Forum Kritika: A Closer Look at *Manila by Night*

MANILA BY NIGHT AS THIRDSPACE

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Abstract

The Marcosian signifier in *Manila by Night* has been inescapably registered in the production, distribution, and exhibition of the film and in the film text itself. The paper revisits these evaluations of the film by using Edward Soja's broader notion of "thirdspace." It rereads *Manila by Night* as Bernal's concept of the city which approximates the lived dimension of urban spaces vis-à-vis the "concept city" of the Marcoses. Such a revaluation of *Manila by Night* as thirdspace 1) locates the film at the center of wider spatio-temporal interrelationship—from "global" to "national" to "cinematic" space, and 2) salvages the epistemological concerns of Bernal, which previous critiques of *Manila by Night* tended to eclipse.

Keywords

city film, cognitive map, lived city, national cinema

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ISHMAEL BERNAL'S *MANILA BY NIGHT* has been critically valued in geopolitical terms and rightly so. Having been first released in 1980, the marks of the Marcoses' political regime and its machinations are inescapably registered in the production, distribution, and exhibition of the film and in the film text itself. President Ferdinand Marcos, having declared martial law on 22 September 1972 (thereby extending his

term indefinitely), was at this time in the midst of enacting politico-economic “structural adjustments,” in alliance with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and accelerating “development” and “national progress” through technocratic policies (cf. Broad; Dubsky; Boyce).

Correspondingly, the urbanization project of the state was at its height this time as well (cf. Caoili 111–52). Hence, with Manila as its main setting, Bernal’s film was irresistibly entwined with the Marcoses’ codification of the modernization of the city. Meanwhile, these historical developments have fomented politicized critical and cinematic productions, typified by the writings of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino and the films of Bernal and Lino Brocka, which were rallied around as counterpoints to the Marcoses’s projection of national development (cf. Campos, “The Intersection”).

The present paper revisits *Manila by Night* by deploying political geographer and urban planner Edward Soja’s notion of “thirdspace,” his recombination of spatial concepts from different theorists,¹ particularly Michel Foucault’s “heterotopia,” bell hook’s “homeplace,” and Homi Bhabha’s “third space,” among others; these all refer to a kind of liminal, inconclusive, complex, dynamic, and even counter-space, either literal or symbolic, that is fertile ground for critical activity. As a critical strategy, the concept is a “thirthing,” a way of trying “to open up ... spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking ... that respond to all binarisms” (5). In this process of thirthing, “the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives” (5).

In this regard, the present paper recontextualizes the film as thirdspace, located in between the ideas of “nation” and “national cinema,” in between the necessity and rejection of creating cognitive maps of the city, and in between the rejection and adaptation of a vista of the cityscape.

Moreover, as applied particularly to social spaces, the present paper appropriates Soja’s reworking of the categories of Henri Lefebvre’s “trialectic” of spatialized thinking (Soja 53–82; cf. Lefebvre). It deploys Lefebvre’s ideas of “perceived space,” or the material space that can be empirically measured and described; “conceived space,” or the conceptualized space of artists, social scientists, urban planners, architects, and technocrats, which is related to the production of and imposition on space and the governance of spatial signs and codes; and “lived space,” or what Soja also calls “thirdspace,” which subsumes both perceived and conceived spaces and simultaneously exceeds them. As Soja argues, lived space as thirdspace represents the “clandestine or hidden side of social life—as well as an attempt to emphasize the partial unknowability, the mystery and secretiveness, the nonverbal subliminality of space of representations” (67).

The paper rereads *Manila by Night* as Bernal’s concept of the city which approximates the lived dimension of urban spaces vis-à-vis the “concept city” of the Marcoses. Such a revaluation of *Manila by Night* as thirdspace 1) locates the film

at the center of a wider spatio-temporal interrelationship – from “local” to “global” and from “national” to “cinematic” spaces, and 2) salvages the epistemological concerns of Bernal, which previous critiques of *Manila by Night* tended to eclipse in favor of only historical-political readings.

The paper is composed of two separate but connected sections. The first part is a consideration of the historical context of *Manila by Night*. It examines in detail the opening sequence of the film as a threshold and what this sequence conceals, condenses, and betrays vis-à-vis the Marcosian project of modernization and urbanization. It also contextualizes *Manila by Night* as a “city film” and discusses the ambivalent impulses of such a genre relative to the inter-/counter-related projects of nation formation and national cinema formation.

The second part problematizes the reified association of *Manila by Night* with Brocka’s *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1975) broached in the first part. It then continues to explicate the text of *Manila by Night* as a city film, through the prism of the closing sequences, and demonstrates how the film could be a “thirthing” of—and an engagement of the binarisms that arise from—Kevin Lynch’s notion of cognitive mapping and Michel de Certeau’s figure of the “walker” vis-à-vis the “cityscape.” Taken together, the two parts of the paper assert that *Manila by Night* was not (only) a counter-discourse against the Marcosian codification of the city, but in fact partook of the same impulses of modernization and the desire for destiny and legibility.

Density and Destiny: *Manila by Night* in-between “National” and “Cinema”

Manila and no other city in the Philippines has been most significantly imagined and represented visually in Philippine media. This preeminence of the city in media representations, through which the nation is many times focalized and symbolically imagined, is ironically premised on Manila’s historical overdetermination as the dominant and primate city.

On the one hand, Manila was transformed by colonial history into the dominant city (fig. 1). It was established as the site of Spanish colonial rule, the center of politics, economy, education, and culture, which correspondingly transformed not only “the indigenous structural characteristics” of Manila, but also the structural relationship of the rest of the Philippines and the external colonial powers relative to it (Caoili xix, 22–63). This historical transformation of Manila became the basis of urban and national politics under American and Japanese rule and conditioned the city’s trajectory of spatial expansion and development.

On the other hand, due to the relative underdevelopment of the other cities and regions in the Philippines, the national capital evolved into a primate city. It has over time increasingly attracted people from other regions and the rural areas with

Figure 1. Moat surrounding the Walled City of Intramuros, the original Spanish colonial settlement. (Photo courtesy of Kumchong Lee, used with permission)

the promise of educational, cultural, and, most especially, economic opportunities. This steady rural-to-urban migration, in turn, has resulted in the formation of the slum and squatter areas, which have become ever-thickening peripheral spaces (Caoili 64–109).

