Manila in the World

A city is a machine with innumerable parts made by the accumulation of human gestures, a colossal organism forever dying and being born, an ongoing conflict between memory and erasure, a center for capital and for attacks on capital, a rapture, a misery, a mystery, a conspiracy, a destination and point of origin, a labyrinth in which some are lost and some find what they’re looking for, an argument about how to live and evidence that differences don’t always have to be resolved, though they may grate and grind against each other for centuries. (Solnit 2016, 1)

Metro Manila in 2006 is a labyrinthine, megalopolitan fortress of foreclosure. Almost all the main arteries of metropolis have become virtually enclosed corridors of free-flowing vehicular traffic, without regulated crossings where pedestrians and cross-street flow might momentarily interrupt the stream of hundreds of thousands of cars, buses, and trucks careening down these roads every day. With the help of numerous “flyovers,” or overpasses, and underpasses built by the metropolitan government over the last decade and a half, these ten-lane roads have become highways that coast and tunnel through the thick of the city, connecting the scattered, archipelagic commercial centers and gated communities where the upper-class and upwardly mobile sectors work, live, shop, and socialize. (Tadiar 2007, 316)

Manila is a chaotic machine (Solnit 2016), a messy space (Manalansan 2015), a political patchwork (Garrido 2019), and a city with no central vantage (Tadiar 1996). With no overall grid and as a veritable sensorial morass or “assault” (Tadiar ibid.; Devilles 2020), people always expect Manila to be on various lists of the “worst cities”—worst traffic, worst pollution, worst hygiene, worst infrastructure, worst violence, and the lists go on. These expectations of the worst in Manila and the relative complacency about the city’s inadequacies and excesses that come along with it have become stale commonsense assumptions that often are pathetic ideological cul-de-sacs. Wearily cyclical. Bound for nowhere.
**Beauty and Brutality** is about Manila, the fabrication and unraveling of this much maligned, often endearing, sometimes frightening capital city of the Philippines. This collection aims to exfoliate and unpack the persistent desiccated layers of conflicting images and ideas ensconced in this “Noble and Ever Loyal City” (a moniker given by Spanish colonialists) or the “City of Man”—a label given by an infamous First Lady who was the first governor of Metro Manila (a conglomerations of districts, cities, towns, and neighborhoods). Questions around these historical appellations remain: Loyal to whom and for whom? Who gets to be human amid the city’s stark inequalities?

Because of its official and imperial designation as the nation’s capital and its long history, Manila often stands in for the Philippine nation and people. For better or for worse, the stories of Manila are seen to represent and at the same time obscure the variegated national landscape (see the following books for divergent examination of the city: Barbaza 2019; Doeppers 2016; Pante 2019; Wise 2019; Wiselius 2016). This anthology is a critical encounter with this city’s imagined and material contours. More appropriately, the essays are limnings of the divergent ways one can talk about Manila and its varied stories. To encounter Manila or any city is to engage with a language constituted by codes enshrined in physical and social densities, paradoxes, and assemblages (Sudjic 2016). This collection offers a particular energized language of urban “worldings” in the Global South, a specific city’s coming into being and its relentless undoing (Simone 2001; Roy and Ong 2011; Wilson and Connery 2007; Tadiar 2004).

### Locating Manila: Infrastructural Mappings

- **Latitude:** 14.6042004
- **Longitude:** 120.982206
- **Northern Hemisphere**

These bare-naked numbers are the geographic coordinates of Manila. But such numbers disregard the messy, fleshy, recalcitrant, mercurial, and immeasurable qualities of the city. If we take location not as a fixed site but as an itinerary (Clifford 1997, 11) and a narrative unfolding, then we should consider Manila’s location as a series of discrepant stories, manifold optics, and multifaceted processes that involves unpacking layers of paradoxical and enmeshed practices, violent hierarchies, institutions, bodies, and histories that make up this city’s past, present, and futures.

The celebrated writer Jessica Hagedorn (2013, 9) described Manila as “a woman of mystery, the ultimate femme fatale. Sexy, complicated, and tainted by a dark painful past, she’s not to be trusted. And why should she be? She’s been betrayed time and again, invaded, plundered, raped and pillaged.”
Hagedorn is referring to Manila’s long, violent colonial occupations by Spain, Japan, and the United States. Each regime has left its mark on the architectural and psychic landscapes of the city. But beyond these unfortunate histories, she says, “Manila is a city of survivors, schemers and dreamers . . . [it] is a city of extremes” (12).

Hagedorn’s raw yet affectionate portrait of Manila is an invitation to unravel its mysteries and banalities and to confront the city’s extremes. Placing Manila in time and space is an archeological endeavor. Excavating through “mysterious” layered strata of meanings and unwieldy concatenations of events and images, Manila encompasses the pulsating embodied experiences of teeming millions living amid cramped aging infrastructures that involve alleys (eskinitas), highways, flyovers, corners (kantos), dead ends, gateways, and crossroads (sangandaan)—these elements make up what is at first glance the legible face of the city (Tolentino, Baquiran, and Aguirre 2002; Tadiar 2004).

