

GEOGRAPHIES OF ART AND URBAN CHANGE: CONTESTING
GENTRIFICATION THROUGH AESTHETIC ENCOUNTERS
IN SAN FRANCISCO'S MISSION DISTRICT

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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While the geographic literature has explored the role of artists as either harbingers or victims of gentrifying processes, this thesis examines the ways in which a particular group of artists *contests* gentrification. This challenges prevalent narratives in the literature. The Mission Arts & Performance Project (MAPP) is a grassroots, multi-venue neighborhood event featuring art and performance in San Francisco's Mission District. Occurring every other month with no external funding, no formalized organizing committee, and no official leader, it is currently in its tenth year. One of its stated goals is to facilitate community interaction across cultural divides. The purpose of this study was to explore how the individuals and groups involved with the MAPP work to contest gentrification and empower themselves and their multivalent communities through discursive and material practices. Broadly, I aim to interrogate the conditions under which such gatherings take place, the effects, and the implications for understanding how collaborative creative practice can contest gentrification and affect urban change.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Research Questions.....	4
Significance of Research.....	4
The Mission Makeover Mural	7
Positionality	9
A Post-art-walk World.....	11
Methods.....	12
RoadMAPP	13
Conclusion	15
II. CONTEXT: THE MISSION DISTRICT, GENTRIFICATION, AND ART	16
The Mission District	18
Gentrification	24
Gentrification and Art.....	26
The Mission Arts & Performance Project (MAPP).....	28
III. MAPP ORGANIZING: DISCURSIVE AND MATERIAL PRACTICES	32
At the MAPP Meeting	32
Objectives	33
Informality	36
Discourses of Informal Spaces.....	36
Spaces Used in Practice	37

Chapter	Page
Informality as Practice in the MAPP	42
The Formality of Being Blessed	43
Decentralization	44
“Out of the Cash Nexus”	48
Accessibility.....	54
Conclusion	56
IV. CONTESTING GENTRIFICATION: THE ENGINEERING OF AESTHETIC ENCOUNTERS	58
Introduction.....	58
Communities: Different Spaces, Different Faces	59
Intentional Relationships: Countering Marginalization.....	69
Spaces of Encounter.....	72
Conclusion	75
V. CREATIVITY: SPACES AND SITES	77
Jorge’s Blessing	77
Creative Geographies.....	78
The <i>Beautiful Trash</i> Exhibit.....	79
The Face of Community	81
Daily Walks	83
Whose Imagination?	84
Jorge’s Prayer.....	88
The Secret Garden.....	89

Chapter	Page
VI. CONCLUSIONS	97
Geography and Art.....	104
REFERENCES CITED.....	107

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. “Mission Makeover Mural” in Balmy Alley portrays neighborhood scenes.....	8
2. Maps by Nicholas Perdue, 2013. Photo of a mural in Balmy Alley.....	21
3. “Legalize Hate Out Of My State” mural by Favianna Rodriguez	77
4. Adrian Arias at MAPP, August 2012	81
5. MAPP sign, entrance to the Secret Garden on Harrison Street	92
6. Pathway leading back into the Secret Garden.....	92
7. Garden walls painted by children with words in English and Spanish.....	93
8. Someone helping prepare for MAPP by picking plums from the trees	93
9. Bucket of free plums for people to take.....	94
10. A Venezuelan couple performs in the Secret Garden for their first MAPP.....	94
11. La Gente (“the people”), regular MAPP performers, play to a crowd	95
12. The band 3 Soulbirds performs songs in English and Portuguese.....	95
13. Ani Rivera and two others look at the destroyed mural outside Galería	96

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. August 2012 MAPP Spaces	38

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For decades scholars have been writing about the relationship between art and gentrification, often examining the ways in which usually young, usually white artists aesthetically transform inner-city urban communities, bringing cultural capital and portending successive waves of gentrifiers (Zukin, 1989; Ley, 1997; Cameron and Coaffee, 2005; Lees, 2008; Lees et al., 2008; see Mathews, 2010). More recently, scholars have also asked whether artists are victims rather than harbingers of the process, due to the fact that they often get priced out and eventually displaced themselves (Ley, 2003; Mathews, 2008). Understanding this relationship has been difficult and the subject of much debate, and it has become clear that there is not a simple, clear explanation that makes sense in all gentrifying neighborhoods.

In this thesis, I examine the relationships between an ongoing, grassroots arts event series called the Mission Arts & Performance Project, or the MAPP, and the neighborhood in which it takes place, the gentrifying Mission District in San Francisco, commonly referred to simply as “the Mission.” I have two main goals in this work: to investigate the ways that the MAPP *contests* gentrification in the neighborhood, and to explore the importance and effects of art itself in the context of the MAPP.

In the Mission District, our understanding of the relationship between gentrification and artists is already complicated by the question of who the artists actually are. In the geographic literature on gentrification and art, “artists” are often treated as a homogenous group, and there seems to be an underlying assumption that artists are white

newcomers. This is not asserted, rather there seems to be the omission of an acknowledgement of the range and diversity of artists' identities, histories, and differences (Mathews, 2010). In the Mission, this assumption is extremely problematic. Several decades of powerful, visible traditions of Latina/o art and music preceded the gentrifying processes that drove out thousands of Latinas/os in the 1990s. While Latinas/os once made up approximately two thirds of the population of the Mission, they are *not gone* from the neighborhood, still making up roughly a third of the population today (Nyborg, 2008; Mirabal, 2009; Mission Possible). Latina/o artistic traditions are still alive, inscribed in the landscape and continually enacted through practice; and they still give the place much of its character. The Mission is therefore a complex and interesting site in which to explore the relationship between art/artists and gentrification and to challenge the narratives we have about this relationship.