The shifting spatial formations of what is central and what is peripheral have, therefore, yielded a host of many times conflicting media imaginings and representations of Manila. For one, the capital city has been continually historicized and/or mythologized for various political causes and aesthetic purposes (cf. Joaquin, *Manila* and “Sa Loob”; Lico 39–47, 127–56). Corollary to this, the relationship of urban spaces as center and rural spaces as periphery has been a major preoccupation of Filipino literary and cinematic productions (cf. S. Reyes; Campos, “Ang Pelikulang Rural”). And, as a consequence of continuous rural-to-urban migration, the strain on existing public security and services, which has magnified the marginalization of the urban poor, has also spawned many bleakly “realist” novels and films (cf. S. Reyes; Campos, “The Intersection”).² The city’s conurbations and various zones, in other words, have been inscribed as cultural signifier across history, and its sociopolitical and psychological dimensions have been articulated in visual meditations on the plight of the Filipino.

It is exactly this quality of imagining Manila that seduces the artist, the politician, the citizen, to gaze upon the city with ambivalence—on the one hand, investing its spaces with grand, profound, and “national” meanings, and on the other hand,

picturing it as a space of disgust and depravity. In both cases, the fraught question lies always in how the city is conceived and in who is conceiving the city. As such, the urban space of Manila is always at least double-coded: concrete and abstract; historical and mythic; social and psychological; fascinating and terrifying; an object of governance and a frame of mind; time-bound and space-defined. It is in between these double-codings that one can productively locate Bernal's *Manila by Night*, which itself does not shrink from the urge to densely render the city onscreen.

Manila by Night—for all its notoriety and critical acclaim in Filipino film history (cf. Hernando; David, “Ten Best”)—opens with a rather benign, but actually designing, sequence of stasis and motion. It is dusk, and centrally framed is the façade of a whitewashed and fluorescent-lit split-level modernist bungalow. In the foreground, bicycles pedal in and out of the screen, highlighting the spaciousness of the paved subdivision that follows the model of American suburbia and reflects developments in the city. Only a few private cars drive by in this apparently exclusive street. People walking by are presumably on their way home from office or school, spaces of activity one associates with the middle-class denizens of such a spatial formation. A group of teenagers carrying a basketball passes by, indicating that there is a recreation area nearby and that the young are not, as it were, up to no good.

Darkness has visibly descended, but this first sequence is still Manila by day, located at the threshold of the film, of time and of space, which at this point is keeping at bay the texture of *Manila by Night* as “city film.” The opening sequence registers a known and knowable middle-class urban space, stripped of any kind of mystery and indecipherability usually ascribed to a historic city (fig. 2). In fact, this is the only sequence in the film which, without the ramifications of narrative and visual complexity, represents in any certain terms a city space that is benign and, therefore, functions as a foil to what is yet to unfold in terms of narrative and spatial visualization. At this point in narrative time and screen space, the sequence is the threshold, where the spectator is located in between the reality of urbanization outside of the screen and Bernal's alter-image of the selfsame city within the boundaries of the screen.

At the time of the film's production, the “conjugal dictatorship” of President Ferdinand and First Lady Imelda Marcos had already taken extensive measures in their bid for national development to cleanse and transform the city, which was the seat of their power and which they had imbued with mythic aura (cf. Lico 39–47; 127–56). The fateful decree of Ferdinand, Proclamation 1081, or the declaration of a state of martial law in the Philippines in 1972 and the appointment of Imelda as governor of Metropolitan Manila in 1975, had legitimized the “beautification” of Manila and the purging of its “lawless elements” (cf. Lico 53–54; I. Marcos 3).

In his *Notes on the New Society*, published in 1973, a year after the establishment of military rule, Ferdinand wrote of the foundations of a “New Society” which was to be the determiner of the destiny of the nation. And, in the year following

Figure 2. Ishmael Bernal (seated center) with Charito Solis, who plays the mother desperately clinging to her hard-fought (yet ironically nondescript) middle-class existence, on location. (Photo courtesy of Bernardo Bernardo, used with permission)

her assumption as Governor, Imelda published *Manila: The City of Man* (1976), in which, with strong allusions to “the glories of Greece and Rome” and other contemporary First World nations, she compared Manila to “other great cities” which have “invented human civilization, having first risen as a sanctuary from barbarism” (2). The conflation of the destinies of the nation and the city found its profound fruition, on the one hand, in the publication of the multivolume history of the Philippines, tellingly titled *Tadhana: The History of the Filipino People* (1976) and purported to have been singularly authored by Ferdinand and, on the other hand, in the massive and accelerated modernization of Metro Manila under the auspices of Imelda.

The image-production of Ferdinand as a strong leader and of the Philippines as a strong nation in the Third World resulted in the constant comparison of the local with the global, in the insistence on simulating a transnational reality within national boundaries, and in desiring modernist development on the basis of known and knowable modernisms (Tadiar 152–53). And under the strain of accelerated modernization, the Marcoses “succumbed to an orgy of borrowing from international financial institutions” (Lico 51) and allowed the World Bank to maneuver the creation of the metropolitan administration against the interest of the Filipinos (cf. Bello et al.; Broad). Moreover, the frantic construction of monolithic edifices at great speed has been highlighted by architect and critic Gerard Lico in his book, *Edifice Complex* (2003), where he notes time and time again how impossible deadlines were set and met under the shadow of the motto,

“What the First Lady wants, the First Lady gets!” (125). All manner of structures were built, from hotels and commercial centers to theaters and cultural centers, each one aimed at attracting foreign attention and foreign investments.

In 1974, the Folk Arts Theater was “constructed within an incredible seventy-seven days” in order to host the Miss Universe Pageant, and the massive and state-of-the-art Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) was completed in less than two years, in order to host the IMF-World Bank Conference in Manila (Lico 52). All of these efforts were aimed at showcasing Manila as a site of development that is synchronized with “the universal time of progress of the advanced capitalist nations and profitably integrate[d] ... into the world economy” (Tadiar 157). By 1980, the year of *Manila by Night*’s first release, the government had already “invested over P19 billion in infrastructure” (F. Marcos, *The Marcos Revolution* 69). In the process of reckless modernization, thousands of squatters had been evicted and displaced, and shantytowns had been literally “whitewashed into obscurity” (Lico 53–54).