This anthology stands as a major attempt to delve into and wade through its liquid modernity (Baumann 2000) with the city’s murky ambivalences and paradoxes. Time and space are entangled in Manila’s complicated narratives, especially those stories sedimented into the built environment. Manila’s imaginative and material landscapes belie prehistoric, Hispanic, and American colonial pasts that resonate with contemporary attempts at presentist struggles and futurist longings. Some writers and scholars romanticize these foreign imperial influences through ruins and rebuilt structures of colonial times, gesturing to an ornate tropical baroque and quaint oriental fusion (Joaquin 1999). Others have critically pointed out that the American baroque exemplified in the city plans by the architect Daniel Burnham is no more American than an awkward, deficient, and vestigial aesthetic sensibility—or to put it in slang words, barok, not baroque (Tolentino, Baquiran, and Aguirre 2002, 19). This barok sensibility is based on the uncomfortable impositions and mistranslations of designs and urban imaginings that have no place for the local and the indigenous (Tolentino, Baquiran, and Aguirre 2002). At the same time, the “mall-ification,” or “malling,” of this crowded city has created unwieldy interiors that are less about an internal refuge and more of public masquerades of the dwindling bourgeois wishes of its citizens. These sprawling malls are air-conditioned paeans to capitalist consumerism. They are a testament to the calcification and erosion of memory and collective action, acting as material and ideological “paramnestic” insulators from the violence and suffering that persist within and without (Hedman and Sidel 2000, 118–139; see also Tolentino 2001).

Manila’s modernist soaring “flyovers” are elite vantages that provide some respite from the unpaved longings and desperate dreams of the million daily commuters lying underneath. These urban natives are left to jostle in the crowded streets below to get into buses and jeepneys amid the unrelenting
heat and choke-provoking exhaust fumes, smells, and noise. Neferti Tadiar (2004) considers these forbidding structures as metaphorical and material stand-ins for the Philippine state’s machinations in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, particularly in its inability to absorb its citizen into the national body and instead expels them in a kind of bulimic reaction to the morass of the global service industry. The Philippine state, through its failing infrastructures, has shaped the troubled contours of the city. Overall, Manila displays its histories and spatialities in the manner of a discomfiting palimpsest, composed by erasures, overwriting (overbuilding), floodings, and ruinations.

**Manila’s Beauty and Brutality**

Given all its cacophonous properties, it is perhaps odd for any collection of works to collectively frame Manila as beautiful. Yet we invoke beauty here as a complex, tenuous, and contingent term that both incorporates and moves beyond the specific material elements of the city. Writing about beauty’s relationship to the social, Mimi Nguyen suggests that beauty can act as an imperative discourse that “determines what conditions are necessary to live, what forms of life are worth living, and what actions we must follow to preserve, secure, or replicate such conditions and forms” (Nguyen 2016). It is precisely this notion of beauty as ethos, aspiration, and capacity for achieving the “good life” that conjoins it with the political, the social, and the material. In the context of Manila, beauty saturates sedimented dreams of a livable life continually denied for some and made possible for others. Beauty sets the stage for the contradictions that can make Manila brutal, violent, and disciplinary. Manila’s beauty is brutal inasmuch as the city’s inequities are often justified through harsh invocations of beauty as a material and social good. If anything, beauty lays bare the differential power dynamics that affect how people navigate Manila with uneven levels of mobility and ease.

Such notions of beauty have historically been wielded in Manila as a site of political power. For instance, with an eye toward the United States, the Marcos regime deployed facile notions of beauty to justify the restructuring of an entire metropolis, to censor representations of systemic brutality, to buttress the mythic domesticity of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos’s conjugal dictatorship, and to maintain martial law, all in the name of what Imelda Marcos (herself a former beauty queen) calls the “true, the good, and the beautiful.” As Mina Roces notes, in the context of martial law Manila, “the relationship between beauty and power is dialectical: beauty can be a source of power, but closeness to power is also a source of beauty” (Roces 1998, 18). A key impetus for Imelda Marcos’s propagandistic attempts to transform the city’s infrastructure was the consolidation of material wealth to her office as
the governor of Metro Manila, a consolidation that required the joining of multiple cities and municipalities into one body that she could then govern. Marcos strategically used beauty as a political tool, mining the dialectical relationship between power and beauty to fashion an image of herself as the ideal national citizen (as a “star and slave”) while also transforming Manila’s contours, flows, and facades. Thus, for better or for worse, Imelda Marcos’s invocations of beauty continue to haunt the Manila we know today. Her notions of beauty are imbedded in its very built environment, affecting how people transect this ever-changing space.

Efforts to beautify the urban space to consolidate political power and to streamline the flow of capital have continued even after Imelda’s governorship. Lito Atienza, for instance, sought to “light up” Manila’s multiple thoroughfares as he refashioned the city’s coastal highway, Taft Avenue, so that the city could become destination for foreign tourists. Proceeding Atienza, Alfredo Lim self-fashioned himself as a “Dirty Harry” figure whose slogan, “Magaling na Lider, Disiplonado,” became the primary justification for efforts to “clean” the city of petty crime. If, as Vanita Reddy notes, beauty lends itself to the language of capitalist accumulation (Reddy 2016), then the shaping and the priming of Manila for the flow of commerce has historically been deployed through narratives of beauty, narratives that are ultimately conditioned by the country’s larger economic aspirations.

