plan sparks a change in atmosphere, the drug trafficking at the economic heart of it casts a shadow. Bodega and Nazario paint their drug empire as a necessary way to gain political clout, comparing themselves to the Kennedy family, whose rise began by selling alcohol during prohibition.[445] Holly Jones

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443. Domínguez Miguela, "Literary Tropicalizations," 173.

444. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 106.

445. Quiñonez, 25.

explains that in Bodega and Nazario's vision of "community restoration . . . the existence and exploitation of heroin addicts is an accepted necessary evil."[446] Since neoliberal policies have taken government funds away from the neighborhood, Bodega realizes he has to rely on private enterprise. As Moiles explains, Bodega sees that "appropriating capitalist strategies is key to improving the neighborhood's material conditions without wholesale gentrification."[447] Bodega's strategies, however, take advantage of the weakest of El Barrio's residents. When Chino points out that Bodega's attempt to uplift the community involves selling drugs to the community's own residents, Bodega responds, "Any Puerto Rican or any of my Latin brothers who are stupid enough to buy that shit don't belong in my Great Society."[448] This statement not only exposes the dark underbelly of Bodega's plan, but it also exposes Bodega's personal ambitions. As Mundo, along with a number of other critics, explain, "Community values and individual ambition are interchangeable in Bodega's dream."[449] Despite the uplift that Bodega wants for the community, his downfall lies in the more selfish aspects of his plan. In fact, just as Gatsby's downfall was his desire for Daisy Buchanan, Bodega's creation of *his* "Great Society"—through the exploitation of addicts—is fueled by his desire to impress and win back Vera, a desire that ultimately leads to his murder.

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446. Jones, "Dreaming the Nuyorican," 40.

447. Moiles, "The Politics of Gentrification," 121.

448. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 30.

449. Mundo, "*Bodega Dreams*," 38. See also Irizarry, "Because Place Still Matters," 165-67 and Moiles, "The Politics of Gentrification,"122.

While Bodega's plan ends with his death, despite its flaws, it has a lasting effect on the atmosphere of El Barrio. Although residents did not protest over his death, Chino describes other elements of Bodega's 1960s influence that were present at his funeral, starting with the space: "The service was held at the redbrick Methodist church on 111th Street and Lexington Avenue—the same church the Young Lords had stormed and taken over, from which they had launched their great offensives: clothing drives, free breakfast, door-to-door clinics, free lunches." Chino describes that nearly the whole neighborhood was in attendance, and for the occasion, in the spirit of the Young Lords, the residents had "even picked up the trash the Sanitation Department always neglected."[450] Picking up trash and cleaning the neighborhood was how the Young Lords gained the community's trust, and now we see the action in reverse. Bodega's burial also becomes a reminder of the proud culture and history of Puerto Ricans. All the pallbearers are former Young Lords, and in attendance are poets, writers, and artists, including Piri Thomas, Edward Rivera, and Jack Agueros. In Chino's words, "Nearly the entire East Harlem aristocracy" was in attendance.[451] This moment stands in stark contrast to the beginning of Chino's story, in which the students at Julia de Burgos believed they did not have a culture. Because of Bodega, the entire neighborhood is physically reminded of their culture—through the museums and now through the people who have gathered in his remembrance.

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450. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 206.

451. Quiñonez, 208.

Although Bodega is gone, the atmosphere of El Barrio remains changed. Chino no longer wants to flee El Barrio; rather, he begins to see the beauty and potential in it. During Bodega's wake, Chino describes the lines of people who "decorated" the neighborhood "like a string of pearls": "For three days Fifth Avenue was colored like a parrot. The Rainbow Race, Latinos form the blackest of black to the bluest eyes and blondest hair, all splashing their multihued complexion at the edge of Central Park."[452] Chino sees the beauty in the residents of the neighborhood. He also hears music in the sounds that they make. At the end of the novel, Chino dreams that he is with Bodega, dressed as a Young Lord, looking out over El Barrio on his fire escape. A woman yells to her son in a mix of Spanish and English: "Miro, Junito, go buy un mapo, un contén de leche, and tell el bodeguero yo le pago next Friday. And I don't want to see you in el rufo!"[453] Although her words—Spanish, English, and combinations of both—are something that might be heard on any given day in the neighborhood, Bodega points out the beauty in it. He tells Chino:

> You know what is happening here, don't you? Don't you? What we just heard was a poem, Chino. It's a beautiful new language. Don't you see what's happening? A new language means a new race. Spanglish is the future. It's the new language being born out of the ashes of two cultures clashing with each other. . . . Our people are evolving into something completely new. . . . Just

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452. Quiñonez, 207.

453. Quiñonez, 212.

> like I was trying to do, this new language is not completely correct; but then, few things are.

Even in Chino's dreams, Bodega is highlighting the beauty of the neighborhood and the culture it's creating.

Critics have made much of the potential embodied in the inclusion of Spanglish at the end of the novel. Mundo argues that "code-switching and Spanglish become important sites of hybridity where new possibilities for metaphors, imagery, and syntax are created."[454] Even Moiles, who—in his economic reading of the novel—at first describes this scene as "sentimental and intellectually lazy,"[455] comes to conclude otherwise. Moiles initially takes issue with this scene:

> This scene seems to reverse the novel's earlier radicalism. When Chino agrees to let a new immigrant stay at his apartment until the man can find a steady source of income, the novel appears to have lost its sense of structural critique and turned its politics instead toward an ethics of individual help. Similarly . . . the ending celebrates Spanglish, not a specific economic or political program that might radically transform society.[456]

However, thinking through the importance of language to culture, Moiles concludes that "the portrayal of Spanglish insists that our language is inseparable from our perception of reality; therefore, creating linguistic alternatives to describing the nature

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454. Mundo, "*Bodega Dreams*," 39.

455. Moiles, "The Politics of Gentrification," 128.

456. Moiles, 127.

of reality can be seen as an important first step toward generating political alternatives to free-market capitalism."[457] More broadly, Moiles argues that Spanglish comes to "embody the politics of Quiñonez's fiction" by signifying "strategies for promoting compassionate, creative, and practical alternatives to oppressive social structures."[458] Finally, in terms of examples of multicultural citizenship, Jones argues that the representation of Spanglish highlights a new path, one that is not fleeing the neighborhood to assimilate in the suburbs or returning to the national activism of the 1960s: "Rather, it is something else, a (re)vision of both in which the promise of each remains yet has been refined."[459]

Taking the possibilities that critics have found in this moment of Spanglish, I argue that this moment also highlights the change in the neighborhood's affective atmosphere. Chino no longer sees a mother trying to keep her son away from the delinquency that began the novel; rather, reflecting on Bodega's statement about the Spanglish that they've heard, Chino thinks, "the new language Bodega had spoken about seemed promising."[460] Not only does the language seem promising, but the neighborhood now feels promising as well. Chino began the novel dreaming of an escape from El Barrio. Now, the final lines acknowledge his change of heart: "The neighborhood might have been down, but it was far from out. Its people far from

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457. Moiles, 128.

458. Moiles, 129.

459. Jones, "Dreaming the Nuyorican," 35.

460. Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 212.

defeat. They had been bounced all over the place but they were still jamming. It seemed like a good place to start."[461] For Chino, the neighborhood has become a good place to start working for a better life. As Jones writes, Chino begins "to reimagine his spatial and cultural place within the neighborhood."[462]

The affect that the neighborhood has on Chino changes his actions. Rather than focusing solely on himself and his family, he begins to carry on Bodega's work. When two newly-arrived Puerto Ricans stop him in the street and ask where they can find Willie Bodega because they were told "that this man would find us a place to live and work," Chino tells them "Willie Bodega doesn't exist," and invites them to stay with him until they can get settled. The characters' names foreshadow this passing of the torch. Irizarry points out how Bodega's earned nickname aligns with the purpose he made for his life. In his name, we see "the symbolic conflation of a literal bodega, the neighborhood supermarket you went to when you needed something, and Willie Bodega, a man to whom you went when you needed something you dreamed about."[463] The word *bodega*, according to Dan Nosowitz, is a Spanish word that derives "from the Latin *apothēca*, or apothecary. It has various meanings, none of which is 'market,' as is commonly stated. (The word for market is *mercado*.) Instead it means something closer to 'storeroom' or 'cellar,' a pretty accurate description. In Spain, it mostly refers to a wine cellar."[464] In these definitions, we see both the

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461 Quiñonez, 213.

462. Jones, "Dreaming the Nuyorican," 38.

463. Irizarry, "Because Place Still Matters," 174.

464. Nosowitz, "What Do You Call the Corner Store?"

similarities and differences between Willie Bodega and Chino Mercado. Like Bodega, Chino will carry on Bodega's support for his neighborhood, but unlike Bodega, he will do it in a way that is less underground; Chino's work will not be based on an illegal foundation like drug trafficking. Jane Dwyer sums up this transition in the novel: "Chino . . . as his surname Mercado suggests, will carry on Bodega's aspirations in a more evolved, more assimilated way. In name and in purpose, bodega . . . becomes mercado."[465] Bodega's influence on the atmosphere of the neighborhood has sparked hope in Chino, and his feeling of connection to El Barrio changes his actions to help others feel the same. El Barrio now provides a sense of place for Chino, one that allows for dreams of change.

Section 4: Conclusion

Both *American Woman* and *Bodega Dreams* illustrate the affective power of space. In *American Woman*, we see how small, enclosed spaces allow for intense self-reflection. In *Bodega Dreams*, we see how culture infuses the affect of a space, in both positive and negative ways. In both novels, we see how a space's affective atmosphere both influences and is influenced by those in its sphere. Even more, we see that the affective power illustrated in these novels extends to the novels themselves. Both novels affect and are affected by their own cultural spaces. Both are based on existing American stories: the Patty Hearst kidnapping for *American Woman*, and *The Great Gatsby* for *Bodega Dreams*. In this way, they are influenced

465. Dwyer, "When Willie Met Gatsby," 171.

by American culture. However, by using these American stories as a starting point, both novels embed new points of view into the American narrative.

In *American Woman*, Choi reframes the focus of the Patty Hearst kidnaping away from Hearst. In fact, Pauline's real name is never stated; rather, we are only given the name she has adopted as a member of the band of radicals. In the case of the novel, the American woman is not the privileged white woman on whom the media focused on but rather the Japanese American women whose name was rarely mentioned in coverage of the story. As Katz writes, "Choi's decision to make Jenny her protagonist . . . calls attention to the ways in which Yoshimura's, and by extension, Asian America's voice in radical activism of this historical moment has effectively been erased."[466] Similarly, Huang argues that by reframing the story onto a "marginal figure," Choi "introduces an unexpected angle into official narratives about the 1970s protest movements, in which white or black perspectives predominate. In such accounts, Asians, when mentioned, typically appear as either the enemy (Viet Cong) or the victim (casualties of war)."[467] With Jenny, readers are given a nuanced look at an Asian American experience of the time. Choi also ties Jenny's radicalism to Japanese internment, allowing for a deeper historical understanding of the events of the novel. Choi's examination of these lapses in recorded history changes the landscape of American culture and asks readers to imagine what other stories might not have been told. This move sparks a hopeful affect, one of possibility for the emergence of new stories and new identities.

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466. Katz, "Listen to Your Body," 327.