This state of affairs, with all of the accompanying discursive and physical violence of cleansing, is the very thing that undergirds the first sequence of *Manila by Night*. The consolidation of political and economic drives is contained in this image of a section of the metropolis, inhabited by the metropolitan bodies governed by state and city administration. This environment, this image of the clean city, is condensed in the first few frames of the film, which is silent about its basis and foundations. What one sees on the surface of the screen is a picture of stability, community, and affluence in an ostensibly transparent setting that is made attractive by the absence of filth. What is suspended, of course, is the visualization of the underside of this misplaced development. What is betrayed are the traces of dependence of Filipino-lived spatiality on the United States. And what is concealed is the traditional visualization of a long line of “city films” of which *Manila by Night* is a descendant.

In the wake of World War II and following American reoccupation, as Hollywood began to flood Philippine screens once again (Deocampo 402–03), the cinematic incarnations of Manila progressively began to be thematized and visualized in increasingly bleaker terms. For instance, immediately after the war, Manila was the setting of wartime life-and-death exploits of heroic guerillas, in films like Luis F. Nolasco’s *Fort Santiago* (1946) and Gerardo de Leon and Eddie Romero’s *Intramuros* (1946). But later on, it became the site of “collaboration [which] filled the screens with stories of despicable villains who betrayed resistance fighters” (Deocampo 406), such as in Eddie Romero’s *Manila: Open City* (1968). This trend in Filipino city films over a two-decade period is, in fact, closely linked with historical developments and spatial reconfigurations.

As history moved farther from the time of war, spatial textures became more perceptible in later city films. Manila and its suburbs were left in ruins after World War II, and the influx of rural migrants to the city continually reconfigured urban settlement; in the 1950s, urban centers like Ermita, Malate, Paco, Santa

Ana, Sampaloc, and Tondo became thickly populated residential areas (Caoili 68). Describing a specific space in the context of this rapid urban transformation, Manuel Caoili writes of a significant spatial-historical juxtaposition: “Poor migrants moved into the ruins of Intramuros, squatting on vacant lots and thus converting the once proud center of Spanish authority and culture into a veritable slum” (68).

These historical developments and spatial reconfigurations are the bases of city films in which Manila was portrayed as the setting of crime and violence, such as action and/or true-to-life movies, like Gerardo de Leon’s *The Moises Padilla Story* (1961) and Cesar Gallardo’s *Geron Busabos* (1964). Two of the most cinematically emblematic examples of how history and space converge in the city film genre—resonating with Caoili’s evocative image—remain to be Lamberto V. Avellana’s *Anak Dalita* (1956) and *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino* (1965). The former visualizes postwar Manila and Intramuros in neorealist terms, clearly setting a standard for later city films. It depicts the expanding squatter areas and the filth and grit of the primate city, as it follows the story of a soldier exposed to a life of poverty, underground economy, and corruption. The latter, which is an adaptation of Nick Joaquin’s play of the same title, visualizes Manila and Intramuros in postwar ruins once again, but this time in elegiac terms, lamenting the passing of the glory days of the historic city (and, by extension, the nation), now under siege by vulgar Americanization. A fulfillment of this vulgarization, so to speak, can be found in two vital women-dominated multicharacter prototype texts, Tony Cayado’s film noir *Mga Ligaw na Bulaklak* (1957) and Gregorio Fernandez’s slum-set *Malvarosa* (1958).

This short historical chronicle of city films paralleled the increasing dependence of the Philippines on foreign aid and loan and the continued recklessness of the Marcoses and their cronies in government. In 1950, US President Harry S. Truman sent an economic survey mission, the Bell Mission, to the Philippines, which recommended that the Philippines borrow American economic aid amounting to \$250 million. In 1958, the IMF, which was closely linked with the US government, “made devaluation and decontrol conditions for the grant of a stabilization loan to the Philippine government.” By 1962, these maneuvers and pressures had resulted in the devaluation of the peso by nearly 50 percent, in turn resulting in enormous Philippine debt and dependence on the US (Caoili 59–62).

In 1980, when *Manila by Night* was first released, the Philippine government forged a two-year standby arrangement with the IMF amounting to \$535 million; and from 1981 to 1983, the Philippines borrowed about \$1.5 billion dollars from the World Bank, while reducing the wages of ordinary Filipino workers in order to continually attract foreign investments (Broad 220, 116–27). In spite of all of these moves, and unlike neighboring Asian countries like South Korea and Singapore that also borrowed from the IMF and the World Bank, the Philippines failed to industrialize and produce a sizeable middle-class sector. These moves, in fact, took their toll on a large section of the population, not least of them on the

urban-dwellers, whose standard of living plunged below the poverty line (cf. Boyce 13–59, 303–45). As Robin Broad writes:

The fact that most would-be NICs [newly industrializing countries] experienced slow growth during this period while the Philippines actually slipped into reverse indicates that behind the accelerating decline of the Philippine economy lie not only external but also internal factors. Some observers ... place most of the blame for the Philippine performance on domestic causes—"years of reckless Marcos extravagance and corruption," topped with capital flight and uncontrolled cronies. (217)

The establishing shot of *Manila by Night*, hence, conceals, condenses, and betrays all of these historical developments and spatial reconfigurations. Meant to geographically situate the spectator, it literally and symbolically regulates the screen space and crops out all signs of poverty that would tarnish Imelda's vision of the City of Man, "an environment within which man can live fully, happily and with dignity" (J. Nells-Lim qtd. in Lico 52). At the center of the screen space is an abode in the mold of modern architecture, surrounded by a manicured lawn and trees impossibly sprouting out of the sidewalk pavement.