In 2003, a diverse group of artists in the Mission—many but not all of them Latina/o—gathered to discuss organizing a regular “multi-venue neighborhood arts and performance event” (www.sfmapp.com). A decade later, what emerged as the MAPP is still going on every other month, despite the lack of an individual or committee who is officially in charge, any formalized organizing structure, or external funding. There were several reasons the MAPP captured my interest. It is run informally, and it has managed to keep itself going for a decade. Events are held in unusual places, places many people wouldn't think of as arts venues. Anyone may come to meetings to participate in organizing and making decisions about the events. The MAPP identifies itself as a “homegrown, bi-monthly, multidisciplinary, unruly intercultural happening” (*ibid*). During the volunteer-run events, artists of all kinds perform and display artwork at a

variety of venues; some of the MAPP sites are bookstores, shops, or cafes, but there is a focus on more informal spaces such as living rooms, gardens, and garages.

Additionally, those involved have another project in mind: to bring together the multiple and divided communities of the neighborhood. The challenge of the MAPP, according to the website, is “to help shape a shared sense of community within a neighborhood that is both culturally rich and yet continuously troubled by the process of gentrification—the disconnection and dislocation of people along cultural and economic lines” (*ibid.*). This definition of gentrification is telling. It is not only about rent prices and displacement; the word “disconnection” also implies the presence of emotional and psychological barriers that have a negative effect on neighborhood residents. One of the current main organizers, Rafael, referred to the project as “our alternative street curating model combating gentrification” (Personal correspondence, 3/3/12).

To walk through the Mission is to be conspicuously surrounded by historical as well as contemporary narratives in the form of the numerous murals adorning the neighborhood’s walls. San Francisco has the highest number of murals per capita in the world (Dresher, 1991), as well as the highest spatial concentration of murals in the United States (Solnit, 2002),¹ and the Mission is the place where the murals are the most concentrated within the city. These images and scenes are located on school buildings, garages, fences, residential dwellings, and the structures that house all kinds of businesses. They attest to the powerful history of art and artists in the Mission, a history complicated by associations of activism and community empowerment on the one hand, and accounts of gentrification and displacement on the other. This complex history makes

¹ San Francisco has the most murals by area and per capita of any U.S. city, although Philadelphia has the most murals in sheer number of any U.S. city.

the neighborhood a rich and fascinating site for geographic research on the relationship between art and urban change.

Research Questions

In this thesis, I examine the effects of the MAPP on the individuals and groups involved. In order to gain a deeper understanding of possible relationships between art and gentrification, I analyze the discourses and practices through which MAPP spaces are (temporarily) produced by artists, musicians, venue providers, and other individuals who coordinate, attend, and participate in the project. Through a combination of qualitative research and discourse analysis, I offer some necessarily partial answers to the following questions: *1) What discourses and practices are produced by the MAPP? 2) How do the discourses and practices affect the individuals and groups involved? 3) In what ways does the MAPP contest gentrifying processes in the Mission District?* In order to answer these questions, I draw upon my empirical research, teasing out the discourses, practices, and effects of the MAPP, and investigating the relationship between the MAPP and neighborhood dynamics. Implications of this research are significant within several disciplinary conversations; specifically, geographic work on art's role in gentrification, as well as recent work in "creative geographies" as coined by Harriet Hawkins.

Significance of Research

Recently, geographers have shown a renewed interest in art as an object of study (Hawkins, 2011, 2013; Rogers, 2012). This is a fertile area in the discipline; however, it is crucial to integrate this new interest in art with geography's current

strengths, such as attentiveness to material and spatial relationships and a concern for social justice (Marston and de Leeuw, 2013). This thesis speaks to the integration of geographies of art with more traditional focuses of geography; in this case, social relations and creative practices in a gentrifying neighborhood. I seek to interrogate how a specific grassroots arts project in this setting potentially empowers individuals and groups who have been disenfranchised by gentrification.

I started this project at a timely moment in geography. Harriet Hawkins has recently argued for a synthesizing of analytics that can help affirm the place of art in geography, both as an object of study and as practice (2013). She distills three analytics that she believes can do this work because of their contemporary significance to both geography and the arts: the site, the body/embodiment, and materiality/material practices. On the heels of this piece that advocates for “creative geographies,” Sallie Marston and Sarah de Leeuw explored the history of the pairing of creative and geographic pursuits in their article “Creativity and Geography: Toward a Politicized Intervention” (2013), the introduction to a special issue of *The Geographical Review* dedicated to recent examples of such work. Marston and de Leeuw call on geographers to explore the “creative (re)turn” in geography and to be mindful of “both geography’s historical engagement of the arts and humanities and the political possibilities and responsibilities of the expressions being produced” (*ibid.*, p. xx).

Geographic work that connects itself with creative practice must be attentive to the twinning of some version of aesthetics, on the one hand, and apposite disciplinary analytics, on the other. If geographers are to take aesthetics seriously, this means exploring and articulating, in specific instances, its materiality, its groundedness, and its

interconnections with social and spatial justice and with place—as well as “the unevenness of processes and circumstances that inform and determine any practice” (*ibid.*, p. xx). This is what I attempt to do in this work on the MAPP and its relationship with the Mission District.

Attentiveness to aesthetics and attentiveness to social, political, and spatial processes are more closely interwoven at some moments than at others; in truth they weave in and out of each other. They meet perhaps most explicitly if and when the *content* of art or performance deals with the social, political, or spatial *context* in which it is situated. As we know, it does often happen that art is paired with social or political motivations, and the term “artivism,” meaning art-activism, was coined in the 1970s in part to articulate this phenomenon. The question remains of how to address art that is not always directly coupled with social or political messages; the content of the art, music, and performance featured in the MAPP is not necessarily political (although it certainly is at times), and the organizers do not claim that this is an explicitly activist project. Instead, the project is social, collaborative, and creative.