At the same time, the dialectical relationship between beauty and power in Manila has also produced the conditions for enacting different ways of resisting the inequities that continue to mark both the city and the larger country. Returning to the Marcos regime, Mina Roces suggests that one of the main reasons that Corazon Aquino unseated Ferdinand Marcos as president in 1986 was her self-presentation as Imelda Marcos’s antithesis, as a simple housewife who did not desire beauty and instead desired to right the wrongs of the country. Roces also points out that “while Mrs. Imelda Marcos alone epitomized the almost palpable links between beauty and power, political activism bred in the atmosphere of a repressive authoritarian regime encouraged the blossoming of the woman as political activist” (Roces 1998, 3). Thus, Marcos’s gendered deployment of beauty also ironically created the conditions of possibility for multiple invocations of feminist critique that continue to work its way in the streets of Manila today. Such critique is certainly present in significant and oft-cited cinematic and literary representations of the city. Films like Manila in the Claws of Neon (dir. Lino Brocka, 1975) and Manila by Night (dir. Ishmael Bernal, 1980) or diasporic novels like Dogeaters (Jessica Hagedorn, 1990) and Leche (R. Zamora Linmark, 2011) produce moments of beauty that do not only mark the aesthetic or creative value; beauty in these works also serves as a foil to critique the brutalities of governmental policies, poverty, and social neglect that exist in Manila.
Beauty animates modes of pleasure, fun, and joy that are wedded to the very messiness of Manila. These artists portrayed sexually and economically marginalized characters that saw beauty in muck, pleasure in trash, and joy in crossing the boundaries of class difference. Artistic depictions of beauty (from the opulent to the gritty, from the mundane to the sexual, in the streets and on the skin) enabled subtle critiques of dictatorial policies and of the continued existence of U.S. colonialism under unquestioned militarism. Beauty is everywhere, and it can be a resource for new ways of existing amid the limits placed on the people living in the city.

In one of the most pivotal moments of the film *Manila by Night*, Kano, a lesbian drug pusher, states her love for a chaotic Manila. She stands on a rooftop, proclaiming: “I love you, Manila, no matter what you are. Young, old, smelly, ugly, woman, man, bakla, or lesbian!” With a hint of euphoria in her voice, and before she smokes a joint, Kano scans the dim glow of Manila under the neon lights of motels, beer houses, and other spaces for pursuing forbidden pleasures. Through this scene, Bernal offers a version of Manila far removed from what the Marcos regime wanted to present abroad. Thus, the film was the first and only one to be banned unless reedited to its existing edition with a voice-over smoothing issues of drug use and good citizenship in the closing scene for international screening. Kano’s love for this chaotic and vibrant metropolis enables Bernal to provide a critique of the regime’s beautification efforts, as seen from the vantage point of a sexually and economically marginalized inhabitant. Kano sees beauty not in the repaved, rezoned, and reclaimed streets of Manila, whose globalized aspirational ethos ultimately mask the realities of poverty and disciplinary violence. She instead sees beauty in the rawness and grit of a city whose chaos engenders different kinds of intimacies and pleasures and different ways of living, being with, and reproducing the urban.

The political meaning of this iconic moment is made eerily resonant in the present. As many local and international social justice organizations have noted, the Rodrigo Duterte government (2016–2022) has precisely justified and rationalized the extrajudicial killing of individuals (mostly from the economically disadvantaged areas) through sanitary narratives that seek to “clean up” Manila of the vagaries of drugs, addiction, and immorality. As Human Rights Watch points out, Duterte’s “war on drugs” has led to the death of twelve thousand people, mostly from the urban poor (HRW 2019). Amnesty International has recently called such killings a “large-scale murdering enterprise” (Amnesty International 2019), one that involves multiple governmental institutions and the police as they mark specific individuals and communities for dehumanization and death. Imbedded within such narratives of “cleanliness” are, of course, assumptions about dirt, obsolescence, and uselessness. Given such modes of dehumanization, this collection thus
sees Manila as a significant and timely physical and ideological space to explore the dialogic nature of beauty and brutality—as these concepts intertwine in the exhilarating, painful, and complex urban repertoires of the Global South. As a city that has experienced the multiple vestiges of empire, the disciplinary machinations of dictatorial rule, the current effects of the “war on drugs,” and the continued realities of uneven resource distribution, Manila is a key site from which to understand how urban realities in the Global South emerge from the transnational movement of goods, bodies, and ideas within and outside of the metropolis. This work revisits multiple versions of Manila to track what forms of beauty and brutality foreground the human and the inhuman, the disposable and the useful, the free and unfree.

**Diaspora and Re-turn: Else-wheres, Other Manilas**

Manila is no longer just a circumscribed place objectified in maps, lists, guidebooks, movies, songs, and other cultural genres. It is not only a cumulative effect of lives lived within its own parameters. The typical Manileño, or Manila native, is a minor node within a vast global network of bodies, currencies, and technologies. Such emotional, economic, and political “connectivities” have transformed the city, like others in the Global South, with the emergence of call centers and expatriate/returnee communities that transformed real estate market, social life, and the skyline (Pido 2017; Padidos 2018; see also Huyssen 2008).

Filipinos may have left the country in droves, and some have returned, but Manila itself has migrated or more appropriately dispersed—to other places as mini facsimiles located in the Filipino diasporic elsewhere. Manila is not a mere object of cool scrutiny, it can be a mournful refrain, a level of intensity, and an unwieldy nostalgic orientation. Manila is not a site for the classic realization of diasporic return but rather becomes an arena for its contestation. Manila is about a re-turn.