Notably, this picture perfect middle-class space is indeterminately located in the geography of the whole film. As the narrative and locations of *Manila by Night* densely unfold, there is an insistence on mapping specific places in the city. The Sauna Turko, which figures in the development of several main characters in the film, and its Roxas Boulevard context are specified. The tenements on Harrison Boulevard, the cocktail lounge row on M. H. del Pilar Street, the drug-dealing street of Bambang, the Santa Cruz district, the street altar along Misericordia, the Remedios Circle, the Shakey's Pizza parlor on Malate, the Breakwater of Manila Bay, the parking lot behind Philippine International Convention Center, Ospital ng Maynila, Harrison Plaza, the open canal beside Central Bank, and the Luneta (Rizal Park)—these are all specifically located as spaces where characters are determined and developed and their individual plots conceived and arranged. But the chic middle-class house of the restless youth, Alex, who is the main point of connection of many characters in *Manila by Night*, remains indeterminate. That is, it could be any house, any lot, from any of the subdivisions around Metro Manila. And this is not the indeterminacy of a mythologized city, but the ironic indeterminacy of the known and knowable which Alex is always trying to escape. The first sequence then presents the spectators with that thirdspace in between the Marcosian conceived space that is "out there" and Bernal's conception of the space where Alex actually "lives."

Past the first sequence, into the second which begins the thematization of Manila by night and which erupts in chaos after a gunshot is fired in a bar, the film ravel out densely, with multiple-character networks and conflict trajectories, the

accumulation of plot time without any immediately decipherable direction, the mapping of intersecting interior and exterior spaces, and the layering of aural and visual motifs. Picking up speed in this direction, the film reveals itself to be a “city film,” a genre with its own “history and a prism through which to address a host of related and interconnected topics regarding cinema and urbanism” (Mennel 23).

The beginnings of the genre of the city film in Europe in the 1920s, during the youth of cinema itself, resonate with the notion of the city as *terra incognita*, a space that needs to be mapped out in order to be known, but interestingly without, or taking off from, any sense of the mythic. The space of the cinema screen grappled with the impact and repercussions of modernization through the urbanity of the city film (Weihsmann 10).

The example of post-World War I Berlin as modern city thematized in several films at the time of the birth of the genre is instructive (cf. Mennel 21–45). Berlin was central to the development of German cinema, not just as location for film productions and setting for film exhibitions, but more important for being at the center of visual, narrative, and generic experiments. Karl Grune’s *The Street* (1923), F. W. Murnau’s *The Last Laugh* (1924), G. W. Pabst’s *Joyless Street* (1925), Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927), Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927), Robert and Curt Siodmak’s *People on Sunday* (1928), Joe May’s *Asphalt* (1929), and Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931) all take place in the city, but take on various genres and modes of visualization/narration, including documentary, science fiction, chamber drama, new objectivity, psychological horror, and expressionism.

Helmut Weihsmann argues that the depiction of German cities in the 1920s was the result of the newly emerging mass culture in an urbanizing modernity and the attendant fascination with “metropolitan motifs, motion, and development” (10). Such a fascination with the city is foundational to the formation of a “German cinema” (i.e., a “national cinema”). As Anton Kaes asserts, “[From] its inception German cinema has been preoccupied by the big city as a site of adventure and modernity” (qtd. in Mennel 65). In a parallel syntagmatic order in which the city is deployed in the conception of the discourse of the nation, the city therefore also figures in the conception of the idea of a “national cinema.”

However, in an important sense, the screen space of the city film bore the crucible of modernization in ways that ran counter to the mythic idealism of “national development,” such as the kind projected by the Marcoses. The Berlin films, as with many city films across history—such as Dziga Vertov’s *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* (1949), Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless* (1960), Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Accatone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962), Perry Henzell’s *The Harder They Come* (1972), Ali Özgentürk’s *The Horse* (1982), Wong Kar-wai’s *Days of Being Wild* (1990), R’anan Alexandrowicz’s *James’ Journey to Jerusalem* (2003), and Marjani Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud’s *Persepolis* (2007), to name just a few—present the contradictions and tensions of urban modernity, which necessarily marginalizes or even eradicates individuals and whole peoples.

Such marginalization and eradication, which are signified in the cropping out of filth and poverty in the first sequence of *Manila by Night*, consistent with the misdirected modernization of the Marcoses, are at the heart of city films. Such films mentioned above, like *Manila by Night*, center on the dangers, weariness, and forbidden pleasures of urban life, such as crime, vice, eruptions of violence, the collapse of families, unemployment, prostitution, and identity and class struggles. These very themes preoccupy *Manila by Night*, though at the threshold of the film, where the family of Alex is shown to be ostensibly closely knit, they are kept at bay.

Manila by Night, of course, is not only a city film of the order of the films mentioned above. It is also a contribution to the tradition of city films in the Philippines which have undermined the urbanization project of the Marcoses. In the same year when Imelda was appointed governor of Metropolitan Manila, Lino Brocka also visualized urban decay and social unrest in the landmark city film, *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*. Here, again, we can see the impulse of the genre, which is premised on the very decay and lawlessness that were frequently cited as reasons for the declaration of martial rule and the consolidation of Metropolitan Manila as a space of governance and purgation (cf. Tadiar 159–60). In the succeeding years, from 1976 to 1984, Brocka produced several other films premised exactly on the same terms (urban decay and lawlessness), notably *Insang* (1976), *Jaguar* (1979), *Bona* (1980), and *Bayan Ko: Kapit sa Patalim* (1984), which were either exhibited or in competition at the Cannes Film Festival, putting the Philippines back on the map of world cinema as a center of Third World film production (cf. Sotto).

Local critics, especially the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino, whose writings were politicized, articulated these achievements of Brocka in the genre of the city film *and* in his international acclaim as gains for “national cinema.” International film festivals, especially those positioned against Hollywood hegemony—such as Cannes, Berlin, and Venice—as critics have explicitly and implicitly demonstrated, validate national cinemas as they allow films and filmmakers to be culturally positioned vis-à-vis “world cinema” (cf. de Valck). As Marijke de Valck asserts,

[The] survival of the phenomenon of film festivals and its development into a global and widespread festival circuit has been dependent on the creation of film festivals as a zone, a liminal state, where the cinematic products can bask in the attention they receive for their aesthetic achievements, cultural specificity, or social relevance. (37)

In this context, *Manila by Night* is once again caught in between the discursive engineering of the “nation” and of “national cinema.” The film was invited to compete at the Berlin International Film Festival, presumably for its value, among others, as a city film. But the government banned the film for nearly a year for undermining the supposedly benign authoritarian rule of the Marcoses over the nation and the city. *Manila by Night* missed the festival, which could have further validated both

Figure 3. Current façade of the Manila Film Center, now condemned because of the dangers of still-continuing subsidence and rented out to a drag-performing entertainment program. (Photo courtesy of Kumchong Lee, used with permission)

the “Manila film” and “Philippine cinema.” It was eventually released locally under the new title, *City After Dark*, practically a different film, with extensive scene and dialogue deletions.