467. Huang, *Contesting Genres,* 84.

In *Bodega Dreams*, Quiñonez uses *The Great Gatsby* as a frame to explore how bodega dreams—or dreams of El Barrio—might differ from, yet be similar to, the American dream of Gatsby. Additionally, *Bodega Dream*'s connection to *The Great Gatsby* inherently alters our view of the literary canon. Quiñonez puts his story in conversation with one of the most canonized works of U.S. literature. In this way, Jones explains, *Bodega Dreams* "asserts the presence of lived Nuyorican experience into the canon of American literature. . . . Quiñonez's novel celebrates American culture and its literature at the same time that it demands entrance into its democratic halls."[468] Like *The Great Gatsby*, *Bodega Dreams* is an American story. This is highlighted by the generational focus in the novel. None of the main characters' parents or grandparents are present in the novel. Rather, the focus is on the generation born in the U.S.—Chino, Blanco, and Sapo—and their futures. Kevane points out how, "Absent from *Bodega Dreams* is that *anoranza*, that longing for the homeland. The island of Puerto Rico is no longer a significant presence for this generation."[469] Rather, East Harlem is the homeland, and the dreams of its residents are American dreams.

This point makes the use of Spanglish at the end of the novel all the more significant. As a number of scholars have pointed out, the insertion of Spanglish into this American story reclaims the language as a part of the culture. Domínguez Miguela, for example, argues that the "inclusion of Spanish words, place-names, and

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468. Jones, "Dreaming the Nuyorican," 45-46.

469. Kevane, *Latino Literature,* 141.

concepts defamiliarizes the English language," and is a "subtle challenge to the dominant discourse."[470] Along similar lines, Jones points out how the mother's Spanglish orders to her son at the end of the novel naturalizes the presence of Spanglish as a part of New York's culture. She explains, "To the reader expecting to encounter standard English in the novel, this woman's precise words may not be fully intelligible, but the cadence and English phrasing are recognizable, thereby demanding that the reader acknowledge a shared American experience between him/herself and the Nuyorican mother."[471] By the end of *Bodega Dreams*, the reader recognizes that the culture and the dreams of El Barrio's residents are part of the American narrative.

By changing the focus of existing American narratives, Choi and Quiñonez illustrate how literary works can have an affective power on the cultural landscape. As Domínguez Miguela describes, writers like Choi and Quiñonez are trying to "claim their place in American society not only by stressing their difference but by challenging obsolete representations of the ethnic subject and encouraging true intercultural dialogue."[472] Correspondingly, their novels illustrate how communities can challenge the repressive spaces that surround them. Characters in these novels reclaim spaces, creating positive atmospheres in areas that hang heavy with the realities of repression. *American Woman* and *Bodega Dreams* illustrate how affective atmospheres are constantly in a state of flux and are, therefore, changeable.

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470. Domínguez Miguela, "Literary Tropicalizations," 177.

471. Jones, "Dreaming the Nuyorican," 43.

472. Domínguez Miguela, "Literary Tropicalizations," 178.

Recognition of the possibility for change has the ability to create an atmospheric affect of hope.

Chapter 3: Embodied Memory in the Works of Cherríe L. Moraga and Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*

Section 1: Introduction

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre treats space as the production of the human body. Likewise, he highlights the importance of considering the body a space in and of itself. Lefebvre writes:

> There is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before *producing* effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before *producing itself* by drawing nourishment from that realm and before *reproducing itself* by generating other bodies, each living body is a space and has space; it produces itself in space and it also produces that space.[473]

In the previous chapter, I examined how bodies produce space by adding to its affective atmosphere. In this chapter, I examine the body as its own space. The texts in this chapter illustrate the body's ability to maintain memory that the mind may not. These embodied memories, in the form of sensations, act as traces of the past for characters to access in their search for a path forward. In Cherríe L. Moraga's work of creative nonfiction "Sour Grapes: The Art of Anger in America," she begins with a longing for the atmosphere of the 1960s, and she appeals to bodily senses in order to

473. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, 170. Italics in the original.

reclaim and move beyond the past. Additionally, Moraga's plays *Heroes and Saints* and *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* demonstrate the political possibilities in accessing embodied memory. Finally, Monique Truong's novel *Bitter in the Mouth* illustrates how repressed memories become embodied, and how corporeal traces of these memories can allow for engagement and reconciliation with the past. Together, these works illustrate that recognizing the affective power of embodied memories and engaging with them can simultaneously access the past while opening up possibilities for the future.

Embodied memories are the traces of memories that created neurological responses but that have been disconnected from narrative structure. Much research surrounding this phenomenon has been focused on victims of trauma. Psychoanalyst Caroline Garland explains that the word *traumatic* has Greek roots referring to a "piercing of the skin, a breaking of the bodily envelope. In physical medicine it denotes damage to tissue." She explains that "Freud (1920) used the word metaphorically to emphasise how the mind too can be pierced and wounded by events, giving graphic force to his description of the way in which the mind can be thought of as being enveloped by a kind of skin, or protective shield."[474] Studies on trauma illustrate that when the mind acts as a shield, memory finds alternative routes into the body. In "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-Establishing the Self," Roberta Culbertson explains how memories of trauma "flashing like clipped pieces of film held to the light, appear unbidden and in

474. Garland, *Understanding Trauma*, 9.

surprising ways, as if possessed of a life independent of will or consciousness." These clips of memories, "though presenting themselves as clearly past, real, and fully embodied . . . appear in nonnarrative forms that seem to meet no standard test for truth or comprehensibility."[475] Culbertson explains that this is the survivor's paradox: to live with the "unreachable force of memory" while simultaneously needing to "tell what seems untellable." During a moment of violation, the body's adrenalin and noradrenalin act in a way to make the recall of the experience "qualitatively different, limiting it sometimes merely to the reflexes." In the moment, these hormones allow the body to focus on action over thought, so that, in some cases, events and feelings "are simply not registered," yet they are not forgotten. Rather, they are located in other parts of the mind and body, ones left out of the narrative memory of the event. In a way, they are repressed because "if included in [the story of the self] they would destroy it." Thus, even if a survivor's memory of an incident is blank, it is because their hormones allowed their mind to go blank during the experience.[476] Culbertson distinguishes embodied memories by separating "sense memory" from "thinking memory." Even if survivors find a way to turn their embodied memories into logical narratives, their narratives can never be fully complete because they cannot portray the body's sensual memory of the event.[477]

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475. Culbertson, "Embodied Memory," 169.

476. Culbertson, 174.

477. Culbertson, 170.

Embodied memories are heightened in trauma survivors, but it does not mean that they are only found in instances of trauma. For example, in Michelle Maiesse's *Embodiment, Emotion, and Cognition*, she tracks the developing view in both philosophy and the sciences that general consciousness and emotion are connected not just to the brain but to the entire body. She argues, "emotion is embodied in one's motor system, as well as in complex automatic physiological changes, and is typically felt *in and through* one's body as a whole." Maiesse explains that consciousness is not only "instrumentally dependent" on the body, but also "*constitutively dependent*" on the body. For Maiesse, research shows that "consciousness is not simply something that happens within our brains, but rather something that we *do* through our living bodies and our lived, bodily engagement with the world."[478] We can only experience the world through our bodily engagement with it, and therefore, our consciousness becomes a part of our bodies themselves. In fact, Maisse concludes, "Our primary way of being in the world is not reflexive or intellectual, but rather bodily and skillful."[479] This "way of being" includes our emotions and memories. Similarly, psychologist Arthur Glenburg argues that all memory is embodied. Glenburg posits that "our perceptual systems have evolved to facilitate our interactions with a real, three-dimensional world."[480] He cites numerous studies in which bodily engagement allows for stronger memory recall, as well as studies in which changing the body (e.g.

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478. Maiesse, *Embodiment*, 1. Italics in the original.

479. Maiesse, 25.

480. Glenburg, "What Memory is For," 3.

telling participants to smile or chew on a pencil) changes perception. Therefore, he concludes that "memory is embodied by encoding meshed . . . sets of patterns of action."[481] These meshed, embodied memories and patterns of action "make the environment meaningful" to a person, and for Glenburg, they provide "a way to address meaning, symbol grounding, recollective and automatic uses of memory, and language comprehension."[482]

Asian American and U.S. Latinx scholarship has long been focused on the importance of the body and its connection to historical memory. Because of their visual status as "forever foreign," as discussed in the introduction to this work, the racially visible bodies of these populations have been inscribed with history. As Lisa Lowe writes regarding the visible presence of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans, their bodies emerge "as a site that defers and displaces the temporality of assimilation."[483] These bodies become affective reminders of a history of imperialism and legalized racism that the U. S. state of exceptionalism seeks to erase. Truong's Vietnamese American narrator in *Bitter in the Mouth*, Linda, recognizes that her body carries this affective power:

> If they [the people of Boiling Springs, NC] saw my unformed breasts, the twigs that were my arms and legs, the hands and feet small enough to fit inside their mouths, how many of the men would remember the young female

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481. Glenburg, 4.

482. Glenburg, 7.

483. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 6.

> bodies that they bought by the half hour while wearing their country's uniform in the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea, or South Vietnam?

The people of Boiling Springs must develop "selective blindness" and therefore, historical amnesia in order to accept Linda's body as part of their community.[484] Viet Thanh Nguyen argues that tracing Asian American literature's concern with the body is the "most consistent trace of political consciousness . . . because authors engage with the dialectic of oppression, resistance, accommodation, and absorption centered on Asian American bodies by deploying their own characters' bodies as symbolic of a larger Asian American 'body politic,' the collective Asian American community."[485] Similarly, in the introduction to the anthology *Making Face, Making Soul*, Gloria Anzaldúa makes the same argument regarding the bodies of Chicanas. In defining what it means to "make face," she explains: "'Face' is the surface of the body that is most noticeably inscribed by social structures, markers with instructions on how to be *mujer*, *macho*, working class, Chicana." Like Linda's body, Anzaldúa illustrates how historically-inscribed bodies are also forced into erasure: "Since white AngloAmericans' racist ideology cannot take in our faces, it, too, covers them up, 'blanks' them out of its reality."[486] For Anzaldúa, the goal for women of color is to take back control of their bodies, and all that their bodies signify.

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484. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 171.

485. Nguyen, *Race & Resistance*, vi.

486. Anzaldúa, "Haciendo caras, una entrada," xv.

In this chapter, I take up this focus on the body in Asian American and U.S. Latinx scholarship. Rather than examining the history inscribed on the outside, visible body, however, I turn to the history inscribed on the inside. The texts in this chapter illustrate that accessing embodied memories can help in accessing the past—the 1960s, in particular—in order to open up possibilities for the future. Literary works like those in this chapter are effective tools for recognizing the connection between the past, embodied memories, and possible futures. Culbertson hints at this in her discussion of how victims can reconstitute the self after a traumatic event. For Culbertson, recognition of embodied memories and recollection of why they are there is not enough for victims to move forward. Rather, "to return fully to the self as socially defined, to establish a relationship again with the world, the survivor must tell what happened. This is the function of narrative." By rendering embodied memories into the form of a story, they can be re-remembered and demystified. In doing so, "mind and body are the same, the healing essentially physiological and energetic, moving finally, as in all good healing to reintegration with a community of others."[487] As Culbertson argues, and as the texts in this chapter illustrate, narrative allows us to understand the link between body, emotion, and past events. Literary narrative allows readers to see these linkages, moving into the future with greater awareness.