Various media outlets have long been involved in enticing Filipinos working and residing in parts of the world by showing airbrushed and decluttered images of Manila as a stand-in for the homeland. Television shows and songs among others have become fertile vehicles for cultivating this form of banal nostalgia for a long time. In 1976, the Filipino pop band Hotdog, composed of elite youth from exclusive private schools, topped the charts with a song entitled “Manila.” For people who lived in Manila in the late twentieth century, the song may evoke a familiar cringe or even a distancing moment while succumbing to a kind of nostalgic pleasure. Time has passed—the Marcos martial law regime was toppled, but the song itself may also be an unwitting archival vantage that may open up the limitations and possibilities of understanding and confronting the various faces of the city.
In the lyrics of the song, there is an abrupt slide from Tagalog to an aspirational (Filipino upper class) American-accented English pays homage to the postcolonial city. The band members painted a Manila that was deemed to be different from other world cities because of its delightful noisy urbanity, and they likened it to a female lover whose arms awaited their embrace. That is, a return to Manila is to be enfolded back to the nation after a worldly romp across other cities and with other women. In other words, it is a song of unbridled, youthful heterosexual masculinity—mobile, promiscuous, and carefree. The song marked not only the emergence of a new musical trend called the “Manila sound,” but it also heralded the historical unfolding of a Filipino global migration that has made “leaving home” the order of the day, and homecomings have become pivotal visceral and economic necessities (e.g., the Balikbayan program). The song is based on a failed yet eager heteronormative masculinist cosmopolitanism and an unbridled sense of privileged elsewhere-ish-ness tempered by an imagined rootedness to sexy female bodies, delicious sounds, cramped spaces, and the colorful images of a chaotic metropolis. However, the Hotdog anthem, in all its problematic undercurrents and strange mixture of eloquence, sappy nostalgia, masculine toxic bravado, and youthful awkwardness, speaks to the troubled notion of return (pagbabalik) to this metropolis.

What constitutes the national mythologies of and allegedly visceral compulsion to return? How does return shape visions, fantasies, and realities of the Noble and Ever Loyal City of Manila? Despite many turgid scholarly dissections of return within the context of diaspora where return is always figured as a penultimate, necessary, and teleological node in a predictable cycle, Manila defies such formulaic assessments.

Manila is not a strictly bounded geographic place within a particular latitude but rather is constructed through affective evocations echoed in unexpected places and times, such as the streets of Woodside in the New York City borough of Queens, in the streets of Jersey City, National City in San Diego, in Daly City, in Stockton (Mabalon 2013), Los Angeles (España-Maram 2006), and in the interstices of other urban areas such as Madrid, Toronto, London, and other world cities. Here, these affective evocations resonate in the fleeting moments of atmospheric recognition, jolting déjà vu, and surprising intimate connections in otherwise foreign spaces. We see fragments and traces of lives and dreams lived in Manila and now transported to these corners and neighborhoods in these other world cities. While some of us have the privilege to a diasporic homecoming, some can only look to or “turn to” such corners, neighborhoods, and districts for the momentary solace of the familiar despite the strange forlornness it might evoke. Here are social sites where one can speak in one’s language, buy home comfort food, and shop for various items from “over there.” These are spaces one can go back to again and again without
the problem of “legal” travel documents and money. Such visits become habitual and repetitive; then they become occasions for firing up emotional and affective energies beyond the everyday. These enclaves provide both the material and symbolic fulcrum for mobilizing ethno-nationalist sentiments, critical conviviality, and, in many cases, community and long-distance activism.

In this sense, diasporic return could be better understood as re-turn. Re-turn is not just a change of orientation, trajectory, or maneuver or a “moving back to a place of origin” as in return, but rather it is imperative to think of re-turn in terms of repeated turning or repetition in language and travel where the act of repeating is not just a lazy droning of the same morpheme but rather marking a persistent tension, an escalating intensity of an enactment, and the relative virtue or lack thereof of an object or a subject. In Tagalog and other Austronesian languages, the repetition of a word is not just a mere repriming of the same sound. Rather, it denotes a shift in emphasis and meaning. Repetition shapes directionality, intensity, valuation, and orientation. For example, ganda, which means “beautiful,” is intensified by repetition so that ganda-ganda means “very beautiful.”

Re-turn is never a singular process or event. It is multivalent. Re-turn then speaks to an affective accretion of disparate ambitions, desires, stances, and interests that meld into an imagined space called Manila. The anthropologist Benito Vergara (2009) in his excellent ethnography of Daly City in the Bay Area spoke about the idea of re-turning in terms of the competing demands of citizenship. Daly City is a Filipino ethnic enclave that has been derisively seen as a ghetto, an elsewhereish Manila or an Americanized version of the original. Culling from Kachig Tolölyan’s assertion that diasporic existence does not necessarily involve actual physical return, Vergara asserts that re-turn is really “repeated turning . . . through political activism, assertions of ethnic pride, nostalgia, consumerism or just vague remembering. Re-turn is obliquely opposed to the narrative of assimilation. The tension between this remembrance and the demands of citizenship in the new homeland, the obligations in different directions, constitute a predicament for the Philippine immigrant . . . [in how they] negotiate—or indeed fail(s) to find a balance between the two” (Vergara 2009, 4).