The Marcoses understood precisely the politics of international film festivals. The banning of *Manila by Night* as city film par excellence is testament to this. The other testament is the construction of the Manila Film Center (fig. 3), roughly at the same time as the release of *Manila by Night*, which was to host the first Manila International Film Festival.³ The festival was to be the point of convergence of 35 countries and over 200 films (Lico 124). Envisioned to be one of the centers of world cinema, the Parthenon-like state-of-the-art edifice was ordered constructed by Imelda at an estimated cost of \$25 million (Lico 122), to be the node where prestige and power vis-à-vis culture and cinema could be concentrated (cf. de Valck 36).

The construction of the cinema space and the founding of the festival relate to *Manila by Night* as thirdspace in crucial ways. The frenzy of endless construction which defies deadlines is hinted at in the opening sequence of *Manila by Night*, where carpenters on top of the roof of the house are shown in the first establishing shot of the film. Alex is addressed by his mother, Virgie, from the doorway, regarding their family’s plans for the evening. It is already past office hours, and

when the father of Alex arrives home from work, only then does Virgie realize that the carpenters are still working in the evening darkness.

The ironic contrast is laid to bare. Virgie is fussing, insisting that no family member should be left behind for the evening family affair. The siblings must come in from their personal errands, and everyone must get ready, since the father is bound to arrive at any moment. What is unspoken is that she has forgotten the families represented by each of the carpenters still working on the roof to beautify and improve her own family's house. And, moreover, that the carpenters do not and will not complain, because it is through this manual labor that they earn what they will feed their own families.

This ironic detail in the opening of *Manila by Night* mirrors a larger-scale tragedy that subsequently unfolded in the construction of Imelda's edifice. Froilan Hong, the architect of the Manila Film Center, in an interview with Lico, recalls, "It was [Imelda's] idea to get the essence of the Parthenon's simplicity and mathematical proportions.... [We] created a basic module that [was] grand and at the same time humane" (qtd. in Lico 121). Ironically, Hong recounts that "there were some seven thousand workers working round the clock between 25 December 1981 and 18 January 1982" (qtd. in Lico 124) in order to beat the deadline and open the space to the MIFF on 18 January.

The move to construct the space and found the festival implies the state's understanding that not only are city films culturally legitimized in international film festivals, but that the city that hosts such a festival becomes part of a "global space economy," where capital and media attention could converge. As Julian Stringer asserts: "What many festivals actually now market and project not just 'narrative images,' but a city's own 'festival image,' its own self-perceptions of the place it occupies within the global space economy, especially in relation to other cities and other festivals" (140; cf. de Valck 39–41). But one of the most shocking international coverage, especially circulated among film cultural communities, which the Manila Film Center received, was from *Film Comment*, the official publication of New York-based Film Society of Lincoln Center, which reported that on 17 November, "more than 200 persons were buried [in the construction site] under fast-drying cement" (Stein 48).

Due to the cutting of budget allotment for the next year's edition of the festival as a consequence of the tragedy, Lico narrates, "Imelda, therefore, created a contingency plan to generate funds to keep her festival going—she had censorship laws circumvented and relaxed in favor of thirteen uncut soft-porn films previewed in local cinemas and the Manila Film Center, drawing long queues and enormous profits" (123). More ironically, after the assassination of Senator Benigno S. Aquino, Jr., one of the Marcoses' staunchest political opponents, an integral version of *Manila by Night* was eventually screened at the Manila Film Center, in the process generating profit for the state (fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Poster of the film's uncensored screening at the Manila Film Center, with the original title (rather than *City After Dark*) restored. "Mature Viewership Only" was code for the venue's regular patrons that the movie would contain highly censorable sex scenes. (Mowelfund Film Institute Archive, used with permission)

As with the insistence on defining and validating the city film and national cinema internationally, the founding of a festival and the construction of a festival space are anchored on the ramifications of modernization and premised on ideological and political agenda. The impulse to build the Manila Film Center and to hold the Manila International Film Festival thus emanates from the same, though counterpoised, impulse to produce the "Manila film."

Legibility and Illegibility: The City Space as Cityscape in *Manila by Night*

As broached in the first part of this paper, Bernal's *Manila by Night* has been critically associated with two things. On the one hand, the film has been associated with the Marcosian project of modernization, which was its sociopolitical and

historical backdrop. On the other hand, it has been many times evaluated side by side with the city films of Lino Brocka, most especially *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (cf. Del Mundo; David, “Primates”).

The critical milieu of the period reified this associative and “standard” reading of *Manila by Night* and for good reason.⁴ The desire of the authoritarian government to turn Manila into a showcase, into a bright and beautiful city, spacious and available to the policing gaze, is akin to the utopian aspiration of what Michel de Certeau calls the “concept city.” According to de Certeau, the project of the technocratic visionary is premised on disciplining the urban object into a governable, abstract, and idealized form (96–103)—precisely Manila in the context of the Marcoses’ New Society. The notion of Manila as the City of Man is dependent upon the purging of urban space and the regimentation of complex everyday practices through which space is in fact embodied and lived.

The bold visualization, therefore, of *Manila by Night* and *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* of the government’s macro-scale oppressive technologies of regimentation and the micro-scale slippages of individual bodies through these technologies renders both films veritable oppositions to the idealized but distorted image of the bright city projected by the Marcoses. Both films expose slums and mazes hidden beneath the shadows of the magnificent edifices, the underside, the filth, the poverty, and the overall darkness of Manila.

From local film writings, roughly between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s, emerged a periodization of a “golden age” or a “new cinema” in the Philippines (cf. David, “A Second Golden Age”; Torre; Tiongson). And within such a periodization was specified a canon of films, some of which, including *Manila by Night* and *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, were conceived as being opposed to the Marcoses’ brand of urbanization (cf. Lumbera 200–03; 208–12). What is summoned in such a critical reading is an image of Manila that parallels (though not necessarily represents) counter-cultural radicalism, beginning with the 1960s onwards.