To begin, I turn to Moraga's "Sour Grapes: The Art of Anger in America" in which she begins with a sense of nostalgia for the 1960s, one that seems almost paralyzing. However, her emphasis on bodily memory and sensations enacts a form

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487. Culbertson, "Embodied Memory," 179.

of hope that allows for a turn in temporal focus from the past to the future. Moraga's plays *Heroes and Saints* and *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* formalize the power of embodied memories on stage. In the second part of this chapter, I discuss Truong's novel *Bitter in the Mouth*, which demonstrates how embodied memories become essential in helping later generations recover faint and lost histories. Through the protagonist Linda, the novel reveals how phenomenal memories can help to uncover repression of the past, allowing for reorientation toward the future.

Section 2: Embodied Memories and Temporal Orientation in the Works of Cherríe L. Moraga

Moraga's essay "Sour Grapes: The Art of Anger in América" is a reflection on the current state of minority playwrights in an artistic field that is mainly produced, consumed, and reviewed by white America. Chicano/a people and experiences are central to Moraga's plays, and she writes this essay to take issue with white, mainly male reviewers who are ignorant of their own biases when reviewing plays with which they cannot identify. She explains:

> Audiences grow angry (although critics as their spokespeople may call it 'criticism') when a work is not written *for* them, when they are not enlisted as a partner in the protagonists' struggle, when they may be asked to engage through self-examination rather than identification, when they must question their own centrality.[488]

488. Moraga, "Sour Grapes," 155.

She takes up the issue that her feelings are just "sour grapes" to negative reviews: "'*Yes, exactly.' Sour grapes: the bitter fruit artists of color are forced to eat in this country*."[489]

Her essay about the current state of theater, however, does not open with a description of her "sour grapes," but with her feelings of nostalgia for the 1960s. While listening to playwright August Wilson speak at Princeton in 1996 about the Black Power Movement, she becomes overwhelmed with emotion:

> I cried and called him 'brother' out loud. I cried as he said to an audience of theater professionals, overwhelmingly white, 'I am a race man' and 'The Black Power Movement . . . was the kiln in which I was fired.' I cried out of hunger, out of solidarity, out of a longing for that once uncompromising cultural nationalism of the 60s and 70s that birthed a new nation of American Indian, Chicano, Asian American and Black artists.[490]

Moraga is yearning for the past in an era of neoliberalism, one in which connections between race, class, gender, and sexuality are hidden. As Lisa Duggan explains, life under neoliberalism is organized "*in terms of* race, gender, and sexuality as well as economic class and nationality, or ethnicity and religion." However, neoliberal discourse "*actively obscures*" connections between these terms.[491] It also actively obscures connections between people like Moraga, a lesbian Chicana, and August, a

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489. Moraga, 158. Italics in the original.

490. Moraga, 152.

491. Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?*, 3. Italics in the original.

Black man. In this moment, Moraga longs to feel a connection with Wilson, and the era for which he is a reminder. She is nostalgic for the 1960s, a time that held the promise of collective action and solidary among minority groups, and that also saw a rise in recognition of minority artists. These artists, whom Moraga calls "memory carriers,"[492] shaped the era with their stories. When Moraga hears Wilson speak, she remembers that they are a part of this tradition. As playwrights, they carry "the same weapons . . . and the same armor" in the fight against white America.[493]

An investigation of the rest of Moraga's work complicates her feeling of nostalgia, however. Her connection with Wilson simultaneously reveals a disconnect in recognition that she must do mental work to overcome: "My unexpected tears forced me to acknowledge my longing for a kind of collective mutual recognition as a 'colored' playwright writing in White America. It is a longing so wide and so deep that every time Wilson mentioned 'Black,' I inserted Chicana. With every generic 'he,' I added 'she.'"[494] Just like her awareness that the connection she feels is one-sided, her feeling of nostalgia for the 1960s and 1970s glides over the complicated and sometimes contentious inter-ethnic and gender politics during this time. In Lee Bebout's study of the Chicano movement, for example, he explains that nationalist groups of the 1960s "have long held up male heroes as icons of unity and potential." In doing so, however, "gendered gaps in the Chicano nationalist imaginary" were

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492. Moraga, "Sour Grapes," 167.

493. Moraga, 153.

494. Moraga, 153.

created, restricting "who could embody such heroes further."[495] For women in the movement, they found their roles limited to either being mother figures, or "nameless *soldaderas* who were defined more by their roles of providing food and sex than through fighting."[496] For queer Chicanas like Moraga, their roles were even limited in early Chicana feminist groups.[497] Solidarity, even within nationalist groups, was an unrealized ideal. Moraga's body of work illustrates that she is well aware of this history; however, in this moment, her "wide and deep" longing avoids this complex past, as nostalgia tends to do.

In Svetlana Boym's study on personal and collective nostalgia, she details the fantastical element of the emotion. She defines: "Nostalgia (from *nosto*—return home, and *algia*—longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship."[498] Boym traces the changing temporal outlook of the twentieth century, arguing that a hopeful outlook on the future at the beginning of the century was replaced with nostalgia by the end of the century. She marks the 1960s as the era in which this shift was made permanent: "Optimistic belief in the future was discarded like an outmoded spaceship sometime in the 1960s."[499] Boym's analysis of this shift

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495. Bebout, *Mythohistorical Interventions*, 101.

496. Bebout, 103.

497. Bebout, 146-47.

498. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiii.

499. Boym, xiv.

from optimism to nostalgia does not simply illustrate it as a shift in orientation from the future to the past. She recognizes that the imaginary elements of nostalgia are about the past, real or imagined, and also about the "visions of the future that became obsolete." [500] In fact, she argues that nostalgia has a "utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed towards the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled in the conventional confines of time and space."[501] Within these confines, Boym illustrates that nostalgia has the power to be both retrospective and prospective.

Moraga, for example, longs for the 1960s because she feels out of place in the current political and cultural environment. She wants to imagine an alternate present and a future in which successful minority playwrights like Wilson do not have to be used as "the example of the ultimate democracy of American theater." She wants to imagine a future in which exceptional minority playwrights become the rule. She also wants to imagine that the past movements of the 1960s worked to create an ideal future in which all of this could have happened. In longing for a shared connection with Wilson during the era of the sixties, she simultaneously longs to be connected with him as a playwright in the present. She imagines that Wilson might think of her as "sister," though she acknowledges that this may not be the case. She writes, "I knew, whether or not he recognized me or not among the ranks, that I was a 'sister' in the struggle against a prescription for American theater that erases the lives of

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500. Boym, xvi.

501. Boym, xiv.

everyone I call my 'pueblo.'"[502] She yearns for a past of "uncompromising cultural nationalism" and solidarity, a past that might not have been, in order to envision a connection in this present moment. [503]

Moraga's essay is a practice in the type of hope that anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki describes as methodical. In his study on the enduring optimism of the Suvavou people of Fiji, Miyazaki explains that he is not interested so much in the object of their hope, but rather the practice of it. He explores how the Suvavou people have maintained optimism for governmental reparations for land that was taken from them during colonialism despite generations of thwarted hope. For Miyazaki, their persistent hope is not naïve wishful thinking. Rather, their hope is a method that allows for continual formation of self-knowledge, which in turn, shifts their focus from the past to the future. In reorienting their temporal focus, the Suvavou people create a cycle of hope. He contrasts this feeling to that of desire and explains, "Unlike the subject of desire, which inherently invites one to analyze it with its infinitely deferrable quality . . . the conceptualization of hope as a method invites one to hope."[504] As the Souvavou people illustrate through their cultural customs and political fight, one must hope in order to understand one's circumstances, and in order to continue to hope. When thinking about hope as a method, the goal becomes the continual development of hope. For Miyazaki, this is foundational to the development

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502. Moraga, "Sour Grapes," 153.

503. Moraga, 152.

504. Miyazaki, *The Method of Hope*, 5.

of knowledge. He extends his discussion of the "performative inheritance of hope"[505] of the Suvavou people to the field of anthropology itself. Practicing a method of hope in scholarship allows for engagements with new domains of thought, focusing on future development of the field. He explains that his focus is on "the idea of hope as a method that *unites* different forms of knowing."[506] Therefore, despite the desired outcome, the replication of methodical hope allows for new types of knowledge formation that simultaneously build on the past.

Through the course of her essay, Moraga practices methodical hope. She begins by laying out the facts of the past, in order to revisit and reform her self-knowledge. She begins:

> I am a third-generation Mexican born in the U.S. My mother was born in Santa Paula, California in 1914; my maternal grandmother was born in the Sonoran desert in 1888. Was it Arizona then? Was it México? In the 19th century, borders were drawn like fingered lines in the sand, and erased with every wagon wheel.

Moraga continues describing both her personal history and Chicano/a history. She illustrates the power of turning to the past, even if it started with a feeling of nostalgia. Similar to Miyazaki's argument, Boym argues that the critical study of nostalgia allows for an understanding of history while searching for "unrealized possibilities, unpredictable turns and crossroads."[507] Moraga's nostalgia allows her to

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505. Miyazaki, 129.

506. Miyazaki, 4.

507. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia,* xvi.

remember the past, understand her own circumstances, and to be critical of the U.S. "culture of forgetfulness."[508] Moraga argues that this culture carries into its arts: "They [regional theaters] want us to forget our origins and, in the act of forgetting, make our work palatable to an American consumer culture. But I/we are not so easily eaten."[509]

Only after Moraga lays out her history can her essay conclude with a temporal refocus toward the future, one that is guided by her embodied, sensorial memory. Here, she unites historical consciousness with an alternate form of knowing and being in the world. She turns to the power of the body in both remembrance of the past and focusing on the future. She writes:

> Sometimes memory is no more than a very faint sniff. You sniff it, take a step, stop and sniff again, and gradually make your way along a path to a people. You are blind and hand-and-tongue-tied. You just keep sniffing toward the warmth of the light on your face, the scent of heat on the stone-packed dirt beneath your feet, the cooling of a summer central valley evening drawing a sudden chill to your skin. You go backwards in time. You write. You're right. Even if you never read it in a book, saw it on stage or at the movies, you're on the right road.

The "you" in this statement acts on two levels: first, as a reminder to Moraga herself. Second, to young "memory carriers," who carry stories within them, stories that can

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508. Moraga, "Sour Grapes," 165.

509. Moraga, 164.

be told if they "can find form in which to express it."[510] To find their way, memory carriers must tap into their embodied memories and allow their senses to guide them. With this conclusion, Moraga illustrates that practicing hope as a method intimately connects temporal orientation with bodily orientation.

Moraga's path to hope emphasizes an alternate, phenomenal way of knowing and being in the world. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, this phenomenological approach illustrates that "existence realizes itself in the body." For both Moraga and Merleau-Ponty, consciousness begins with the living body. Merleau-Ponty explains, "Bodily existence, which runs through me, yet does so independently of me, is only the barest raw material of a genuine presence, and establishes our first consonance with the world." [511] Phenomenological thought recognizes the connection between the body and time, the same connection that Moraga's essay illustrates through its shift from memory to future possibilities. As Merleau-Ponty summarizes, "the ambiguity of being-in-the-world is translated by that of the body, and this is understood through that of time."[512]

A more recent phenomenological study by Sara Ahmed emphasizes the connection between the body and consciousness, specifically sexual consciousness. In her *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Ahmed begins her thought with phenomenology because of its focus on orientation: "phenomenology makes

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510. Moraga, 168.

511. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 192.

512. Merleau-Ponty, 98.

'orientation' central in the very argument that consciousness is always directed 'toward' an object, and given its emphasis on the lived experience of inhabiting a body."[513] Ahmed considers the orientation of bodies in time and space. She queers phenomenology to think about the spatial nature of sexual orientation. She asks, "What would it mean for queer studies if we were to pose the question of 'the orientation' of 'sexual orientation' as a phenomenological question?"[514] Like Merleau-Ponty, Ahmed prioritizes the orientation of the body in space in one's experience and knowledge of the world.

Just as Ahmed illustrates the connection between bodily and sexual orientation, Moraga's conclusion highlights the connection between bodily and temporal orientation. Part of Moraga's initial nostalgia is due to her feeling of disorientation in the present. If nostalgia is partly a sense of disorientation, however, this nostalgia does not necessarily have to paralyze. As Ahmed recognizes:

> The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do), but how such experiences can impact the orientation of bodies and spaces, which is after all about how the things are 'directed' and how they are shaped by the lines they follow. The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do—whether they can offer us the hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope.[515]

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513. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 2.

514. Ahmed, 1.

515. Ahmed, 158.

For Miyazaki, these new directions are themselves a methodical hope. Moraga's conclusion illustrates that in uniting embodied knowledge with artistic practices, writers enact a hopeful temporal shift, reorienting themselves to the future.

Moraga's play *Heroes and Saints* and its sequel *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*, demonstrate the political power in using the body to guide one's way of being in the world. Elizabeth Thomas explains that the power of theater is in its "agile ability to move effortlessly between metaphor and physical presence."[516] Diana Taylor echoes this sentiment in her study of theater. She writes, "There is a continuum between inner and outer, much as there is between the live present and the living past, and a notion (or act of imagination, perhaps) that individuals and groups share commonalities in both the here/now and there/then, made evident through embodied experience." Theater, Taylor argues, puts a spotlight on the embodied experience.[517] The genre of the play, then, is particularly apt for representing embodied memories in both physical and symbolic ways. Both of Moraga's plays address the environmental and human destruction of capitalism. *Heroes and Saints* is set in 1988 and takes place in the San Joaquin Valley of California where corporate use of pesticides has "violated" both the land and the people who work it.[518] *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* follows some of the same characters from *Heroes and Saints* eight years later during a strike against inhumane working conditions at a

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516. Thomas, "Poisoning the Mother/Land," 154.

517 Taylor, "The Archive and the Repertoire," 82.

518. Moraga, *Heroes and Saints*, 91.

cannery. Both plays demonstrate the nostalgia that Moraga herself feels in "Sour Grapes." For example, in *Watsonville*, we see the characters debate the effectiveness of fasting during their strike. Susana, a public health worker, argues that Cesar Chavez was able to create a strong impact through fasting. One of the strikers points out that she is stuck in the past with this thinking: "This is not 1968!"[519] In this neoliberal era, workers are easily replaced and methods like fasting are not so effective. In *Heroes and Saints*, the people long for an even earlier time, one before the land was worked to death. The setting notes, "The people that worked the dirt do not call what was once the land their enemy. They remember what land used to be and await its second coming."[520] Both plays, based on historical events, point to the body—connected to the land and its history—as the holder of memories that can reorient focus toward the future.

The bodies in *Heroes and Saints* act as both physical and symbolic reminders of environmental poison. The opening scene is of children hanging a cross with the body of a dead child crucified on it. The town of McLaughlin, California, has seen an unusual amount of children die from cancer because of the extreme use of pesticides in the corporate farms surrounding it.[521] The living children in the town have begun displaying the bodies of dead children on crosses because, as Amparo explains, "If

519. Moraga, *Watsonville*, 78.

520. Moraga, *Heroes and Saints*, 91.

521. In the notes to *Heroes and Saints* (89), Moraga explains that McLaughlin is a fictional town based on McFarland, California, a real town that became a "cancer cluster" between 1978 and 1988.

you put the children in the ground, the world forgets about them. Who's gointu [*sic*] see them buried in the dirt?"[522] The children's bodies are physical reminders of the poison—and the environmental racism—that surrounds them. Thomas describes these crucifixions as "a new rite of bodily memory" that performs "an act of resistance and a call to arms."[523] Similarly, the character of Cerezita is a striking reminder of the destructive environment, not because of her body but because of her lack. Cerezita was born without a body and is only a head. Her head is situated on a mouthpiece-operated, rolling platform, or "raite."[524] Thomas describes that it is "as if her body is buried beneath the toxic ground that surrounds the community."[525] Moraga based this character on a child in the documentary *The Wrath of Grapes*. Her mother worked in pesticide-sprayed fields, and the child was born without arms or legs. Cerezita is a teenager in the play because Moraga, in a moment of methodical hope, "wondered of the child's future."[526] Cerezita's mother, Dolores, keeps her daughter hidden from the community because she does not want to see her child suffer further. Cerezita realizes, however, that like the crucified children, her lack can be a strong image in the fight against the corporate farm owners. She tells her mother, "If people could see me, ámá, things would change."[527]

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522. Moraga, 94.

523. Thomas, "Poisoning the Mother/Land," 153.

524. Moraga, *Heroes and Saints*, 90.

525. Thomas, 154.

526. Moraga, *Heroes and Saints,* 89.

527. Moraga, 113.

The bodies in these plays are not just physical reminders of environmental damage; rather, they also contain the memories of the past. The women in these plays access their embodied memories to continue their political fights. The connection between the physical body and embodied memory is highlighted in *Heroes and Saints* after Amparo is beaten by the police at a rally so badly that her spleen needs to be removed. The doctor told Amparo's husband, Don Gilberto, that "the spleen is the part of the body que 'stá conectado con el coraje"—the part of the body that is connected to courage. Juan responds that the spleen is "the place of emotion, of human passions." Despite her missing spleen, Amparo taps into her body to continue her fight: "Pues, that policia got another thing coming if he think he could take away mi pasión."[528] In addition to representing the body as the place of emotional memory, Moraga also represents it as a connection to ancestral memory and, thus, the land. In the forward to *Watsonville*, Moraga highlights this connection: "I found myself truly engaged in writing about Watsonville and East Palo Alto . . . when I began to recognize these towns as sites where Indian memory is allowed place and finds articulation through the bodies of its own displaced residents."[529] The bodies of her characters contain the memories of a pre-capitalist past, one in which the land and those who lived on it were in unison.

We see the characters in Moraga's plays access their embodied memories to make connections with their ancestors and their land. In fact, using theater's "ability

528. Moraga, 135.

529. Moraga, *Watsonville*, vii.

to move effortlessly between metaphor and physical presence,"[530] Moraga's casting notes call for this connection to be visible in the character of Cerezita. The casting notes describe Cerezita as a "head of human dimension, but one who possesses such dignity of bearing and classical Indian beauty she can, at times, assume nearly religious proportions. (The huge head figures of the pre-Columbian Olmecas are an apt comparison.)"[531] Cerezita is not the only character with a connection to her ancestors. In *Watsonville*, after channeling the power of her body through fasting, Delores realizes her connection with her land and her ancestors and calls upon them in the fight: "This land is the same land as México. Todo es América y la Virgen de Guadalupe es la Emperatríz de América, una América unida. . . . Ahora, mi raza, come with me, on your knees, si pueden, para demostrar a la Virgen y a toda américa [*sic*] que somos gente de fe y fuerza."[532] After the crowd gets on their knees, they begin to chant names of ancestral goddesses. Finally, Moraga makes the power of Delores' embodied memory literal: as Delores kneels, the ground begins to rumble and an earthquake takes place. This earthquake destroys the town of Watsonville, all except "some ten thousand survivors, mostly Mexican residents, who were found gathered together in an oak grove in a County Park just outside of town," the people who were with Delores at the time.[533] This "miracle" is the result of Delores

530. Thomas, "Poisoning the Mother/Land," 154.

531. Moraga, *Heroes and Saints*, 90.

532. Moraga, *Watsonville*, 98.

533. Moraga, 99.

following the cues of her body and saving all those whose bodies hold the memory of the land.

When the characters in Moraga's play use their embodied memories to guide them, they are reoriented in new, hopeful directions. The end of *Watsonville* demonstrates this temporal shift. In a queer, sensual moment, Susana and Lucha kiss. Immediately following this bodily act, Susana expresses her connection to the land of her ancestors. She speaks in poetry:

> I am going back
> a la tierra sagrada rising up
> through the limbs of the aging oak
> and the thick torsos of redwood mourning
> I am going back
> to live in those days in resurrection of the past
> of the ancient
> of the miraculous
> I am going back to find my future.[534]

Susana's connection to the land of her people opens up a new path for the future. Moraga makes this metaphorical connection physical at the end of *Heroes and Saints* when Cerezita takes on the appearance of La Virgen de Guadalupe. In appearing as Guadalupe, Cerezite is channeling both ancestral memory and the recent past. Anzaldúa explains that Guadalupe is a combination of Mesoamerican goddesses

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534. Moraga, 105.

merged with the Christian Virgin Mary to become a symbol of hope for those who are subjugated. Additionally, Anzaldúa explains, "During the 1965 grape strike in Delano, California and in subsequent Chicano farmworkers' marches in Texas and other parts of the Southwest, [Guadalupe's] image on banners heralded and united the farmworkers."[535] In this image, Cerezita finally appears in public and tells the people, "Put your hand inside my wound. Inside the valley of my wound, there is a people. A miracle people. In this pueblito where the valley people live, the river runs red with blood." Cerezita channels the history of her people found in her (lack of) body. She connects this to the present moment, telling the crowd that their bodies hold this memory, too: "You are the miracle people too, for like them, the same blood runs through your veins. The same memory of a time when your deaths were cause for reverence and celebration, not shock and mourning." Finally, Cerezita leads a call to action, one that points to the future: "You are the miracle people because today, this day, that red memory will spill out from inside you and flood this valley con coraje. And you will be free."[536] As Cerezita moves her raite into the field, she is shot by those policing the protest. In her death, however, the people "all . . . rush out to the vineyards" shouting "¡Asesinos!"—Assassins!—and they continue to fight for their futures.[537]

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535. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 51-52.

536. Moraga, *Heroes and Saints*, 148.

537. Moraga, 149.

Moraga's "Sour Grapes" asks minority artists to follow their embodied memories to save the future of their culture. Her plays *Heroes and Saints* and *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here*, represent the power of embodied memories in both symbolic and physical ways. In an interview with Moraga, Maria-Antónia Oliver-Rotger comments that Moraga's plays "draw attention to the 'real' social space that conditions the lives of [her] characters," while simultaneously drawing attention "to the 'imagined' or 'imaginary' space that is necessary for spiritual, cultural and political regeneration."[538] I argue that this "imagined" space in Moraga's plays is accessed through the character's connection with their embodied memories of ancestry and land. Although Moraga's works illustrate anguish, none end with that feeling. Rather, they end with a reorientation to the future, one that holds hopeful possibilities.