Manila is constituted by various tensions: between attachments and detachments, between the pendulum swings of movement and immobility, between being mobile and (un)settled, between failures and fulfillment, and between return and re-turn. These tensions compel us to think of how seemingly antipodal sites, narratives, and processes can become a melancholic incantation, a reverie of spatial and temporal incompleteness, a psychic restlessness, and a vital necessary itinerancy. Manila is neither an original departure point nor a penultimate destination. It is not the culmination of a diasporic cycle. Manila is a repeating node, a continuous waystation, and an
invocation not toward a dead end but rather to persistent unending journeys buoyed by intensified, enduring desires and longings. These affective geographies and temporalities are best exemplified by the haunting lines of Jessica Hagedorn in her essay “Homesick.” This section of the introduction ends with these lines not as a definitive conclusion but as a lively segue to animate readers’ engagements with the essays that follow and to also intensify hopes for a Manila that will persist and survive in its various future incarnations:

I leave one place for the other, welcomed and embraced by the family I have left—fathers and brothers and cousins and uncles and aunts. Childhood sweethearts now with their children, I am unable to stay. I make excuses, adhere to tight schedules. I return only to depart. I am the other, the exile within, afflicted with permanent nostalgia for the mud. I return, only to depart: Manila, New York, San Francisco, Manila, Honolulu, Detroit, Manila, Guam, Hong Kong, Zamboanga, Manila, New York, San Francisco, Tokyo, Manila again, Manila again, Manila again. (Hagedorn 1991, 326)

Sitings and Citings of Manila’s Beauty and Brutalities

The essays in the anthology conjure Manila and its larger amalgamated entity, Metro Manila, in their immense representational forms and various contents that substantiate the worlding of its modernities usually imbri-cated in its beauty and brutalities and in its rendering of metropolitanisms and cosmopolitanisms. The city’s beauty is situated in the experience of its madness and brutalities, and its persistent brutalities render an aestheticiza-tion of the experience of beauty—one that recalls the violence of colonialisms, neocolonialities, U.S. imperialism, Third Worldism, development, dictator-ship, neoliberalism, and tyranny, among others. The essays examine the translocalities of Manila as represented in literary texts, films, SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions), use of hookup apps, and urban poor performances of their precarity and strength that foreground reiterations of urban, national, and global histories, geographies, and modernities. The essays discuss the creative responses from the ground level to Manila’s insistence on beauty and brutality, allowing alternative and contrary claims of hope. The power of the essays is their capacity to site and siting or the mapping out of geographies of insistence and resistance in the urban war of classes, genders and sexualities, ethnicities and races, and generations, especially of those obfuscated in this war, and to cite and citing or laying bare the oftentimes conjectural, discrepant, and intermittent histo-ries, disciplines, texts, and contexts that attempt to cohere a worlding of other possible worlds of and in Manila.
The essays examine the cartographies of Manila, its metropolitanizations and imbrications in the nation, local and the global. Oscar Tantoco Serquiña Jr.’s “Scenes Not So Fair: Poetic Representations of the Philippine Capital City” examines the literary metaphors of the city to discuss its competing epochal histories and its refusal to be shaped and to find a coherent shape. It is in the insistence to represent the unrepresentable in Manila’s politics—the socialities of the urban poor—that locates another Manila within Manila. The essay foregrounds the city as a battleground between classes and class interests, especially to what would transpire to a consumption politics since the 1990s that segues to an affect of being stuck, as in Metro Manila’s notorious traffic and the daily rendering of a biopolitics of docility, especially for its middle class and in its middle-class aspirations. The selection of poems results in an urban aesthetics that allows for a discussion of the divergent and dialogical forms of Manila’s imbrication in colonial, imperial, dictatorial, and multinational power relations. The contemporary poets provide a critique of these social relations in power, foregrounding a site of negotiation and relief in the everyday that bears the weight of the violent histories and spatialities.

An olfactory mapping and navigation of the city is offered in “Smelling Manila” by Gary C. Devilles, who mobilizes this sensorial regime to explore its unique urban forms and configurations. Devilles examines the symbolic dimensions of Manila’s smell and the materialization of scents of the city through colonial and postcolonial conjectures of personal, literary, and filmic experiences of the factory odors and foul aromas in the production of soaps and the popularity of soap operas in the local national context and the scent of apples and the smelling sensibilities of the Filipino immigration in the postcolonial context. Wittingly foregrounded in the experience of the sense and sensing of the city is the privileging of the smell of Americanization, where the economic postcolonial presence of the United States’ mode of manufacturing allows for an intergenerational site of citizenry working class formation. The consequence of the downside and downsizing of the United States’ economic ventures in the Philippines allows for labor migration also to be institutionalized in the 1970s, with work migration in the United States as the most privileged among other labor hosting nations. The materialization of America’s worlding through smell both in the national and transnational landscapes becomes a metonym of colonial and postcolonial identity formation and transformation of becoming and being a Filipino labor.