This kind of critical contextualization of *Manila by Night*, however, privileges a historical configuration that does not much account for the spatial dynamism of *Manila by Night*; it downplays the film’s dimension as lived space (as understood in Soja’s terms) in favor of highlighting it as a conceived space to counter Marcos’s concept city.⁵ A dynamism, thus, may be activated in the thirdspace if the desire for control over the city, the drive toward governance, and the presumed response of Bernal toward these drives are altogether accounted for. If we consider Soja’s theorizing vis-à-vis the spatial imaginaries of *Manila by Night*, what emerges is a correlation between thirdspace and the complex urban maze of Bernal’s imagination which also partakes of the same desire (though certainly not the same means and mode) of the Marcoses to map out and create a panoramic vista of Manila.

Manila by Night—more than *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*—can be located at the center of the fascinations which link the city and cinema with the conflicting

desire for “legibility” and “illegibility.” The desire to frame the city spaces—to make them legible—and, at the same time, the desire to make them difficult to decipher through visual-aural excess, in order to correspond to lived spatiality, has been abiding in cinema history across cultures (as exemplified above).

As such, one cannot easily impute the desire to frame, to put under control, the city only on the Marcoses. Bernal’s *Manila by Night* is itself an evidence of the complexity of this desire. The film orders the disordered in its continued attempt to introduce binaries of meaning—day and night, exterior and interior, old and young, cleanliness and filth, objectivity and subjectivity, hypocrisy and truth, lust and love. But it is in clearing a space for the lived city—rather than the government’s insistence on the concept city—where *Manila by Night*’s desire for control emanates.

In the germinal book of Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (1960), he prescribes an antidote to the anxiety, fear, and terror arising from metropolitan life. The “spatial organization of contemporary life, the speed of movement, and the speed and scale of new construction” (119)—all of which are reflected in the drive for modernization of the Marcoses—necessitates a self-conscious reflection on the question of urban representation vis-à-vis the expansion and continued acceleration of growth of the urban space. As Lynch argues, “We must learn to see the hidden forms in the vast sprawl of our cities” (12).

Seeing the hidden in the sprawl is Lynch’s insistence on working out the “‘legibility’ of the cityscape” (2). And this work of making the city legible is tantamount to the creation of what he called “cognitive maps,” which are mental and memorable representations of the form of the city that enable its inhabitants to cognitively situate themselves within it. I maintain that the desire to develop cognitive maps to alleviate anxiety, fear, and terror—like ideology—is shared by both the governor and the governed. But, as *Manila by Night* demonstrates, the terms of sharing are not necessarily the same or complementary. Bernal’s project, in this context, sought to bring social, subjective, and psychological themes to bear on the formal conceptions of planners, designers, and architects of the city. In the same way that the Marcoses wrote the myth into the city, like a creative reversal of eisegesis, *Manila by Night* wrought a thirdspace, an alternative cognitive map out of the concept city.

Lynch asserts that the effectiveness of a cognitive map can be measured by “the ease with which [a city’s] parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern” and its “sense of beauty” (2, 199). Both these values of measurements suggest that the idea of urban legibility is based on aesthetics and formal criteria. The patterning and beautification of the City of Man is apparent in the urban planners’ conception of the city as it is executed onto Manila’s perceived spaces. Patterning and beautification are exactly the same criteria one encounters in the ordering of the city in *Manila by Night*. Out of the ostensibly chaotic, multicharacter, plotless, unevenly patterned film, the conception of the artist and

the phenomenological experience of the viewer gel in the self-consistent aesthetics of actually well-motivated characters with individual plots forming legible patterns.

Lynch's notion of cognitive mapping rests on the difference between the city as perceived through maps and other representations and the city as lived within the material conditions of actual structures and streets. This means that ideal urban representations should be aligned with the material conditions, which is impossible because of the unevenness of lived spatiality and undesirable because a representation that fits perfectly with conceived space conceals much of lived materiality.

The last two sequences of *Manila by Night*, which can also be considered as one long sequence divided into two parts according to the mode of motion of the characters (walking and running), exemplifies how Bernal comes to terms with the necessity of mapping.

The sequence begins inside the by now very familiar Sauna Turko, where Alex is trying to borrow money from the blind masseuse Bea. Kano, the lesbian drug pusher, who is in love with Bea and from whom Alex buys his drugs, enters from the streets, as she is being pursued by law enforcers in civilian clothes. Out of paranoia or founded fear, Alex starts running as well, as if he were the one being pursued by the police. One of the pursuers inquires with Bea, who, humorously (for the viewers) but meaningfully gives the man detailed and specific directions on how to navigate through the interior-to-exterior spaces—to run through a certain passage and climb up the roof.

The image of people on roofs refers back to an earlier sequence also atop Sauna Turko's roof where Kano, with Bea, expresses her love for Manila (not to mention the opening of the film, in which the carpenters are shown working on the rooftop of Alex's house). The scene from the roof down to the narrow alleys and winding streets, up to Central Bank and Harrison Plaza, where Kano and Alex elect to pass to lose their pursuers, bespeak of how both have owned the city spaces in a way that the police have not.

The running, scored with fast and rhythmic music, punctuated by the periodic pauses of an unfit policeman catching his breath, and concluding with the slowing down of time and the distortion of sound as Kano is finally captured—epitomizes the wearisome dimension of lived spatiality at certain moments of acceleration. This breathless running gives way to the walking once again. As soon as Alex finds himself free and safe, he begins to pace leisurely, somewhat aimlessly but actually toward Luneta. On his way to the park, he passes by one of Imelda's Metro Aides sweeping in front of a movie-house and another man cleaning the sidewalk.

And toward the final scene we sense symmetry, albeit imperfectly (i.e., an approximation of symmetry). Alex listens to a guitarist strumming "Teach Your Children," the very song that he sang near the beginning of the film. Instead of the dusk in the opening, it is now approaching the break of dawn. And, as in with the opening, we see spacious and paved grounds where bikers and joggers, students

and office employees, are once again passing in and out of the frame. Alex lies down on well-kept grass and shuts his eyes before Manila by day.