Section 3: Tastes of the Past in Bitter in the Mouth

The "culture of forgetfulness" that Moraga disdains is literalized through Linda's missing memories in Monique Troung's novel *Bitter in the Mouth* (2002). Linda Nguyen Hammerick, the narrator, is born in Vietnam in 1968. Not long after her birth, her father receives a post-doctoral fellowship in the United States and her family moves to North Carolina. It is from North Carolina that they watch the destructive Vietnam War on television. In a parallel moment of destruction, Linda's parents die in a tragic fire in 1975, leaving seven-year-old Linda to be adopted by the Hammerick family in Boiling Springs, a rural town in North Carolina. The past has

538. Moraga, "Voices from the Gaps," 1.

been almost entirely cut off from Linda's memory. She cannot remember anything about the first seven years of her life, and her adoptive parents hide anything they know about it from her. Her body provides the one faint memory to her past. As a synesthete who experiences taste when she hears words, Linda has only the memory of a bitter taste in her mouth from the night of the fire. She explains, "When I was seven, I heard a word that made me taste an unidentifiable bitter, and I never forgot flames cutting through the seams of a trailer home, the sound of footsteps on gravel, then darkness. Not of nighttime, which it must have been, but of closed eyelids or a hand held tight over them."[539] Linda's memory has become embodied, and she believes this bitter taste is a connection to her parents and her past. Underlying Linda's narrative is a search for the word that will recreate this taste. Through Linda, *Bitter in the Mouth* demonstrates how embodied memories can uncover repressed histories, opening up future possibilities.

The synesthesia that Linda experiences is only one of many sensory combinations in which the condition presents itself. Psychologist James Ward explains that for synesthetes, "One attribute of a stimulus (e.g., its sound, shape, or meaning) may inevitably lead to the conscious experience of an additional tribute." He provides the following examples: "the word 'Phillip' may taste of sour oranges, the letter A may be luminous red, and a C# note on the violin may be a brown fuzzy line

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539. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth*, 116. Like Linda, the character of Cerezita in Moraga's *Heroes and Saints* also has the memory of a bitter taste. Because she is bodiless, however, Cerezita's memories cannot be embodied and she remembers the distinct circumstances of the taste (95): "I remember the first time I tasted fear, I smelled it in her [Delores's] sweat. It ran like a tiny river down her breast and mixed with her milk. I tasted it on my tongue. It was very bitter. Very bitter."

extending from left to right in the lower left part of space."[540] Like Ward's first example, Linda experiences taste when she hears words. She catalogs her synesthesia throughout her narrative by connecting tastes—or "incomings," as Linda calls them—to their words: for example, "Hammerick*Dr.Pepper*, Linda*mint*,"[541] and "My mom*chocolatemilk* says this is for you*cannedgreenbeans.*"[542] As Linda describes, "Many of the words that I heard or had to say aloud brought with them a taste—unique, consistent, and most often unrelated to the meaning of the word that had sent the taste rolling into my mouth."[543] Linda's experience aligns with studies on synesthesia, which show that the induced sense is an "inevitable consequence of encountering the inducer."[544] Not all words have tastes for Linda, however; some are "voids."[545] As an adult Linda realizes that her incomings can only produce a flavor after she has experienced the taste; in other words, they are sensory traces of memories. Growing up, Linda was exposed mainly to DeAnne's cooking, which she describes as "unpleasant, bland, or unremarkable at best." She also learns that her birth mother learned to cook from Betty Crocker cookbooks, providing her with

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540. Ward, "Synesthesia," 50. According to Ward (54), some studies have found that 1 in 2,000 people are synesthetes; however, because these studies required volunteers to respond to an ad, the prevalence may be much higher.

541. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 30.

542. Truong, 62.

543. Truong, 21.

544. Ward, "Synesthesia," 50.

545. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 76.

American tastes throughout her childhood.[546] Once Linda moves to New York City for law school, the flavors attached to her new legal vocabulary broaden and become much more flavorful.[547] Linda's incomings have a strong effect on her, even into adulthood. On days when Linda encounters too many distasteful words, she explains, "I was subdued and in search of a dark, quiet room. The opposite, of course, was also true."[548]

Linda views the unidentifiable bitter taste as a key to the memories of the first seven years of her life. She believes that if she could only identify the taste, or the word that creates the taste, she could regain her memories. She narrates, "I have come close to identifying that taste of bitter, but close isn't good enough for a mnemonic device. As for the word that triggered it, the usual trailhead of my memories, it remains lost to me."[549] Like in Linda's case, Ward explains that "synesthetic experiences of taste can occur even if the inducing word is inaccessible, as in a tip-of-the-tongue state."[550] This missing taste feels all the more frustrating for Linda because she relies on her synesthesia to strengthen her memory in general. She calls it her "secret sense" that provides "a way to encode information that was immediate and long-lasting."[551] Amanda Dykema argues that through this encoding, Linda creates an

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546. Truong, 271.

547. Truong, 74.

548. Truong, 77.

549. Truong, 117.

550. Ward, "Synesthesia," 50.

551. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 115.

embodied archive with her incomings. Dykema explains the connection between archives and nostalgia: "symptoms of archive fever include the desire for that which is elusive ('right where it slips away'), as well as nostalgia not for the past in general but for the moment of origination and beginnings."[552] Linda feels nostalgia for an origin she cannot remember, but she continues to hope that it will reveal itself to her.

A number of critics have tied Linda's lost memories to the trauma she experienced that night of the fire. As Culbertson explains, in cases of trauma, one's hormones may cause a mind the go "blank"; thus, the memories find their way into the body.[553] Begoña Simal-González connects this situation directly to Linda's. She writes, "If amnesia can naturally result from the traumatic event (fire, death, separation), then synesthesia can even be interpreted as Linda's particular way of coping with that same traumatic experience, allowing the mind-body to forget and remember (through word-taste associations) at the same time."[554] Michele Janette connects the trauma of the fire to the historical trauma experienced by Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S. during and after the Vietnam War. She points to how Linda's use of the word "incomings" links her "neurological bombardment directly to the militarized global power struggles that killed many of her family members and to the violence of American racism against new and linguistically different immigrant

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552. Dykema, "Embodied Knowledges," 106.

553. Culbertson, "Embodied Memory," 174.

554. Simal-González, "Judging the Book by Its Cover," 27.

populations in the wake of such global power struggles."[555] In fact, Janette goes so far as to posit that the suspicious timing of the fire—the day after the fall of Saigon—"suggested racialized violence," arson caused by a "jingoistic American."[556] Thus, Linda's experience can be seen as a metaphor for the trauma experienced by the Vietnamese and Vietnamese immigrants alike.

In addition to the trauma of her past, the culture that surrounds Linda also impedes her narrative memory formation. Her adoptive parents, Thomas and DeAnne Hammerick, have purposefully concealed anything that they know about her personal history. Thomas had been in love with Linda's birth mother, Mai-Dao, earlier in his life. They stayed in touch through letters, though they both ultimately married other people. When the fire occurred, Thomas was the only American contact that that emergency workers could find for Linda's parents. He immediately rushed to help Linda and convinced his wife to adopt her. Before agreeing to the adoption, DeAnne makes Thomas reveal his entire past with Linda's mother. Then, she makes him agree to never tell Linda about her birth parents. She offers Linda a rhetorical question as an explanation for this act: "*Otherwise how could I learn to love you, Linda?*"[557] DeAnne cannot begin to imagine accepting Linda if she were constantly reminded of Linda's past. She believes that erasing the past will allow Linda to assimilate into

555. Janette, "'Distorting Overlaps,'" 168.

556. Janette, 169.

557. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 288. Italics in the original.

their lives more easily. Erasure of a child's past is common in some instances of interracial adoption. As Jennifer Ho explains:

> Certain white adoptive parents seem to view their Asian adopted children as malleable and flexible; their natal ancestry is simply the backdrop on which they can mold, anew, their American identities, and their racial difference is rendered ambiguous—it can be acknowledged and then discarded as unimportant.[558]

For DeAnne, erasure of Linda's history is even more personal, as Linda is the representation of her husband's emotional infidelities.

Even with the disavowal of Linda's past, however, Linda's body acts as a constant reminder and threat for DeAnne. Linda narrates her last conversation with DeAnne in which DeAnne reveals her past feelings: "She admitted that during the first few years of my life at the blue and gray ranch house she sometimes would pretend that I wasn't there. She would close her eyes and imagine that everything had stayed exactly the same. This became more difficult as I grew older. *Thomas loved you so much, Linda*." Again, DeAnne frames her explanation in terms of love. Linda realizes that her physical presence is the constant reminder of her mother: "When I was in the house, Mai-Dao was in the house."[559] There is more to DeAnne's attempt to disavow Linda's physical presence than the reminder of her husband's emotional infidelity, however. Linda's body is a reminder of her birth mother, but it also

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558. Ho, *Racial Ambiguity*, 53.

559. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 281.

becomes a threat to the purity of the Hammerick family. DeAnne's actions are aligned with the U.S. culture of forgetfulness when it comes to Vietnamese immigrants. As Janette argues, "This offer of assimilated inclusion is the promise America has historically held out to 'model minorities.' It is the promise that, once difference is repressed, the nation could learn to love its immigrants."[560] DeAnne attempts to erase Linda's body—the physical reminder of Mai-Dao and Linda's racial difference—in the hopes that she could come to love her. However, just as the nation cannot repress the difference of those whose image remains foreign, DeAnne is unable to repress Linda. At one point in her narrative, Linda pauses to reflect on the word "favor." She explains, "I now know that it is no coincidence that the word 'favor' is used to denote a physical resemblance. . . . Favor is a reciprocity based on a biological imperative."[561] It is this reciprocity that becomes so frightening for DeAnne. The affective nature of Linda's body forces DeAnne to avoid giving love and, therefore, the reciprocity of favor.

As we see through DeAnne's treatment of Linda, adoption, particularly transracial adoption, has a strong affective nature. In *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging*, Mark C. Jerng explains that narratives of adoption revolve around the adoptive parent(s), which stifles the adoptee's need for recognition. Jerng writes:

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560. Janette, "'Distorting Overlaps,'" 172.

561. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 133.

> The adoptee is defined only in relation to another character, only as part of a relationship and structure from which his or her status as adoptee derives. At the same time that the adoptee is a person whose inclusion within given social structures is always in question, he or she is defined only as a part of someone else.[562]

Because the adoptee is defined only as a part of the adoptive parent, however, the relationship is an affective one, and the definition of the parent changes as well, whether they acknowledge it or not. In his study on racialization, David L. Eng considers this affective nature of transnational adoption. He traces a case study of a girl named Mina, who was adopted from Korea by two white parents. Her case causes him to question the reciprocity of affect involved: "Is the transnational adoptee an immigrant? Is she Korean? Is she Korean American? Are her adopted parents, in turn, immigrants, Korean, or Korean American?"[563] For Eng, the adoption process is a two-way encounter in which affect flows in both directions. Facing the reality of Linda as part of the family would force DeAnne to consider the changing racialization that Linda's adoption has forced upon the Hammerick family.