Bliss Cua Lim’s “A Tale of Three Buildings: The National Film Archive, Marcos Cultural Policy, and Anarchival Temporality” conceives of the Marcos martial law period as the propensity to meld all necessities of authoritarian nation-building in the doomed film and cultural archive Marcos has initiated, becoming the very analogue that forecasted the doomed trajectory of the Marcos dictatorship and usurpation of power of the succeeding
elite factions of the newer national administrations. The lack of closure on Marcos authoritarianism in the post-Marcos era becomes the register in the continuing failing quests for a national film archive. Marcos’s enforcement of archival time haunts the continuing failure in the amnesia to deal with what will become this national trauma—so painful was its register of experience in its time yet so unresolved or even erased in the present. The archival void is mobilized in the post-Marcos era and its continuing and failed quests and questings for a national film archive. Lim’s analysis of the tales of the arts and culture and film buildings reify the logic and violence of archival time of Marcos’s edifice complex, including lost lives in the tragedy of the collapse in the construction of the National Film Center and in the continuing failed and some hopeful mobilizations in the post-Marcos era of archival time and the national film archives. In contrast, Lim uses anarchival time as the flip side of Marcos’s megalomaniac pursuits and mobilization of archival perpetuity time, a sensed “time of collapse and precarity,” though directly linked with state power allowing a reflexive gesture and gesturing of ephemerality. This timeliness of time allows for a newer temporality of archiving, maintenance of, and everyday negotiation with state power, especially in a current time when historical revisionism about the Marcoses, martial law, and the Marcos dictatorship has been systemically at work, leading to the big-time political and social comebacks of the Marcoses.

Ferdinand M. Lopez’s essay “Wayward Informality, Queer Urbanism: Manila, the Dark and Decadent City” further evokes the filmic conversation of the Marcos dictatorship and the bakla, a noncompliant gay male figuration of insistence and resistance. The filmic representations of gay Manila and the authoritarian Philippine state allow for a contestation of desires and claims to darkness, making possible a rendering of the relationship of visibility and invisibility in the formation of the state and its transformation in and by the bakla. Lopez analyzes the ingenuity of the film and its bakla heroine in the morass of Imelda Marcos’s social engineering of Manila, which is nestled, too, in the quagmire of Ferdinand Marcos’s mobilization of martial law in the city and the country. The figures of the bakla and Manila in film and the lived experiences of the bakla in martial law allow for a contrary claim and claiming of national identities in state formation.

The state disavowal and counter-reclaiming of the bakla identity in Lopez’s essay is relationally mobilized in the discourse of Metro Manila’s urban poor and sites in Christine Bacareza Balance’s “This Is Our City: Manila, Popular Music, and the Translocal.” Balance uses sonic and music texts and sensing to differentially analyze the state citification drive and the alternative music and urban poor reclaiming of the city, scenes, and sites and their resultant translocal urbanity and identity. The essay is initially replete in the descriptions of the translocal music scene as interactive cultural negotiations
of the foreign and its use and adaptation in the lives of the people that embody and choose to mobilize this as their own. The translocality of the music scene and its local actors is further teased out in the more violent site of staking claim in the city, that of the urban poor and their settling in intermittent city sites, which unsets the state’s ventures of the beautiful progressive city and nation-formation. Local musicians embody their lived negotiations—the “Manila sound,” which is symptomatic of a larger national-transnational nexus—accommodating and inhabiting their origin and progression of their music evolution and divergence in this nexus of the conditions of the possible in their music and in the Philippine popular and alternative music scenes. Balance rightly complexifies the origins and rise of these multitudes of claiming and reclaiming of the city through music, music sites, and music publics, but she also renders the class specificity of the younger musician intelligentsia in the territorialization and re-territorialization of the city’s sonic and music subcultures.

If for Balance, the city is ours, then for John B. Labella, the city can never be theirs, which is what Balance foregrounds and Labella unpins in their essays on the city and its poor. John B. Labella’s essay, “Nodes of a City Labyrinth,” analyzes the version of the city novel Smaller and Smaller Circles by F. H. Batacan as an imagined and lived Manila of mountains of trash and landfill, sewer riverways, and trashed humanity as critical sensing of the urban imaginary representations, including dreams of what Metro Manila produces, discharges, and trashes and what literature and creative responses reclaim and redeem. The essay uses the novel as a rendering of a theory of the lived experiences of Metro Manila, using the detective fiction novel to investigate and unravel the paradoxical Manila’s “disputed coherence.” The city labyrinth is one of nodes, a man-making endeavor that restricts flows and enhances flooding and fixes people and their dreams in standstill traffic and uninterchangeable social classes on the one hand but also allows for pedestrians to seize the streets, proliferate violence as a counter-state act, and realize their existence outside the state purview. It is mostly the underclass that outmaneuvers the city as labyrinth, allowing detection and to sense places in tight spaces even as the labyrinth insists and is insistent in its dislocations and mapping or can only be mapped out and experienced in its nodes and nodal spaces. What the novel does and Labella navigates are the insistent ways the abject subjects reclaim other state-instigated daily ways of life—Metro Manila’s notorious traffic, pedestrian seizures of the streets, and contradictions of flow—to a city that can never be theirs.