This thesis attempts to reconceptualize geographers’ understanding of the possible relationships between art and gentrification through incorporating newer and broader ideas recently brought to bear by the introduction of “creative geographies.” One of the primary aims of my particular project is to pinpoint specific conditions under which the arts are *empowering* for individuals and groups in gentrifying neighborhoods (instead of representing and reinforcing disenfranchisement), as well as the conditions under which particular spaces become the sites of this empowerment. In her review of the literature on gentrification and art (2010), Vanessa Mathews writes that art in cities “when drawn into

regeneration strategies is often *smoothed of contestation* and served up for aesthetic delight” (p. 669, emphasis added). Curiosity and hope drive this project, as I attempt to understand whether and how the MAPP finds ways of achieving its goals of contesting gentrifying processes. It is important to recognize and identify *different* effects that art can have on neighborhoods and cities, and to understand what accounts for this difference.

The Mission Makeover Mural

Located in a Mission alleyway filled with murals, the Mission Makeover Mural tells a common version of the neighborhood’s current story. This mural (not a project of the MAPP) provides a clear example of the pairing of content with context (see Fig. 1), and I use it therefore to allow an artwork by a local artist tell part of the Mission’s tale. Known as a predominantly Latina/o neighborhood since at least the 1960s, the Mission has seen a significant decrease in its Latina/o population since the 1990s due to gentrification. Thousands of families and hundreds of Latina/o run businesses have been displaced in the last two decades as a result of skyrocketing rent prices, eviction, and harassment. The mural, a beautifully rendered piece of art in itself, is filled with urban neighborhood scenes. A trendy blond woman chats casually with a dark-haired police officer; they both sip coffee beverages out of their plastic to-go cups; there are kids on bikes, people moving out of their homes, other people waiting in a line, a city bus, a man asleep in the street. What look to be young men of color are getting arrested by what look to be policemen of color. The characters in the mural embody racial diversity (as well as ambiguity) that crosses simplistic social categories. Above the neighborhood, there are



Figure 1: “Mission Makeover Mural” in Balmy Alley portrays neighborhood scenes.

powerfully symbolic images of militarization, Adam and Eve leaving the Garden, a foreclosure sign, faces painted like skeletons in the Latina/o tradition of Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), and a strange, cyborg-like figure on a laptop computer in front of City Hall. These latter images are haunting, conveying a sense of foreboding. This mural is a social commentary on the ongoing gentrification of the neighborhood.

Lucia, who designed the mural, writes:

I designed the Mission Makeover Mural to depict the two Missions that I am most familiar with; La Mision of my youth, filled with a vibrant Latino culture, rich in art and history, a place that I have lived my entire life; and the current Makeover Mission, remodeled and revised with designer boutiques, high priced cafes, less Latino immigrant families, and dwindling diversity... This Balmy Alley mural honors those individuals, businesses and families who left without choice. (Mission Makeover Mural, Kickstarter)

Lucia's description of the Mission is typical of many stories I've heard. It tells of the disenfranchisement and disempowerment of the long-term and Latino/a residents through gentrifying processes, of people who were forced out at an alarming rate.

Positionality

I want to briefly address my positionality in this research and why I am doing this project. I am a white, educated woman and a U.S. citizen, and throughout most of my life I have lived in big cities on the West Coast of the United States (Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle) and been lower-middle class. I am a poet, and I have been a part of various arts communities in different cities. There have been a number of times when artist friends and/or I, many of us white and identifying as progressive, thought about moving and sometimes did move to lower-income neighborhoods, often predominantly inhabited by communities of color. I have mainly experienced this in Seattle, in the neighborhoods of the Central District and Columbia City, which have slowly been undergoing gentrifying processes in the last decade, especially visible in the last few years. Conversations about our role in gentrifying processes have been ongoing amongst my friends, including jokes about how we shouldn't tell other white folks how much we like our new neighborhood. "There's not really anything going on there," we encourage each other to say to other people. This is indeed an awkward position to be in: we want to move somewhere, but we don't want other white people to move there. This necessitates difficult conversations about gentrification, whiteness, and what art means or should mean, as well as what we want solidarity to look like. There is guilt associated with being a part of gentrification, and we wonder if there is anything we can do short of staying in

neighborhoods with higher rent and less diversity.

Additionally, I also know how much time and effort and energy is put into organizing independent arts events, especially when people are doing it without funding or an organization behind them (i.e., in their spare time when everyone has a full-time job and/or a family). I have been a part of small, free, community-oriented poetry readings, house music shows, and informal art exhibitions. They can be incredibly rewarding, and when they're over, people say, "We should do this again! We should do this regularly!" But it is incredibly hard to organize events like this regularly, and an event does not often turn into the fantasized-about series. It becomes even more complicated when trying to combine a desire for arts events with a desire for cross-cultural solidarity in urban neighborhoods. How do we make connections? How do we organize? How and where do we gather? How do we bring the arts and conversations about social and spatial justice into the same realm?

While most of my own experiences have been in Seattle arts communities, my sister has lived in the Mission District for more than fifteen years, and I have spent time there and have known people (both whites and Latinas/os) there since I was a teenager. I also lived there for one year during 2005 and 2006, and it was during this time that I first went to a MAPP. Throughout my experiences in the Mission, I talked to many different people about changes in the neighborhood, and I saw many of these changes for myself as I went back time after time. In the Mission there is a longer and more intense history of gentrification than in the aforementioned Seattle neighborhoods, as well as a more visible history of contestation. For all these reasons I decided to go back to the Mission and conduct research on the MAPP, gentrification, and empowerment through the arts.