As exemplified by its closing sequences, *Manila by Night* foregrounds what David Frisby has identified as characteristics of modernity, which are also characteristics of city films—"abstraction, circulation and movement, and monumentality" (20). While the film could be characterized as monumental in quite a number of ways (e.g., the ambition, the peak in the *auteur's* oeuvre, the number of stars in the cast, etc.), the density, complexity, and symmetry of the narrative that correspond to the density, complexity, and symmetrical mapping of spaces are the notable testaments to *Manila by Night's* monumentality as city film. The closing sequences also resonate with many a city film that attempts to equate metropolitan spaces with fragmented visualization, episodic narratives, and abstract and associative juxtapositions both in terms of *mise en scène* and montage (Mennel 25).

It is precisely in representing aspects of lived spatiality, the visualizing of the failure of creating an ideal, but nevertheless coming up with a recognizable, cognitive map that Bernal instead bares the feelings of anxiety, weariness, and fear that conceived spatiality exists to conceal. Bernal's map of Manila fleshes out precisely the sprawling urban conditions, so that the senses of urban coherence, order, and beauty remain as potentials within the screen space and not necessarily the perceived city spaces.

At the other end of the spectrum from the desire to cognitively map the city is the complete refusal to depict vistas of cityscapes. This, again, would be an easy way of construing *Manila by Night* vis-à-vis the panoramic mapping tendencies of the Marcoses and the critical milieu that originally received it—that the film is the dismemberment of the vision of the city that is purportedly whole.

In his essay "Walking in the City," from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), de Certeau writes of a vista of the city seen from above that makes the spaces appear lifeless (fig. 5). He argues that such a vista of the cityscape is premised on purging the city of "the obscure interlacings of everyday behavior" (99)—its multiple encounters, its heterogeneous crowds. "The seeing god created by this fiction," de Certeau asserts, must "make himself a stranger" to the lived dimension of city spaces and "know only corpses" (96). "The city-panorama," he asserts, "is a 'theoretical' simulacrum: in short, a picture, of which the preconditions for feasibility are forgetfulness and misunderstanding of processes" (99).

In his discussion of the city, de Certeau privileges instead the "walker" (*Wandersmänner*) (100), which resonates with the figure of the *flâneur* (cf. Benjamin), who purposelessly appropriates the spaces with little regard for their original conception by the planners and designers. Much of de Certeau's essay characterizes the "many-sided, resilient, cunning and stubborn" "microbial processes" of the walkers that resist "the purview of the panoptic power" (100). These walkers exceed and recalibrate pockets of lived spaces (metonymically

Fig. 5. Lifelessness from above: a recent shot of Manila after night.
(Photo courtesy of Ilsa Malsi, used with permission)

associated with garbage, pollution, noise) and, in the process, interfere with the project of governance and transparency.

Those who do not cohere with and conform to the official conception of the City of Man are what Bernal himself centrally conceives in *Manila by Night*. He privileges the walkers as well. The camera itself is peripatetic, restless, moving in and out of spaces, going from place to place through the maze of the streets, the editing rhythmic, varied and alive. On the one hand, these characters are the incarnations of lived spatiality. By virtue of framing the city on ground level, we see not corpses but lived lives—slipping between the spaces of conceived governmentality and invisible in the cityscape. Hence, if the characters in *Manila by Night* are walkers, then they may be productively figured as binary oppositions to the “corpses” bred by the Marcosian cityscape.

On the other hand, and unlike de Certeau’s idea of the walker, purposeless, imbibing and adapting the city spaces aimlessly, the characters in *Manila by Night* are not romantic walkers. They are also not like Walter Benjamin’s idea of the *flâneur* who is pleasantly lured and lost in the city. They are running *for* their lives, running *after* their lives. It is palpable how Bernal denies the viewer any reassuring “erotics of knowledge” and proffers instead only the “physical, mental and political pollutions” of the concealed and repressed (de Certeau 92–94). It is at this point that *Manila by Night* is nearest and farthest from the project of *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*. That is, while both films were premised on lifting the veil, on exposing the contradictions and violence of Marcosian modernization, *Maynila*

preferred linearity, chronology, and dramatic development (arguably the same modes utilized by the Marcoses in their myth-making project, therefore making *Maynila* a real counter-discourse), while *Manila by Night* preferred nonlinearity, spatiality, and the “configuration of social formation” (cf. David, “Primates” 88–90).

In these terms, we can think of *Manila by Night* as a “thirling,” as the visualization of the possibilities and necessities of thirdspace geography. Bernal does more than to describe (or even prescribe) a resistance to oppression, as does *Maynila: Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag*. The conventional historico-political reading of *Manila by Night* actually recreates binarisms. That is, it argues, in effect, that the illegibility of Bernal’s film is an opposition to the conceived legibility of authoritarian urbanism. But Bernal, as mentioned, is on ground level, preoccupied by individual lived lives. The process of following these individuals as they walk and run around the city spaces allows us to read these spaces and see *how* our spatial imaginary takes shape. The process, the *how*, the liminality are foregrounded. *Manila by Night* is not tragedy but irony.

It is, thus, crucial to sidestep de Certeau’s binarism—as Soja’s “thirling” demands—of the fossilized vista fictioned by the technocrats and the purposeless embodiment of spaces by the walkers. In other words, as Soja insists, it cannot be simply an either/or question. The convergence of the historical significance, the narrativized sociality, and the production of spatial imaginary in *Manila by Night* suggest that instead of a macro-micro binarism, the film comments on both (and more). It has shifting perspectives of the city projected on the screen space through various characters’ fields of vision. In fact, the attempt of Bernal to formalize the illegibility of the city through its multicharacter, plotless, and unevenly patterned narrative is his attempt at panorama on ground-level, if that is at all possible—and it is possible in the thirdspace that is *Manila by Night*. The film is a reclamation of panorama—different from the technocrat’s panorama but the same in its desire for legibility and aesthetic pleasure. But it also represents the walker’s inability to see the cityscape, to see the space from a distance, from above, as she moves in the midst of noise and filth, unable to view the city as a whole. Even the spectators who have followed several characters in many different directions throughout the film still do not have the view of the cityscape but only the dense city spaces. Unlike the blindness of the walker, however, the film projects the vision of a process.