Faith R. Kares elaborates and analyzes the violence of urban life and growth in “Of Demolitions and Dispossession: The Everyday Violence of Metro Manila’s Growth Politics.” Her essay anchors the state’s obfuscation of the urban poor and their reclaiming of the interstitial city on the larger
national problem of pro-elite agrarian reform programs that have insufficiently addressed the land issue for Filipino farmers victimized by the hacienda system introduced during the Spanish colonial times and remaining intact, for most part, during the American colonial and contemporary periods. The landless farmers in the countryside form the reserve army of surplus labor in the city, though remaining a vital component that runs Metro Manila and other cities and the nation itself. Through ethnography and immersion in urban poor communities, the tales from below of how the dispossessed urban workers negotiate with the artificial poverty alleviation schemes of the national government, neoliberal machinations of national development that privileges large private businesses, including the current propensity for public-private partnerships (PPP) to build and operate infrastructures of public services at assured profit margins for the winning proponents, the continuity of the agrarian reform issue in the current continuing dispossession of the urban poor, and how progress and privatization affects the Metro Manila’s poor unfold. It is the last section that weaves stories told by the urban poor that provides a contrapuntal narrative of struggle, survival, minute triumphs and wholesale victimization, and creative daily undertakings to the state imperative of rendering the urban poor as an invisible yet a vital force that moves the nation’s economy. What is foregrounded in the essay is the machination of the city’s urban poor and their conditionalities, especially their being dispossessed of land, that allow these bodies for another government policy—contractual labor migration and export.

In the meantime, in the waiting game of finding work overseas or business process outsource work in the key cities and to what is claimed as the “sunshine industry” in the Philippines that is targeted to employ two million call center agents, the daily living of the surplus army of reserved labor in urban poor communities abound even as urban poor dwellers are periodically demonized in political and elite rhetoric and even as their sites are demolished or threatened with demolition in the greater demand for gentrified business spaces in Metro Manila and other key cities. In the convolutions of neoliberalism and the unsettling settled claims of inner ghetto claim to rightful existence, especially of Manila’s urban poor, Vanessa Banta’s “Recalling to Sitio San Roque: Countermapping Urban Spaces in Quezon City” examines the creative impetus and response to the drastic and violent urbanization in neoliberal Metro Manila. The essay relationally signifies the more violent and rising creativity of the lived negotiations of the urban poor as narrativized in one such effort and scene in Sitio San Roque, “at the heart” of the proposed business district of Quezon City. This essay also marks the imposing and contending notions of beauty and brutality in the experience of city planners and state power on the one hand and the urban poor dwellers laying claim to their sites and communities on the other hand. The state’s
neglect and obfuscation of the urban poor and their communities as unsightly, or even “un-sitely,” allow a taking on of life and living by the community members, transforming house by house, alley by alley, daily life by daily life, and creative performance by creative performance the necessity of individual existence and shared community claims that reconstitute what often is rendered invisible and powerless, their claiming of their site in the city—a literal and figurative undertaking of the city as battleground.

The rendering of invisible and powerless of the urban poor as discussed in the essays of Kares and Banta are integral in the imagination of a truly metropolis Metro Manila. The rendering of a First World metropolis is discussed in Paul Nadal’s “Infrastructural Futures: Arroyo’s Philippines in a Technological Frame.” Nadal examines the future-making drive of then-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in again another attempt to transform the Philippines into a First World nation and Metro Manila as its primary showcase of megalomania. The essay traces the recent First Worlding attempts of past national administrations, using this drive to get elected into power, propelling the kinetics of their programs, terms, and visibility of the presidential bodies, and implementation of global neoliberalism in the country and focuses on Arroyo’s infrastructural future of a Philippine First World imaginary. This essay tacitly links and differentiates Arroyo’s infrastructure-driven development with the Marcoses’ edifice complex, that modernizing infrastructures translates to economic growth. What end-results from this infrastructural future necessitates a technological framing, allowing structures, networks, and sites to exude a dreamworld of the First World possible. As philosophically drawn out in the essay, technology is a poetic form of worlding, and Arroyo’s drive becomes a kind of un-worlding of the country’s maldevelopment realities into a First World technological frame, with herself as the messianic evocation of this turn. Nadal examines a counter-representational claim to technologizing the infrastructural future by way of a poetry collection that writes “beyond the time of development.”

The elaboration of a technological future is further elaborated in the next two essays, focusing on Metro Manila’s SOGIE concerns. Roland Sintos Coloma’s “The Struggle Continues . . .”: On the Cruel Optimism of LGBT Organizing” traces the origin, rise, and conundrum of Ladlad, the first lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender political party in the Philippines along its enactments of “parrhesiastic pedagogy,” or an oppositional form of learning proposed by subordinated subjects seeking to present a counter-hegemonic discourse. In campaigning for party-list representation, Ladlad has moved from Metro Manila to form a provincial network of voters and advocates; it has negotiated with political parties, realities, and exigencies for the elections it has participated in. The confluences of other SOGIE gains in the electoral process and how this perseverance and educational drive for the
elections and an LGBT-future is a “cruel optimism,” a relation to the “compromised conditions of possibility.” Paul Michael Leonardo Atienza’s “Sociotechnical Infrastructures: Tracing Gay Socio-Sexual App Socialities in Manila,” on the other hand, examines a class-based use of gay dating apps in Metro Manila, elaborating on the use and movement of science-based technological infrastructuring that allow the specific gay individuals and sectors to circulate and negotiate within and outside their community. The essay maps out the contending coding networks of engagement that marks bodies and identities among Metro Manila’s rich gay individuals and their communities, allowing them to negotiate and reconfigure solitude and intimacies. Although gay dating apps have normativized the parameters of gay male engagements, these have also provided world-making possibilities for its users, allowing within their communities a restitution of inclusivity and exclusivity. Through an ethnography of networks that form distinct blue-collar and elite gay male users’ communities in Metro Manila, tales of cloistered solitudes and new intimacies are retold, allowing for a network to establish shared platforms of negotiating tactics and an imagination of other possible worldings of their gay male positionalities and futures.