A Post-art-walk World

Hearing about MAPP, one might think of the so-called “art walks” that have become quite common in “every major city with half a central art district” (Lasarow, 2010). In general, art walks are events that consist of several proximate art galleries, museums, and/or other business venues opening their doors for free entry and/or for extra hours, often including complimentary wine and snacks, and sometimes including free performances. The MAPP website states, "MAPP is not an 'art walk' (thank god)". Why does the MAPP dissociate itself from art walks?

The answer is that art walks are strongly associated with gentrifying processes, with their main goal being to attract new people and new capital to an area. “A traditional art walk,” an interviewee named Cristina told me, “is all about getting the people you want into your gallery or into your storefront... Businesses that want to participate in an art walk, most of the time they want to do it because they get more business... it's a transactionary impetus” (Personal interview, 7/17/12). Rather than having economic growth as a primary or even secondary goal, the MAPP aspires “to be not only an open and inclusive platform for artistic expression, but equally, if not more importantly, a space of exchange among the diverse, and often divided, communities that reside within our neighborhood and city” (www.sfmapp.com).

Guy Debord and the Situationists called the process through which radicalism gets assimilated into the commodity-spectacle society “recuperation,” and it is easy to see the cooptation of art and artists through gentrifying processes as an example of this. Theodor Adorno argued for an art not quickly or easily decipherable, so that it could not be immediately coopted by what he called “the culture industry” (2001). Philosophers

such as John Dewey (in writings from the early 1930s) and Henri Lefebvre have argued that aesthetics and everyday life should not be separated, that art should be democratic and a part of the normal existence and expression of the public (Lefebvre 1991, Lefebvre and Kofman 1996, Dewey 2005). In the tradition of these and many other philosophers who have engaged with questions of creative practice in social life, I have pursued an exploration of the material and discursive practices and the effects of the MAPP. The MAPP website asserts that the project is part of “a post-art-walk world” (www.sfmapp.com).

Methods

During my fieldwork, I used qualitative methods to gather data for my project. Through twenty-nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews with people involved with MAPP, and through participant observation of meetings and event spaces, I investigated the ways in which the discourses, strategies, and practices of MAPP affect people’s experiences, narratives, and material practices in order to address my questions. Interviews were conducted with former and current participants of MAPP: organizers, volunteers, artists, performers, and attendees. Participants were recruited both in person and over the phone, stemming from contacts I knew previously in the Mission as well as contacts I made with MAPP organizers when I did preliminary research in February 2012. I asked questions about participants’ experiences and involvement with MAPP and the Mission District, as well as going in depth regarding the personal, social, cultural, and economic significance of art and of gentrification processes for each interviewee. I spoke with individuals in the neighborhood about their experiences and thoughts regarding

cultural divides, the role of art events in the area, and knowledge and perceptions of the MAPP.

In addition, much of my time doing fieldwork was spent going to various arts events in the neighborhood; meeting people and talking with people on the street, in shops, in cafes, at parks, and in people's homes; and taking daily walks through the neighborhood to observe (and be a part of) the activity spaces, routines, and cycles of the people there. These habits and practices during July and August 2012 were as important as the interviews I conducted, the analysis of which constitutes much of this thesis. Getting a sense of the Mission and being a part of the current fabric of the neighborhood, as I have been periodically since my mid-teens, was a vital part of what allowed me to think through my questions and compose this thesis.

RoadMAPP

In the following chapters, I situate my argument in a particular place (the Mission District) and in a particular body of literature. I then attempt to answer the questions with which I set forth. In Chapter II, I outline the history of the Mission, and I review the literature on gentrification. Specifically, I discuss the literature on art's role in gentrifying processes. I also give further details on the history of the MAPP.

In Chapter III, I examine the discursive and material practices of the MAPP, and I explore the effects of these practices on individuals and groups involved. I demonstrate how discursive and material practices function as well as identifying inconsistencies between the two. I analyze four major themes in MAPP discourse: informality, decentralization, being "outside" capitalism, and accessibility. I conclude that there is

some discrepancy between discourses and practices. Specifically, I assert that the discourses are utopian and evocative, while the practices have allowed the MAPP to grow slowly over the ten years but stay relatively small. Additionally, I argue that the combination of discourse and practice empowers individuals and groups involved. Discourse plays the role of inspiring and motivating people, while in practice, the MAPP's slow growth has allowed the operation to remain relatively independent, and each space is afforded a degree of autonomy that is powerful for the people involved.

An analysis of the MAPP discursive and material practices is necessary in order to answer my third question, that of how the MAPP contests gentrification. In Chapter IV, I argue that the structure of the MAPP allows different individuals and groups to pursue different goals according to their own ideas and priorities. I address the complex theme of community, and I show that the MAPP functions in ways that highlight the participation of those most disenfranchised by gentrifying processes in the Mission. This happens through the building of supportive relationships between long-term residents, locally owned and run organizations, Latinas/os, and artists (these groups are not mutually exclusive).

In Chapter V, I honor the relatively new term (at least in its current elaboration) "creative geographies" by engaging creatively with my research. I write Chapter V as an exploratory ode to creative geographies. This chapter is written as a series of vignettes and passages that explore evocative moments, ideas, and scenes. Some of these lead to theoretical investigations, as I draw upon theories and concepts that work to enliven and explain real, lived experiences I had during my fieldwork.