DeAnne's treatment of Linda is representative of how the nation treats the physical presence of the Asian "other" in their midst. In Boiling Springs, for example, the affective force of Linda's body does not end with familial lines, and the fear of pollution extends into the community. As I described at the beginning of this chapter, Linda's body, her sexuality, is a reminder of the sexual exploitation that went hand in

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562. Jerng, *Claiming Others*, xxvi.
563. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship*, 149.

hand with U.S. imperialism in Vietnam. Although the adults in the community adapt to this reminder through "selective blindness," the children become mouthpieces of their parents' racism, taunting: "Chinese, Japanese / Dirty knees, / Look at these!" while pointing at their breasts.[564] With both the adults and children in Boiling Springs, Linda's body becomes a site of sexualized affect. Her reproductive presence threatens the southern, i.e. white, "purity"[565] of this North Carolina community. Like Linda's relationship as an adoptee, her relationship to her community is an affective one. As an adult, Linda's fiancé, Leo, comments that she must know "what it was like *being* Asian in the South." Linda replies, "No, Leo, I knew what it was like *being* hated in the South."[566] As Janette points out, Linda changes the relationship from one of looking Asian to an affective exchange between her and her community, one representative of the "embedded structures of power" in the South.[567] Linda's treatment in Boiling Springs is biographical for Truong. In an interview with Jihii Jolly, Truong explains why she set *Bitter in the Mouth* in Boiling Springs, the small town where she lived as a child for three years:

> Boiling Springs was where I became—in a blink of an eye—not just a little girl but a Chink, a Jap, and a Gook (all the names that my classmates called

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564. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 171-72. Adult Linda comments (172), "Emily Dickinson, these monsters were not."

565. Linda explains (173) that when she "came to Boiling Springs, the diversity drought was over," emphasizing its lack of any racial minorities, including Asian Americans.

566. Truong, 173. Italics in the original.

567. Janette, "'Distorting Overlaps,'" 165.

> me). Boiling Springs was where I learned that I was physically different, ugly, and a target. So, yes, I wanted to revisit this small town that I have carried with me with so much anger, and I wanted to make it mine. I wanted to tell my version of its story.[568]

Like her narrator, Truong revisits Boiling Springs later in life in order to reclaim the narrative of her past.

Although Linda did not know any other Asians or Asian Americans in Boiling Springs, her experience of the U.S. South is not unique. Frank Cha explains that after the fall of Saigon in 1975, 130,000 Vietnamese refugees came into the U.S., and three relocation centers were located in the South: Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, and Fort Bragg in North Carolina. After securing income or a sponsor, refugees would move from these centers, and many found homes in towns nearby. Cha notes one example of how this changed the makeup of the South: "The drastic increase in the Vietnamese population in Fayetteville, North Carolina, home to Fort Bragg, led many residents to rename the town 'Fayettenam.'" Cha explains that the attitude toward these refugees was unsupportive, with 54% of Americans opposing resettlement. Cha writes, "The lingering memories of the war and growing concerns over the immigrants' effect on job opportunities and public housing left many leery of the Vietnamese presence in the United States."[569] Thus, the poor

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568. Truong, "Southern Girl." In "History is a Story," Truong explains that she thought about changing the name of the town, but "it was too wonderfully gothic: I've never thought of Boiling Springs as a gift—more like a curse—until I decided to write about it. If you are a writer and life gives you a 'Boiling Springs,' you would be a fool to ignore it or change it."

569. Cha, "Growing Up in the Margins," 134.

treatment of Linda (and Truong) highlights the experience of many Vietnamese refugees in the South. As Denise Cruz describes, "the novel highlights imperial histories of pain and violence that tie South Vietnam to the US South."[570] It is also important to note that these experiences are not unique to the South. In *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South*, Leslie Bow argues that "the South is often conveniently represented as the Third World within, part of the First World but not quite" so that the rest of America can claim "immunity" from it.[571] However, as Cruz points out, the South is a "hypervisible site of the lingering history of racial and sexual violence" for the entire nation.[572]

As a member of the Hammerick family and the Boiling Springs community—and as an Asian American—Linda experiences what Eng terms "racial melancholia." The racial melancholic experiences "ungrievable" loss in the "everyday experiences of immigration, assimilation, and racialization." For the racial melancholic, the history of political and social conflicts becomes interwoven in the space of familial relations. Therefore, even intimate relationships and encounters become racialized, organizing the psychic life of the racial melancholic. This notion is similar to Lauren Berlant's argument in *Cruel Optimism* that trauma theory can no longer account for the affective experience of everyday life in late capitalism; rather, she explains that

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570. Cruz, "Monique Truong's Literary South," 729.

571. Bow, *Partly Colored*, 231.

572. Cruz, "Monique Truong's Literary South," 718.

we live our everyday lives in a "crisis of ordinariness."[573] For the racial melancholic, whose bodies have been marked as foreign and un-assimilable, their "crisis of ordinariness" has historical roots and is layered with their racialization. For Eng, Freud's notion of melancholia is a key tool to understanding this sometimes unnamable and constant "pain of racial history and reality."[574] This experience is heightened for Linda because her adoptive parents are not first- or second-generation immigrants. Like Mina, the adoptee in Eng's case study, Linda faces the "suspension of this intergenerational and intersubjective process, the loss of the communal nature of racial melancholia."[575] Without a community to share in her melancholy, Linda's "pain of racial history and reality" cannot be shared and is epitomized in her amnesia and her embodied memory of a bitter taste. In fact, the word that triggers the bitter taste may be a Vietnamese word, making Linda's lack of community an even more poignant loss.

The form of *Bitter in the Mouth* parallels Linda's experience of amnesia and solitude. Just as Linda's history has been withheld from her for most of her life, the novel does not reveal the story behind the bitter taste until almost two-thirds into the book. Moreover, readers do not even learn that Linda is Vietnamese American until this revelation. Although there have been small clues, it is nearly impossible to pick up on them until a second reading of the book. Margot Kaminski explains how the form of the novel makes this revelation all the more surprising:

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573. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 10.

574. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship,* 163.
575. Eng, 150.

> Truong revisits events again and again, to pin them down or expose slightly more, or show them from a slightly different angle. . . . You get so used to this technique that you don't expect to be blindsided. But you will be. This book made me the most surprised I've ever been in a revelation about a character, in a way that suddenly explained all the careful nuances of conflict that Truong had laid down before.[576]

Simal-González argues that this strategy emphasizes Linda's synesthesia as the defining character that makes her "other," rather her race. She writes, "For Linda, Truong tells us, it is not her presumed Asianness that matters; what makes her really different is her synesthesia."[577] This argument, however, does not take into account the complex ways that Linda's race and synesthesia work together in her identity formation. Rather, I am inclined to agree with critics like Lisa Hinrichsen, who argue that this formal strategy "is both a strategic move to mirror the cultural whitewashing of Linda's Asian heritage in the South and a reflection of her own delayed knowledge of the true facts of her parental history."[578]

Because Linda's past has been forgotten and hidden from her, and because she lacks an Asian American community to help her process the trauma that she has experienced, Linda's coping mechanism is to repress her only connection to her past: her incomings. As a teenager in a world of labels and cliques, Linda consciously takes on the role of the "Smartest Girl" in high school because embracing that role meant

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576. Kaminski, review of *Bitter in the Mouth*, 125.
577. Simal-González, "Judging the Book by Its Cover," 25.
578. Hinrichsen, "Consuming Memories," 189.

"disembodiment."[579] In order to be the "smartest," Linda has to stifle her synesthesia because the incomings distract her from listening to her teachers. She begins smoking between periods because it weakens the strength of her incomings. The novel itself has already made a convincing case for the distracting nature of Linda's incomings. Reading a conversation with the connection between the words and tastes can become challenging. For example, "You*cannedgreenbeans* never*bubblegum* say any*rice*thing*tomato* to me now."[580] In some ways, Linda's repression of her incomings also provides a break for the reader. Janette calls the way that Linda's incomings are formally represented as "interference."[581] She points out that Amazon reviewers tend to respond negatively to this textual interference: "Frustrated, they decry the denotative/connotative pairings as 'distract[ing]' . . . 'tedious' . . . 'irritating.'"[582] Just like Linda, DeAnne, and the town of Boiling Springs, readers find short-term relief when difference is stifled or ignored.

In repressing her incomings, Linda becomes detached from her history—both her personal history with its embodied memories and, therefore, the cultural history that her very body represents. Even when her education provides clues to her erased history, she feels no connection to it. This feeling is literalized when she sees her own

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579. Truong, *Bitter*, 173.

580. Truong, 45.

581. In "Monique Truong's Literary South" (49), Cruz uses the word "disjunction" to describe this method, which she feels represents "the textual construction of otherness."

582. Janette, "'Distorting Overlaps,'" 174.

name, "Nguyen," in a history book, referring to Nguyen Van Thieu, the president of South Vietnam from 1967-1975. She explains, "For a split second, I thought the president's name was a typographical error, perhaps a missing vowel or a consonant tucked into a Dutch name. Then I recognized it as 'the unpronounceable part' of my name. . . . I had never seen 'Nguyen' printed in a book before. So while it belonged to me, I didn't recognize it."[583] Linda, so disconnected from her birth family and culture, can only imagine her name as a typographical error. Up until this point of the novel, Linda's main exposure to history has been through a children's book about North Carolina that her father gave her. Her reaction to this book is quite different when compared with her reaction in seeing her name in print:

> When I was eight years old . . . my father gave me a book entitled *North Carolina Parade: Stories of History and People.* The book was published in 1966, two years before I was born. It had the look and feel of a book written in a much less complicated decade than the sixties. . . . I was immediately pulled in. There was something reassuring about having the history and people of your world reduced to 209 pages and a handful of drawings. True to his nature, my father wanted me to have a book that would foster a sense of security and belonging.[584]

Linda claims that this book teaches her that history "always had a point of view" and that actual history "was in the missing details."[585] However, a juxtaposition of her

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583. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 216.
584. Truong, 52.
585. Truong, 52-53.

narrative illustrates that the uneven exposure—she receives 209 pages about North Carolina's history and five paragraphs about Vietnam—adds to the sense of disconnect she feels when reading about Vietnamese history.

Additionally, the formal presentation of the two histories illustrate the different connections that Linda has with both. For Linda, *North Carolina Parade* was a book about the people of "your world." The shift to second person in this sentence reveals Linda's precarious place in North Carolina. It is not, "my world," but it is not "their world," either. Although she is hesitant to claim her community, the sense of connection is stark when compared with her description of Vietnam as presented through her history book:

> In the other four paragraphs about Vietnam in my history book, I learned that the war was still in progress in 1968, the year of my birth, and that it ended for the Vietnamese in 1975, the year of my second birth at the blue and gray ranch house. I filed these facts away. They were connected to me, but I wasn't connected to them. . . . At the time, I had no body, which meant that I was impervious and had no use for such information.[586]

This description is firmly in the third person: "the Vietnamese," "they," and "them." Linda pinpoints her lack of a body—the physical marker of her ethnicity—for this disengagement. As *North Carolina Parade* interrupts Linda's ability to make a connection with her past, it formally continues to interrupt her narrative. Many of the chapters begin with Linda narrating seemingly unrelated stories from the history of

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586. Truong, 216.

North Carolina. Chapter 6, for example, starts, "Orville Wright was the first American man to fly."[587] One could argue that each of these unrelated stories has a thematic connection to Linda's narrative. The story about Orville Wright, for example, concludes with Linda realizing that Wilbur Wright's story does not receive the historical attention it deserves. Wilbur flew more successfully, but he did not fly first; therefore, his place in history is lesser than his brother's. These stories continue to highlight the thematic notion that untold history speaks volumes. More importantly, however, all of the North Carolina stories work to formally interrupt the narrative. Readers become distracted by historical figures from North Carolina as they work to piece together Linda's personal history, paralleling the experience Linda has a child.