The film is emblematic of the way in which illegible cities—perceived, conceived, and lived—occasion the foregrounding of the spatial imaginary as always partial and open-ended and, therefore, always activated by lived spatiality. The experience of watching these characters run around narrow city streets, through interiors and atop roofs, and vicariously living the shortness of breath, the anxiety of being caught, the tiresomeness of aimlessness ensure that we have both the (desire for the) vista of the technocrat and the (desire for the) blindness of the walker. That is, in any case, we desire both, in the same way we desire legibility and illegibility both. The experience of watching Bernal’s conceived city, as exemplified by the

final sequence of running and walking which concludes with an open ending, is also an approximation of the lived city.

The density is registered in the act of movement, but it cannot ultimately account for the movement itself. This movement of bodies, of the camera, in Bernal's *Manila by Night* makes the experience of Manila dense—almost like the anthropologist's idea of “thickness”—and allows space for the ambivalence of hating and loving Manila, the opposing realities of lightness/day and darkness/night, the interactions between people and their interiority/exteriority, between the social and the psychological.

By the end of the film, after Alex has run and walked the city spaces, we are yet again on another threshold. *Manila by Night* is revealed to be a threshold—toward somewhere, to be sure. What is certain is that Alex is not headed—symbolically, if not literally—back home, the space presented in the opening of the film. But, as Clodualdo del Mundo asserts, “Whatever Alex does, he will surely be in the city: he is a creature of the city” (92).

To what altered image of the city Alex exactly wishes to wake up to is anyone's guess. Certainly he will awaken with the vision of the same city; but what has become apparent—in any case, to the viewer, if not to Alex—is the desire for an altered city. And this desire, registered as a partial and open-ended map, also intimates the open-ended possibilities and processes of the city. Moreover, the panorama on ground level, mapped through all the walking and running, is an insistence that while we cannot have it literally, the view from above is always already being pursued. In this way, Bernal posits a teleological drive, a destination, represented by the density of his mapping of the city spaces which does not preclude arrival.

Notes

1. “Heterotopia” refers to spaces of otherness that function in non-hegemonic conditions. The metaphor that Michel Foucault uses to describe heterotopia is the mirror, which is a space that creates and conditions an image that is actually not there. See Foucault. “Homeplace” refers to a haven of a space where one can be oneself; bell hooks, who coined the term, writes that such a space is “where we return for renewal and self-recovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole” (49), but it also refers to a radical position of resistance and marginality (152). The “third space of enunciation,” as used by Homi Bhabha, is a cultural space “where the negotiation of incommensurable differences [among global and national cultures] creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (218).
2. The themes of rural-versus-urban spaces and the tragic plight of the migrants in the “big city” have been emblemized by Brocka's *Maynila: Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, to be discussed at length in this paper. This film was adapted from Edgardo M. Reyes's *Sa mga Kuko ng Liwanag* (1968), which typified the same

themes in the context of Tagalog literature and the novel (cf. S. Reyes). In *Manila by Night*, the theme of rural-versus-urban spaces is internalized, as it were. Or, in Manuel Caoili's terms, the urban spaces have become "ruralized." Rural folk, from places like Olongapo, Cebu, and Iloilo, who have migrated to the shantytowns of the city, comprise a good number of the primary and secondary characters, yet there are no references to the rural spaces in idealized or nostalgic idioms. Interestingly, moreover, a number of these characters also dream of finding "greener pastures" beyond Manila, such as in Saudi Arabia and the United States. Notably, this formation of urban-poor spaces in the film is located in Manila towns formerly and historically occupied by the rich of the land—Tondo, Santa Cruz, Quiapo, Santa Ana, Ermita, and Malate.

3. The experience of the two Asian nations earlier mentioned provides comparative insight here. Singapore and South Korea, with the Philippines, were part of the IMF-World Bank postwar "experiment" in politico-economic structural adjustment among "less developed countries." But these two nations' insistent protectionism, strategic trade policies, rising wages for their people, coupled with their efficient bureaucracy and "benevolent dictatorships" (Broad xix-xx, 4, 30, 40-47, 117, 189-90, 205), among others, have engendered city films, like Tan Pin Pin's Singapore documentaries, and a festival like South Korea's Busan (Pusan) International Film Festival. Tan's works, such as "Moving House" (2001), *Singapore GaGa* (2005), and *Invisible City* (2007), are city films in so far as they register silenced histories, marginalized figures, repressed voices, and "alternative visions" (cf. K. P. Tan). But they are unlike many city films in world cinema history in their brightness, literally and figuratively. For various reasons, and for better or worse, darkness, filth, and noise are hardly indexed in Tan's visualization of urban spaces. Meanwhile, the Busan International Film Festival, held annually since 1996 in the second biggest city in Korea, has signified the industrialization and globalization of Korean cinema, both as an Asian cinema benefactor and as a leading figure in world cinema (cf. Stringer and Shin). The festival has functioned, among other things, as a showcase of Korean films side by side with international films, as a "gateway" of the national cinema to the international circuit, and as a springboard for partnerships and co-production initiatives (Shin 54-55).
4. For more discussion on the relationship between the MPP and the Marcos regime and the MPP's nationalist programme, see Campos, "The Intersection."
5. To qualify, the politicized critical milieu of the times defined by critics such as Lumbera and the rest of the Manunuri ng Pelikulang Pilipino, the first film critics group in the Philippines, does rely on and may be said to have championed historicized criticism, especially as a counterpoint to the "anachronisms" of Ferdinand Marcos's idea of "democratic revolution" and accelerated modernization. In fact, the MPP was founded in 1976, in the thick of the Marcos regime (after the declaration of Martial Law in 1972 and before the People Power uprising in 1986), and was then only beginning to carve out of the mass, as it were, a more historically attuned brand of film criticism. As such, its critical engagements, which appeared mainly in the form of terse and popularly

legible film reviews published in newspapers and magazines, were primarily expressed in the language of (many times subtle) politico-ethical engagement of the Marcosian system meant for the general reader. However, given both the nascent critical milieu and the threatening state censorship, there had yet been no space for more nuanced critiques which took to account a more spatialized understanding of both history and lived experience.

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