In my concluding chapter, I revisit the arguments made in the previous chapters. I

also bring up some issues that I was not adequately able to address in this research due to time constraints and other limitations. In addition, I reiterate some of the important contributions that this research makes to the continuing pursuit of creative geographies.

Conclusion

This project speaks to a growing body of work on geography and art. By examining the organizing discourses and practices of a specific group of artists, this thesis interrogates the relationships between event-spaces, the arts, and neighborhood dynamics. It is my intention to remain attentive to the ways that such research can work toward a better understanding of social and spatial relations and practices in a specific place, the Mission District. However, at the same time I pursue this research in order to better understand how creative practices in general relate to the spaces and sites in which they are situated, as well as to interrogate the implications for contesting and affecting urban change.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXT: THE MISSION DISTRICT, GENTRIFICATION, AND ART

I arrived in San Francisco on a cool day in July in time for the beginning of what some organizers call a “MAPP cycle.” The MAPP has been going on in the Mission District for a decade. It takes place on the first Saturday of every even-numbered month—February, April, June, August, October, and December. After each MAPP, organizers take a month off, and then the new cycle begins: meetings every Monday night for one month leading up to the next event.

On July 9, 2012, I got to the city with plans to go to the first meeting for the August MAPP, which was being held that evening at an address a few blocks away from where I was staying. This turned out to be the house of David, where meetings have been taking place since 2009. That night I met four of the five current main organizers of the MAPP (the fifth was out of town), all of whom I subsequently interviewed: Jorge, David, Rafael, and Cristina. These four individuals are artists who feel connected to and invested in the neighborhood. This investment is social and cultural, political and personal. Each has a unique relationship and history with the Mission District, and they are all *mappers*, a word they use to describe people involved with the MAPP.

Jorge is in his late 60s and originally from Peru, although he has been living in the Mission since the 1970s. He is a musician, a teacher, a healer, an activist, and a respected elder in his various communities. He also drives a taxi.

David is in his 70s and has also lived in the Mission since the 1970s. He is a poet, a pagan, and a Jew, and he has long been involved with neighborhood activist groups. He

rents out the rooms in his home to young activists and artists at prices that are comparatively cheap for the neighborhood, and different groups hold meetings at the house, which is known by some in the neighborhood as House of Affect². The house also becomes a venue during MAPP events.

Rafael is Latino, in his 30s, and was born in San Francisco and raised in the Mission—when we spoke, he called himself “a real Mission brat.” His mother is from Colombia, his father from Nicaragua. Although he and his family no longer live in the Mission due to rising rent prices, he still considers the neighborhood his home. He is a musician and has been playing music all over the Bay Area and elsewhere with his band for over a decade. He has also been very involved with the Red Poppy Art House, an arts non-profit in the Mission that has ties to the MAPP.

Cristina is a young Filipina woman from Southern California and is a visual artist, dancer, and singer. She works with a sizeable arts non-profit in San Francisco that builds connections between the visual arts and the public through education, workshops, exhibits, and other events. She started volunteering at the Red Poppy and connected with the MAPP community soon after moving to the city. Although she has only lived in San Francisco for three or four years, she told me that she immediately felt at home there, especially in the Mission. She is committed to “listening to the people that have been here for a long time,” because she feels that “the people that have been around the longest have a more bird's-eye perspective” (Personal interview, 7/17/12). Jorge and David, for example, have witnessed firsthand, and have at times participated in, the neighborhood's changes over the last several decades.

² I have changed the house moniker for the writing of this thesis.

In the next section, I will introduce the Mission District, which I consider to be one of the main characters of this thesis. Understanding the current conditions in the Mission and the significance of the art produced there is only possible to the extent that the neighborhood's history and dynamism are acknowledged. I will then briefly summarize the significant literature in geography on gentrification, highlighting specifically the debate on the role of art and artists in gentrifying processes. This chapter's main purpose is to contextualize my work in a particular place, as well as to situate it in terms of the arguments that have been made up until now concerning gentrification and the arts.

The Mission District

The Mission District is the oldest neighborhood in San Francisco. A region bordered by hills to the east (Potrero Hill), south (Bernal Heights Summit), and west (the slightly higher Noe Valley and then the ascent to Twin Peaks), the flat neighborhood is known for being sunnier and warmer than other parts of the city, making it a pleasant place to live. Its location insulates it to some extent from the fog and clouds. This phenomenon is especially the case in the west; fog rolling in from the Pacific Ocean sits atop Twin Peaks, dispersing as it sifts down in the east and hangs against the foothills, or warming as it moves through Noe Valley toward the Mission (Gilliam, 2001).

The Mission does not have official boundaries, but many consider the neighborhood to stretch from Church Street to Potrero Street (western and eastern border, respectively), and from Duboce Avenue to Cesar Chavez Street (northern and southern border, respectively). The area of the neighborhood is less than two square miles. The

eponymous Mission San Francisco de Asís, commonly called Mission Dolores, was the sixth of the California missions built by the Spanish at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century. Mission Dolores is San Francisco's oldest building. It was built in 1776, and then rebuilt from 1782 to 1791 less than two blocks away, where it still stands today just east of its original location. The neighborhood's area was once part of the "Mission lands," which meant lands belonging to the Spanish missions (Milliken, 1995).

Of course, the history of this area did not begin with the Europeans. For thousands of years prior to the arrival of Europeans, the Yelamu Indians, part of the Ohlone Native American people, occupied the land now called the Mission District. Their worldview, way of relating to the land, and way of life was virtually wiped out, as was the case with many Native American populations; the Yelamu had in effect disappeared only a few generations after contact. This was in large part due to diseases brought from Europe, along with other factors resulting from the total disruption of life caused by European settlements (*ibid.*; Sandos, 2008). Although the population of Ohlones had decreased to roughly 10% of its earlier numbers within one century of contact with Europeans, some Ohlone groups still exist in California today in small numbers.