After so much interference and repression for the reader, the novel's late revelation of Linda's ethnicity clarifies the disorientation the reader was almost unaware they were experiencing. Before the reveal, for example, Linda comments on the idea that she was an "aberration" in her family because she was adopted:

> During my sophomore year in college, I learned in my Alienation/Alien Nation seminar, cross-listed under sociology and literature, that a definition of 'aberration' was a mirror that failed to produce an exact image. I understood long before this that the body, especially that of an offspring, was best when it was a reflective surface.[588]

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587. Truong, 61.

588. Truong, *Bitter*, 133.

After the revelation of her adoption and race, however, this section takes on political and historical significance. Linda's feeling is not just about her place in her family, but in her community and nation as well. With the revelation, readers can see the entire structure of her psyche. Linda is, as Bow labels it, an "anomaly" in Boiling Springs. Although Bow's study is about the position of Asian Americans in the South during Jim Crow, Linda's story can be read as a continuation of this study. For Bow, being an anomaly does not carry only a negative affect. Rather, inherent in an anomaly is the potential for "a productive site for understanding the investments that underlie a given system of relations; what is unaccommodated becomes a site of contested interpretation." For Bow, studying the space between black and white "forces established perspectives and definitions into disorientation."[589] As we learned from Ahmed's study of phenomenology, new directions and possibilities emerge out of disorientation.

Bitter in the Mouth ultimately encourages the hope inherent in new directions. As a child, Linda deals with her status as an anomaly through repression. When Linda stifles her incomings, however, she turns further into herself and away from any possible community. It is at this point that her deep friendship with Kelly—the only person who knows about her synesthesia—begins to crumble. Into adulthood, she continues to struggle with making connections. In fact, Linda does not even tell her fiancé Leo about her synesthesia. Eventually, in her forties, she is diagnosed with ovarian cancer, which leaves her unable to conceive a child and marks the end of her

589. Bow, *Partly Colored,* 4.

engagement to Leo. Although the book does not explicitly point to her smoking—Linda's repressor of choice—as a cause, it most certainly did not help prevent the disease from forming. Paradoxically, it is the removal of her ovaries, what Linda calls the "void" in her body,[590] that forces her back into her body. After this diagnosis, she has to quit smoking and drinking alcohol, and has no choice but to allow her incomings to occur without repression. Around this time, Linda comes across a PBS special about synesthesia. It is the first time she hears about others with her same condition. Like Moraga's emotional recognition of August, Linda is overwhelmed by this program and the synesthetes represented on it:

> I was on my knees in front of the television, and not only my hands but my face was also pressed against the screen. I was no longer as interested in seeing the images as becoming one with the images. I wanted to give the six-year-old girl who would grow up to be Ms. Cordell . . . a hug and tell her about Mr. Roland and me. I knew that the information about our existence would have comforted that little girl in Tuscaloosa because it would have comforted the one in Boiling Springs.[591]

Linda has finally discovered a community. No longer able to repress her incomings, she returns to Boiling Springs with a tape of the PBS special and a new sense of direction.

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590. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 212.

591. Truong, 222.

Linda's new openness is reflected in her reestablished relationships. In Boiling Springs, after reconnecting with Kelly, Linda sits down for an honest conversation with DeAnne. In order to be open with DeAnne, Linda must start with her embodied memories, so she begins by playing the PBS tape. DeAnne's recognition of Linda's subjectivity begins with her recognition of Linda's experience of the world. As a child, Linda tried to tell DeAnne that "mom" tasted like chocolate milk. DeAnne, not willing to try to understand, responds, "Linda*mint*, please*lemonjuice* don't talk*cornchips* like a crazy*heavycream* person*garlicpowder*."[592] Now that Linda is an adult and they are restarting their relationship in a new direction, DeAnne responds to the PBS tape by asking Linda "how much it hurt [her] to not be believed" when she was a child.[593] Both DeAnne and Linda are finally in a position to begin to recognize each other. In fact, Linda marks this moment as their first official meeting: "I met DeAnne Whatley Hammerick for the first time when she was sixty-six years old."[594]

In reconnecting with her body and reforming a sense of community, Linda is guided to the story of her past. Through DeAnne, Linda's history finds its form. DeAnne tells her of the fire, of Thomas's love for Mai-Dao, of the Vietnam's War destruction of her extended family, and of family who managed to escape to France. History that once registered no connection for Linda becomes a major part of her family story. She realizes that 1968-1975 marks not only her lost memories, but also global events that forever changed her family's lives. Linda also learns that she still

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592. Truong, 107.

593. Truong, 246.

594. Truong, 244.

has living relatives, opening up the possibility of reconnection. Although the bitter taste remains a mystery,[595] the specifics are no longer quite as important as they had been. Rather than being the sole key to her past, Linda's taste becomes what Eng calls an "affective correspondence," which keeps "the past affectively alive in the present" and becomes "a site of both individual repair, of collective racial reparation."[596] The affective correspondence acts as both a site of history and of futurity. The taste in Linda's mouth acts as a potential site of the restoration of history, and in doing so, it becomes more about future possibility than lost past. As Dykema explains, "A mnemonic device, Linda's synesthesia registers memory but also constantly gestures to the future day that she might taste the mysterious bitterness and gain knowledge of the word she seeks. . . . Linda's archive is clearly as much about the future as it is about the past."[597] This shift in temporality is satisfying for Linda. She narrates, "At least it was a story. . . . We all need a story of where we came from and how we got here. Otherwise, how could we ever put down our tender roots and stay."[598]

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595. Dykema points out (125) that even if DeAnne had said the word that would trigger the taste during this conversation, Linda would not experience it: "DeAnne's method of telling Linda's family history—'very slowly, pausing in between words, stopping in midsentence'— activates and heightens the operations of Linda's synesthetic archive. . . . Desperate to quell the incomings, Linda procures a bottle of bourbon, and the story continues without interruption."

596. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship,* 186.

597. Dykema, "Embodied Knowledges," 124.

598. Truong, *Bitter in the Mouth,* 282.

Section 4: Conclusion

Both Moraga's and Truong's works illustrate the hopeful, affective power of embodied memories. In "Sour Grapes: The Art of Anger in America," Moraga uses her senses to redirect herself from nostalgia and toward the future possibilities of art. Moraga advises that minority artists tap into their embodied memories to carry their culture into the future. Her plays *Heroes and Saints* and *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* are examples of the kind of cultural work that she encourages in "Sour Grapes." The plays illustrate the power of embodied emotion and memory in enabling a sense of political possibility for the future. In *Bitter in the Mouth*, Truong illustrates how embodied memories are traces to repressed and forgotten pasts. Remaining open to these memories can allow for reorientation toward the future.

Although all memory is embodied, the works in this chapter illustrate the imperative for minorities in the U.S. to remain connected to the memories that the body maintains. Both Moraga and Truong illustrate the everyday trauma—the racial melancholy[599]—that minority populations experience in a country that wills forgetfulness for its past and blindness for its current racism. This trauma is inscribed in the body. Moreover, recent research indicates that the physiological effects of trauma can alter genetic coding in ways that get passed on to later generations.[600] When Moraga's characters turn to their bodies as a way to connect to their ancestors,

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599. Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*.

600. Yehuda et al., "Holocaust Exposure." Although this study is focused on Holocaust survivors and their children, the authors conclude (372) that it provides "potential insight into how severe psychophysiological trauma can have intergenerational effects."

they are connecting both to their ancestors' strength and their trauma, on a genetic level. As Cruz argues in her essay on *Bitter in the Mouth*, "despite the prevalence of twenty-first-century narratives that suggest otherwise . . . race still matters, for the global and local histories of race relations still linger bitterly in the mouth, long after we imagine they are gone."[601] Just as Eng describes transnational adoption, racialization in the U.S. is a two-way, affective encounter; therefore, awareness of the affective labor that racialized bodies have had to carry—that should not be theirs to carry alone—is also imperative.

Narrative is important in bringing awareness to embodied memories. On the stage, the bodies of Moraga's characters work on both a physical and metaphorical level. When Delores fasts and calls upon her ancestors, resulting in an earthquake, the powers of Delores' embodied memories are made visual on the stage. Similarly, Linda's synesthesia—and its representation on the page—gives physical presence to embodied memories, as well as the narratives that surround them. As Dykema explains, "In making Linda a synesthete, Truong has created a character who cannot stop the influence of the outside world on her body and experience. As a result, inner and outer are productively muddled."[602] Moraga's and Truong's narratives muddle the lines between bodies and the memories they maintain. Thus, they make visible the affective nature of racialization. In doing so, they illustrate how embodied memories can be recognized and, in an act of hope, channeled to continue to face the future with a sense of possibility.

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601. Cruz, "Monique Truong's Literary South," 727.

602. Dykema, "Embodied Knowledges," 124.

Coda

On November 9, 2016, the morning after the presidential election, *The New York Times* published an article by Roxanne Gay entitled "The Audacity of Hopelessness." In the midst of watching election results, Gay wrote, "I am stunned. . . . I was confident because I thought there were more Americans who believe in progress and equality than there were Americans who were racist, xenophobic, misogynistic and homophobic. This is a generalization, but it's hard to feel otherwise." Gay described her emotional response to the results: "I feel hopeless right now. I am incredibly disappointed, but I cannot wallow in these feelings for long. I will not. The world will not end because of a Trump presidency. Tomorrow, the sun will rise and the day will be a lot less joyful than I imagined, but I'll get through it. We all will."[603]

Thus far, the Trump presidency has provided progressives with plenty to feel hopeless about. In addition to the rise in racial hate crimes,[604] immigrants and minority Americans have suffered a string of setbacks. In terms of Latinx immigration, the Trump administration is criminalizing the asylum process for political refugees. Natahsa Arnpriester, a writer for Human Rights First, details how the zero-tolerance "Operation Streamline" is prosecuting anyone who enters the U.S. without authorization, even those who are claiming asylum. Arnpriester gives an

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603. Gay, "The Audacity of Hopelessness."

604. See p. 5-6 of this project for details about the rise in hate crimes.

account of the Operation Streamline trials that she attended: "I've visited all eight Streamline courts and watched more than 500 prosecutions for entry charges. All the defendants have been Latino."[605] This zero-tolerance policy has led to an increase in detainment, with adult asylum-seekers being sent to prison and deported while their children are held in privately-owned detention centers.[606] As of 2019, at least 2,600 families experience separation.[607] Additionally, the Trump administration's wall on the U.S.-Mexico border currently has $18.4 billion available for construction.[608]

Immigrants in the country are also facing battles. Since the election, the Trump administration has tried to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, under which approximated 800,000 undocumented immigrants who arrived to the U.S. as children would be protected from deportation.[609] Although the Supreme Court recently ruled against the administration, it did so not because the administration could not rescind DACA but because they did not provide proper justification to do so.[610] Additionally, the Trump administration has pushed to end refugee status for Vietnamese refugees, including some who have become permanent

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605. Arnpriester, "Trump and the Criminalization of Asylum."