The lived creative response to urban hegemony of Metro Manila life and existence is further teased out in two specific texts and endeavors to negotiate, critique, and come into terms with the national development drive instigated in the city. In Louise Jashil R. Sonido’s “Halimaw: A Hauntology of Manila in Street Art,” the modalities of street photography art by the Ang Gerilya collective are examined on its representational counterclaims to the city. Usually known for its political street murals, Ang Gerilya draws from the transgressive erasures of mural making to a transmediated photographic contemplation and occupation of Metro Manila’s streets. In the Halimaw series, the rich mythic and folk creatures present in the Filipino collective consciousness are mined and reinvented for the city sites, contemporizing growing up and into tales and creatures in the visibility of the urban landscape. As part of the “postcolonial fixation on identity-formation,” the Halimaw series in the essay is examined in its translayering of its power to haunt and its power to represent a hauntology of Metro Manila. In Jema Pamintuan’s “Endo, Manila Kentex Fire, and Contractualization under Global Capitalism,” the independent film Endo becomes the starting point and nexus to expound on the imagined and real perils of the intensification of flexible labor in the Philippines, a neoliberal policy normalized to favor business owners. The essay traces the genealogy of Philippine films that have represented the laborer and their conditions of labor and how the overt political rendering in these films has morphed into Endo, a romance film set in Metro Manila with the capacity to provide commentary to this current mainstreamed structure of contractual employment. Pamintuan asks the ethically vital and
charged question, “For whom?” and debunks the labor practice’s illusion of bridging the socioeconomic gap. Not just withstanding the lack of security of employment with the possibility of regular worker benefits, the hazardous conditionalities of flexible labor have yielded to catastrophic accidents. The fire that engulfed seventy-two workers in the Kentex factory relates to other tragic fires that killed huge number of workers in South Asian factories, highlighting the culture of impunity in late capitalism.

The final essay, by Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo and Raffy Lerma, “Regime-Made Disaster in Metro Manila: Beyond an Aesthetics Reading of Photographs of Duterte’s ‘Drug War,’” examines the discourse of President Rodrigo Duterte’s war on drugs that has claimed thousands of lives, mostly from the poor and abject poor of the country, and the photojournalism that documented and provided a contrary representation, mostly from the positioanalitity of the victims and their loved ones. As part of a campaign promise, Duterte harped on, among other things, the enormity and monstrosity of the “drug problem,” which catapulted a regional candidate into the presidency, thereby reactivating the strongman rule of Marcos. In power, Duterte continues to echo the drug problem and validity of the war-on-drugs solution that has allowed his administration and military to implement a martial law political and everyday environment. Yet, his presidency and his policies remain popular with the masses of people primarily affected by his violent solutions. Rosa and Lerma examine the political rendering of the war on drugs by Duterte, police, and the primarily poor people directly affected and instigate a contrary claiming at the ground level, the photojournalists’ documentation of the lethal quality of the war. The essay details the modalities of extrajudicial killings, justifications, and tactics of sustainability of this war. What rose as a creative response to the coverage of the war on drugs are photographs by persevering photojournalists covering nightly the daily toll of the war. Lerma is one such photojournalist, and it is primarily his coverage photographs that highlight a contrarian claim, visuality, and storytelling to this war, allowing for the humanity of the victims and their families to be represented.

By and large, the essays and anthology talk about the modalities of state beauty and brutality and the tactics of negotiation and critique in the lived and representational experiences at the ground level or by responses of artists, writers, photographers, and cultural workers or by both marking a contrarian notion of beauty and brutality in Metro Manila and in the Philippines, implicating the historical evolution of Manila and the Philippines under colonial rules to its postcolonial development, highlighting the Marcos dictatorship as a benchmark to the contemporary rise of populist administrations in Duterte and Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. This anthology involves the re-infrastructuring and social re-engineering of tales and analyses of bodies, identities, communities, and sites of complicity and resistance. The over-
bearing weight of state formation in the intensification of neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and fascism that secures the profit of the 1 percent seems to allow little breathing space for those in the majority whose lives, social relations, and city-making efforts are directly and violently affected in the everyday. But as the essays also foreground, there is something hopeful, too, in the compounding ways of Philippine state formation in Manila and Metro Manila—in the creative everyday lives and tales of the urban poor, gay communities and political party, and the other disenfranchised individuals and sectors, in the politicized artistic intervention of performing groups in abject communities forging an organization of resistance, in the photographs providing stories from the street and the violent scene of daily life and death, and in the scholars themselves represented the beauty and violence of the city, nation, and state that has also represented the creative and real claims and stakes to these violent ventures. In these texts, artifacts, and mnemonics, hope abounds, and in the real responses and struggles, a hundred flowers and discourses bloom.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