In the nineteenth century, the Mission area was swept along in the larger drama of shifting political boundaries. The region was considered Spanish territory, then claimed as Mexican territory, and then, in 1848, part of the United States. Upon the ending of the Mexican-American War, California officially became United States territory. Over the next seven years, the California Gold Rush brought people to San Francisco from all over the world, especially from Europe, Latin America, and other parts of California, with

many Irish and German immigrants settling in the Mission area. After the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fires, which destroyed up to 80% of San Francisco and resulted in upwards of 3,000 deaths, the Mission was one of the few areas left intact. Inhabitants of surrounding areas who were displaced by the disaster moved to the Mission District to rebuild homes and retail shops, including a large number of Polish and Italian families (Fradkin, 2005).

Starting in the 1940s, large numbers of Mexican immigrants began moving to the Mission; many families of European descent moved further away from the city center as structural factors instigated “white flight” and as suburbanization exploded. By the 1960s and 1970s, there was continual immigration in significant numbers from all over Latin America to the Mission, and the neighborhood became known as predominantly Latina/o (Hartman, 2002; Solnit, 2002).

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of significant activism and mobilization in the Mission District in relation to urban renewal. As City Hall turned its gaze toward the working-class *barrio* with reinvestment schemes in mind, artists, community organizers, activists, and neighborhood dwellers protested and collaborated to fight the city’s plans to overhaul the entire district. Although there was some displacement as well as harassment (including the intentional setting of fires to force people out of their homes), large numbers of people worked together to resist the city’s attempts to have full control over the Mission’s future; and the emergence of the Chicano and feminist movements, along with the growth in the neighborhood of muralism as a political, artistic, and collaborative practice, allowed the Mission to thrive in its diversity (Castells, 1985). During that time, important arts nonprofits that are still vital cultural institutions in the neighborhood today

were established, most notably Galería de la Raza, founded in 1970, Precita Eyes Muralists Association, founded in 1977, and the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, also founded in 1977 (see Fig. 2).

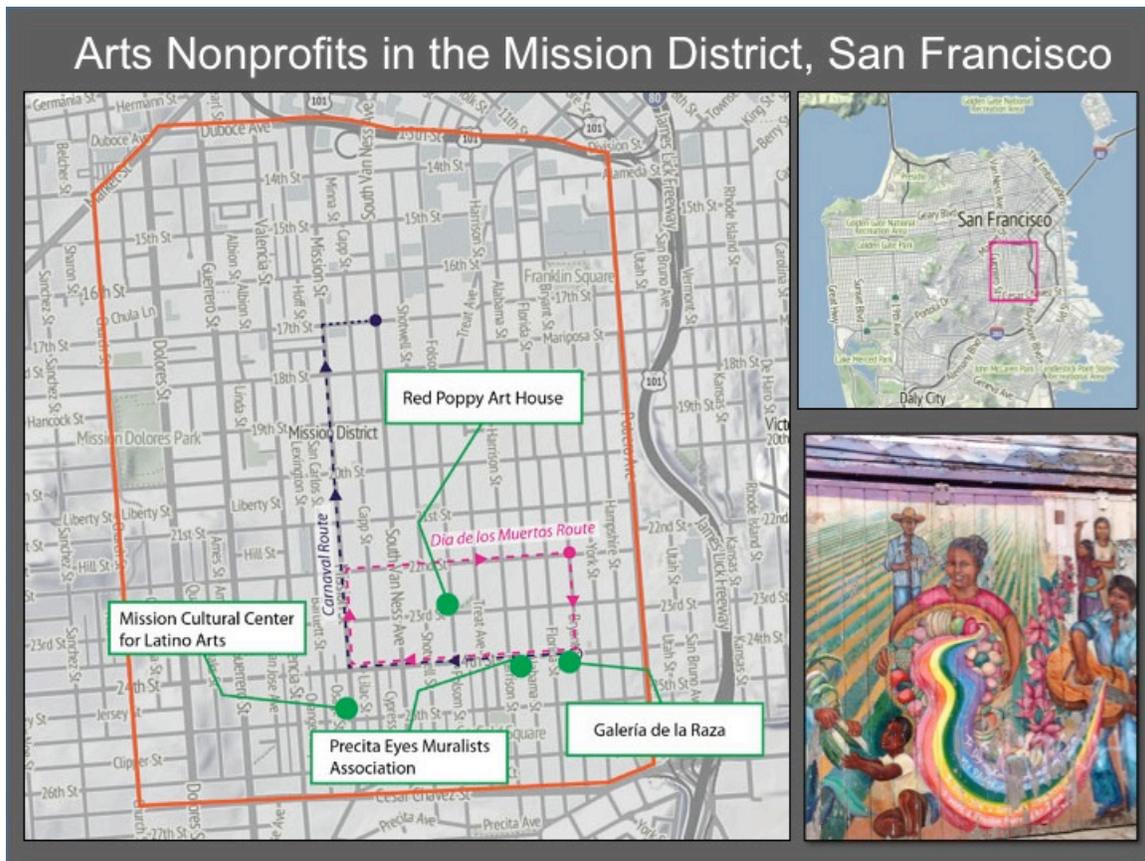


Figure 2: Maps by Nicholas Perdue, 2013. Photo of a mural in Balmy Alley by author. The orange lines in the map on the left show roughly where the boundaries of the Mission District are. Since these boundaries are not officially designated by the city, they are not agreed upon by everyone. Some people consider the neighborhood to extend east to Highway 101, for example. The map shows a few of the main nonprofits mentioned in this chapter and throughout this thesis. It is not comprehensive of arts nonprofits in the area. Parade routes for Carnaval and Dia de los Muertos are also shown.