606. Garrett, "The Security Apparatus, Federal Magistrate Courts, and Detention Centers as Simulacra," 83.

607. Todres and Villamizar Fink, "The Trauma of Trump's Family Separation and Child Detention Actions," 377.

608. Miroff and Blanco, "Trump Ramps up Border-Wall Construction."

609. Rogers, "Dreaming of the Future," 1.

610. Totenberg, "Supreme Court Rules For DREAMers, Against Trump."

residents.[611] Although they gave up this push regarding Vietnamese immigrants, they most recently made a similar push to deport Lao and Hmong refugees.[612] Finally, the Trump administration has overseen a breakdown in the nation's relationship with China, leading to trade wars and xenophobia, particularly in light of the emergence of COVID-19.[613]

The Trump administration's policies are a continuation of the fight over 1960s politics. Bernard von Bothmer explains:

> People recall the 1960s with surprising passion because the fight over "the sixties" has not stopped. The decade is still contested terrain, as the nation has not yet fully come to terms with its impact. The memory of the Vietnam War, the Kennedy presidency, the Great Society, and the changing social norms of the 1960s will not remain hot-button topics forever (who still argues about Calvin Coolidge?), but they still are today. Each of these subjects lends itself to historical interpretation and reinterpretation, and each president since 1980 has attempted to fashion a useful historical memory of these issues in voters' minds.[614]

In Bothmer's study of how the era of the 1960s has been remembered, he found that many in the U.S. on both the political left and right were "profoundly unhappy with the present" and that each believed that the decline started in the 1960s: the Left

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611. Dunst, "Protections Fall for Vietnamese Immigrants."

612. Constante, "Congress Introduces Bill to Halt Deportations to Laos."

613. See p. 6 of this project for more on this.

614. Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties*, 5.

believing the decline started with the conservative backlash to the 1960s, and the Right believing that the decline began with the progressive movements and politics of the 1960s itself.[615] Bothmer points to the current divide between "red states" and "blue states" as representative of the remaining fight over the 1960s.[616]

Although Bothmer's study ends with the George W. Bush administration, historian Leonard Steinhorn argues that the Trump administration is continuing this fight. Steinhorn writes:

> Donald Trump and his supporters may be waging battles against the press, immigrants, voting rights, the environment, science, social welfare programs, Planned Parenthood and what they label political correctness and the deep state. But to them these are mere skirmishes in a much larger conflict. The president has essentially declared an all-out war on the American 1960s.

Steinhorn echoes Bothmer's statement that those on the political right believe the 1960s was the beginning of decline for the U.S. He cites a Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) survey from 2016 that found "close to three-fourths of Trump voters and white evangelical Christians bemoaning an American society and way of life that to them has changed for the worse since the 1950s." He concludes that for this population, "Donald Trump has become their cultural and political reset button." Steinhorn points to the wide range of policies of the Trump administration and concludes: "It's often said that Trump is fixated on undoing everything President

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615. Bothmer, 226.

616. Bother, 232.

Obama accomplished. But in truth it's not the Obama legacy he's undoing. It's the 1960s."[617]

As Gay predicted on the night of the election, progressives have not wallowed in their hopelessness. She ended her article asking, "Where do we go from here?" and answered:

> We need — through writing, through protest, through voting in 2018 and 2020 — to be the checks and balances our government lacks so that we can protect the most defenseless among us, so that we can preserve the more perfect union America has long held as the ideal. We have to fight hard, though I do not yet know what that fight looks like.[618]

The fight has found its form in the emergence of large political protests, finding inspiration from those of the 1960s. In the first half of the Trump presidency, the U.S. saw four huge protests, all with more than a million participants: the 2017 Women's March, the 2018 Women's March, the March 14, 2018 national student walkout, and the March 24, 2018 March for Our Lives protest. Additionally, in 2018 teachers across several states—including Arizona, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and West Virginia—protested the neoliberal cuts to public education. Finally, the Black Lives Matter movement, founded in 2013, continued protests against police brutality.[619]

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617. Steinhorn, "Donald Trump's War on the 1960s."

618. Gay, "The Audacity of Hopelessness."

619. Arnold et al., "Theses are the Four." These large protests were among many other smaller protests. Arnold et al. estimate that in March 2018 alone, there were "6,056 protests, demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, rallies, and walkouts" in the U.S., with participation of between 2,587,786 and 3,944,175 people.

Thus far, the second half of the Trump presidency has seen an even larger uprising of protests. The 2020 convergence of the coronavirus pandemic—which disproportionally affected Black and Latinx Americans[620]—and the horrifying murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 by Minnesota police officer Derek Chauvin sparked a sense of outrage. Between the end of May and the beginning of July, researchers predict that anywhere between 5,000-8,000 individual anti-racism and anti-police-brutality protests have taken place across the nation.[621] The protests are sustaining for long periods of time and, surprisingly, taking place in cities, suburbs, and small towns. Even predominantly white areas are seeing protests. Researchers at *The Washington Post* report that protests have taken place in all 50 states with an unprecedented "size, intensity and frequency,"[622] and that "counties with big cities, former industrial centers, less-prosperous suburbs and rural regions have generated protests in nearly exact proportion to their share of the state's population. There is no simple rural-urban-suburban divide."[623] They argue that the geography of the current protests is "very different from that of the late 1960s," which is important, because

620. In "The Color of Coronavirus," APM Research Lab reports that COVID-19 mortality rates for Black Americans are about 3.7 times as high as the rates for white Americans, and mortality rates for Latinxs are about 2.5 times as high.

621. Putnam, Pressman, and Chenoweth, "Black Lives Matter beyond America's Big Cities."

622. Putnam, Chenoweth, and Pressman, "The Floyd Protests Are the Broadest in U.S. History."

623. Putnam, Pressman, and Chenoweth, "Black Lives Matter beyond America's Big Cities."

"the closer someone lives to a protest, the more likely it is to change their vote."[624] The protests seem to be changing public opinion. In the two weeks after George Floyd's murder, support for the Black Lives Movement increased nearly as much as it had in the previous two years,[625] and currently, polls find that "a record 69 percent [of Americans] say black people and other minorities are not treated as equal to white people in the criminal justice system."[626]

The recent protests, while focused on anti-blackness, are affecting those in the racial middle as well. Jose Antonio Vargas, founder of Define American, a cultural organization working to support the view of immigrants in the U.S., points to the support the Black Lives Matters movement has received from young Asian Americans and U.S. Latinxs as a place for optimism.[627] Young Asian Americans are beginning to realize how divisive and harmful the "model minority" myth has been. Kim Tran, a diversity consultant, sums up the changing views surrounding the model minority stance: "Does it divide people Absolutely. . . . Does it rely on anti-blackness? Absolutely."[628] Young Asian Americans also seem to be learning the lessons of anti-blackness that Afropessimism has to teach. Recently, *Time*

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624. Putnam, Chenoweth, and Pressman, "The Floyd Protests Are the Broadest in U.S. History."

625. Cohn and Quealy, "How Public Opinion Has Moved on Black Lives Matter."

626. Guskin, Clement, and Balz, "Americans Support Black Lives Matter."

627. Trent, "Young Asians and Latinos Push Their Parents to Acknowledge Racism amid Protests."

628. Quoted in Trent.

interviewed a number of Asian Americans who experienced blatant acts of racism as a backlash to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jileen Liao, for example, was told, "Next time, don't bring your diseases back from your country" on a grocery run.[629] Abraham Choi was told that "All of you [Chinese] should die" and was coughed and spit on in a bathroom.[630] Out of the ten Asian Americans interviewed for this article, all alluded to the Black Lives Matter movement, and eight addressed anti-Blackness specifically. Hannah Hwang, for example, redirected her anger from her experience by "acknowledging [her] privilege and recognizing the critical role Asian Americans play in standing in solidarity with the Black community."[631] Rei Joo ended his interview by saying, "The increased level of attention given to anti-Blackness is a must and a critical part of working toward eradicating racism overall."[632]

Additionally, young U.S. Latinxs are beginning to recognize the problems of anti-Blackness in their culture. As Jasmine Haywood, a researcher on anti-Black racism among Latinos, explained to Trent Sydney, "Many Latinos arrive in the United States with their own anti-black beliefs rooted in the histories of white European colonialism and slavery in their native countries. . . . As they try to assimilate, they often adopt anti-black attitudes" as a direct result of the pervasiveness

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629. Quoted in Kambhampaty, "Facing Racism," 54.

630. Quoted in Kambhampaty, 56.

631. Quoted in Kambhampaty, 64.

632. Quoted in Kambhampaty, 59.

of whiteness.[633] Simultaneously, however, Latinxs are facing similar challenges as the black community—aggressive policing, inadequate healthcare, high mortality rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, and other effects of systemic racism—while also contending with their own concerns regarding immigration and assumptions of foreignness.[634] Among calls for recognition of Latinx concerns, the community is still showing strong support for the Black Lives Matters protests: a recent poll shows that "21 percent of Hispanic voters said they had participated in Black Lives Matter protests, nearly identical to the 22 percent of Black voters who said they had done so."[635] Ysenia Lechuga, a protester in Phoenix, told reporter Jennifer Medina that she hopes the protests will have a "ripple effect" and that change will reach the U.S. Latinx community, too.[636]

In the wake of the Arab Spring, Judith Butler wrote a blog post titled "Bodies in Alliance." In it, she details the affective power of bodies coming together in protest:

> In the last months there have been, time and again, mass demonstrations on the street, in the square, and though these are very often motivated by different political purposes, something similar happens: bodies congregate, they move and speak together, and they lay claim to a certain space as public

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633. Trent, "Young Asians and Latinos Push Their Parents to Acknowledge Racism."

634. Medina, "Latinos Back Black Lives Matter Protests."

635. Medina.

636. Quoted in Medina.

> space. Now, it would be easier to say that these demonstrations or, indeed, these movements, are characterized by bodies that come together to make a claim in public space, but that formulation presumes that public space is given, that it is already public, and recognized as such. We miss something of the point of public demonstrations, if we fail to see that the very public character of the space is being disputed and even fought over when these crowds gather.[637]

The recent protesters in the U.S. are working together to lay claim to public spaces. With the presence of bodies and the toppling of monuments to confederates and colonizers,[638] protesters are changing the affect of public spaces and reclaiming their rights to the spaces as members of the public. They are also working to affect the psychology of Americans. As Ghassan Hage explains, currently, the ruling affective attachment to the nation is one of worry, creating a "defensive society" that "suffers from a scarcity of hope and creates citizens who see threats everywhere. It generates worrying citizens and a paranoid nationalism."[639] Today's protesters are asking the nation to shift from worry to care. Hage explains the difference between these affective attachments:

> Worry is . . . a narcissistic affect. You worry about the nation when you feel threatened—ultimately, you are only worrying about yourself. Caring about the nation . . . is a more intersubjective affect. While one always cares

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637. Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street."

638. See *The New York Times*, "How Statues are Falling Around the World."

639. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, 3.

> primarily about oneself, caring also implies keeping others withing one's perspective of care. Most importantly, caring does not have the paranoid, defensive connotations that worrying has."[640]

By working to change the affect of public spaces and public opinions, the protesters are asking Americans to imagine what a nation of caring, a nation with a surplus of hope, might become.

In *Hope in the Dark*, Rebecca Solnit argues that political movements, like those in the 1960s, continue to have an effect long after they seem to have ended. She writes:

> It's always too soon to go home. Most of the great victories continue to unfold, unfinished in the sense that they are not yet fully realized, but also in the sense that they continue to spread influence. A phenomenon like the civil rights movement creates a vocabulary and a toolbox for social change used around the globe, so that its effects far outstrip its goals and specific achievements—and failures.[641]

Today's protests are making use of the activist tools that were passed down from the era of the 1960s in unprecedented ways. Hope will continue to provide sustenance for their work toward lasting change on racial relations in the nation.

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640. Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*, 3.

641 Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 61.

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