The characterization of the Mission as Latina/o continues to this day, despite the fact that the Latina/o population has seen a significant decrease in numbers since the 1990s due to gentrification. The dot-com boom and bust of the 1990s and early 2000s, as

well as related factors such as housing and rental policies, real estate speculation, and local politics, substantially reconstituted the economic and social conditions of the Mission (Solnit, 2002; Hartman, 2002; Lees et al., 2008; Nyborg, 2008; Mirabal, 2009). Thousands of Latina/o families and hundreds of Latina/o run businesses have been displaced over the last two decades as a result of skyrocketing rent prices, eviction, and harassment.

By the mid-aughts, San Francisco had recovered from the burst of the late '90s dot-com bubble, and today technology giants such as Google, Facebook, Apple, Yahoo, and eBay are headquartered in Silicon Valley, in effect making popular neighborhoods like the Mission into “bedroom communities” for young techies who get hired by these mega-corporate firms (Fowler, 2012). Today’s Mission District is home to many fashionable cafes, restaurants, boutiques, galleries, and bars that cater to the young urbanites or “hipsters” moving into the area. Often, the populations that can afford to patronize these relatively new hotspots are unaware, or only peripherally aware, of the issues that face the neighborhood’s lower-income and marginalized populations such as racism, economic hardship, displacement, and the appeal of gang involvement for young Latino men (Romney, 2011). Violence between the Norteño and Sureño gangs rocks the neighborhood as foodies and hipsters engage in upscale consumption (Hernandez and Goupil, 2011, Romney, 2011). In 2011, the neighborhood saw an overall increase in gang-related violence (Burack, 2011; Raygoza, Smith, and Hernandez, 2011); late August and early September saw three gang-related homicides in a period of two weeks (Rinker, 2011). As I am working on this thesis chapter, I find a news story reporting that a nineteen-year-old boy was fatally shot at 3 a.m. yesterday at the intersection where I was

living during my research (Avila, 2013).

Today's Mission District is animated with languages, cultures, and color. From the neighborhood's bright murals, the eyes of past and present heroes and legends implore you to meet their gaze; languages from all corners of the world can be heard on any given day, but Spanish and English are by far the most common; there are small Latina/o fruit markets, panaderías, and taquerías; numerous remittance shops; both cheap and upscale cafes; a large number of independent bookstores; and dozens of annual street fairs, festivals, and parades that outnumber those in most urban areas, including Día de los Muertos/Day of the Dead every November 2 and Carnaval over Memorial Day weekend.

In today's Mission District, the rifts are visible and visceral. I've heard many times from different individuals that white newcomers often avoid eye contact with Latina/o residents when they pass each other on the sidewalk. Two main streets, Valencia Street and Mission Street, which run north-south and parallel to each other just two short blocks apart, feel like two vastly different worlds. Mission Street is the oldest street in the entire city, once made of long wooden planks; today it is wide, loud, and bustling, dotted with taquerías, cheap clothing outlets, remittance shops, hundreds of signs in Spanish, and crowded with the neighborhood's Latina/o residents. Valencia Street is wide, loud, and bustling too; but it is sprinkled on both sides with upscale cafes, expensive hipster boutiques, and high-class restaurants that attract rich patrons from all over the Bay Area and beyond. Going from one of these streets to the other is surreal; it is as if you are traveling quite a lot further than two blocks—and in a sense, you *are*. You are traversing not only space, but economic, social, and cultural divides.

The tensions in the neighborhood run deep, and at its core the conflict is about the loss of homes, jobs, and dignity. Year after year, the very community responsible for making the neighborhood the vibrant place it is today has been getting pushed out. In her account of the Mission District, Rebecca Solnit describes speaking with a performance artist:

He tells me of several incidents in which Latinos were attacked or thrown out of bars in a Mission District that no longer feels like their home. "It is horrible, horrible," he says with emotion, and he repeats what several others have told me, that the San Francisco police are busting the neighborhood's Latino bars for every possible code infraction, thereby accelerating their turnover into enterprises catering to wealthier and whiter new arrivals. (2002, p. 26)

Solnit's passage speaks to the violent and structural aspects of racial, cultural, and economic turnover, demonstrating that these changes are constituted by broad discourses and powerful institutional practices.

Gentrification

The story of the Mission is a part of the larger story of the post-World War II urban renewal attempts that have transformed the landscape of American cities for the last six decades, variously including processes of reconstruction, suburbanization, and downtown redevelopment. The idea of urban renewal has seduced and troubled politicians, planners, community organizers, and city dwellers, who observe and often participate in local drama as it unfolds on their respective streets in their respective cities across the country.

Gentrification, "the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use" (Lees et al., 2008), is a term, a process, a literature, and a debate that has emerged in the last half century within the

context of postindustrial urbanized society; it is rooted more generally in larger processes of urbanization and modernization (Smith, 1996; 2002). Neil Smith's entry for the term in the *Dictionary of Human Geography* reads:

The reinvestment of capital at the urban centre, which is designed to produce space for a more affluent class of people than currently occupies the space. The term, coined by Ruth Glass in 1964, has mostly been used to describe the residential aspects of this process but this is changing, as gentrification itself evolves. (Smith in Gregory et al., 2009)

Within the literature on gentrification, which constitutes a sizeable body of work, the discourses, practices, and processes of urban capitalist society are inherent. In her study of San Francisco, Solnit writes: "Gentrification is the shark's fin, whereas the new economy is the shark beneath the water" (2002, 13). As examined by the work of the late Neil Smith (1996, 2002), gentrification is just one of the more visible effects of the extensive economic, social, and spatial restructuring caused by contemporary capitalist practices. It is one among many versions of accumulation by dispossession, which plays out through the everyday discursive and material practices of multitudes of individuals.

In the 1990s, the gentrification literature and the debate were constituted by, on the one hand, supply-side theories or production oriented explanations of gentrification, especially the work of Neil Smith, who emphasized structural factors and the uneven development that leads to social and economic disparities and displacement (Smith, 1996); and, on the other hand, demand-side or consumption oriented explanations, exemplified by the work of David Ley, among others (Ley, 1997; Lees et al., 2008). The latter explanations focused more on the agency of the gentrifiers, asking questions about who they were, where they came from, and their motivations. The answers were often found in the examination of such factors as shifting gender roles, professionalism,

secularism, and shifting perspectives on sexuality, which led specific populations to value living in central, urban locations and in diverse, inexpensive neighborhoods. As Loretta Lees has written, by the end of the 1990s most scholars had recognized the two sides of the debate were both vitally important, as well as being interconnected.

After a lull in gentrification research, new attention turned to questions of how gentrifying processes are tied to globalization, public policy, immigration, and race (Lees, 2007). However, gentrifying processes have been seen to be so broad, so variable and context-specific, that there are still many questions. In her 2007 report on progress in gentrification research, Lees singles out several broad gaps in the literature. *Contestation* in gentrifying areas is one theme she identifies as still needing further exploration, as well as the question of nongentrifiers' perspectives (*ibid.*, 231). In addition, she points out that issues of *community* (what an ambiguous word!) require more investigation (*ibid.*, 230). In my examination of the MAPP, contestation and community are two significant themes that I will return to in the following chapters of this thesis.

Gentrification and Art

Scholars in various disciplines have written about the relationship between the arts and gentrification, one of the early and important works being sociologist Sharon Zukin's *Loft Living* (1989), in which she describes processes through which investors use culture (such as the arts) to draw capital. Such scholars have predominantly examined the ways in which artists—usually young, white artists—aesthetically transform inner-city urban areas, foreshadowing successive waves of gentrifiers (Ley, 1997; Cameron and Coaffee, 2005; see Mathews, 2010). It has been difficult to discern whether it makes

more sense to see artists as pioneers of the process or as victims, as it is often the case that artists eventually get priced out and displaced themselves (Zukin, 1989; Ley, 2003; Mathews, 2008). Determining causality in the relationship between art and gentrification is not easy.

Scholars have also examined the current trend in urban policy to use the arts as a tool to further commercial goals, which often results in a deepening of already profound divides between communities (Evans, 2009). Richard Florida's popular work on the "creative classes" (Florida, 2002; 2003), which attributes the success of urban revitalization to a city's ability to attract workers in creative industries, has influenced urban policy makers worldwide. His work has been critiqued by a slew of social scientists who draw attention to the uneven development and displacement caused by urban renewal policies (Barnes et al., 2006; Markusen, 2006; Banks, 2009; Evans, 2009; Fougere and Solitander, 2010; Mathews, 2010; O'Callaghan, 2010; Ponzini and Rossi, 2010). In her review of the literature on gentrification and art (2010), Mathews writes that "when drawn into regeneration strategies," art in cities "is often *smoothed of contestation* and served up for aesthetic delight" (p. 669, emphasis added). She warns that these approaches are becoming more common: "Urban redevelopment strategies which pivot around art and culture are increasingly popular in the urban policy toolkit" (*ibid.*, p. 671); but she points to an area in which she believes research could be more robust:

The agency and identity of artists beyond economic measures [...] is underdeveloped in the literature, despite its influence in defining space [...] The call for more nuanced understandings of the particularities of artists in urban space will proffer greater understanding of their role within processes of urban change. (*ibid.*, p. 666)

My thesis speaks to this gap in the literature, in that the project is fundamentally about

the artists of the MAPP, their goals, and the way they use urban spaces. Like Lees' 2007 report, Mathews asserts that the notion of *contestation* requires more consideration, writing that "art in the urban provides an opportunity for local (and contested) meaning production and expression" (Mathews, 2010, p. 673). In the following chapters, I will explore the discourses, practices, and effects of the MAPP, and the ways in which the MAPP *contests* gentrifying processes.

The Mission District presents a fascinating site for exploring questions about the potentially conflicting functions of art in gentrifying neighborhoods because of its conspicuous history of gentrification, but also because of the ongoing strong presence of artist/activist communities (Castells, 1985; Lees et al., 2008; Somdahl-Sands, 2008). The story quickly becomes complicated because of the question of who the artists actually are; some of them are long-term residents while some are newcomers; many of the artists are white but many are Latina/o or other ethnicities. Art has been combined with activism to fight urban renewal, while the neighborhood simultaneously attracts reinvestment and newcomers precisely because of such features as colorful murals on the building walls.

In the following pages, I interrogate some of these entangled issues. Broadly speaking, my thesis questions what the MAPP *does* in the Mission District, and how what it does relates to neighborhood dynamics, gentrification, and urban change.

The Mission Arts & Performance Project (MAPP)

In 2003, a small, diverse group of artists got together in the Mission to discuss starting a neighborhood arts event. Some of the artists were long-term residents; some were newcomers; some were Latinas/os, and some were not. They gathered not as

members of one ethnicity or another, not as gentrifiers or nongentrifiers; they gathered as artists, and as people who wanted community, who wanted connection with their neighbors. A couple of the people involved were also assembling a tiny multi-disciplinary art space not much bigger than a living room that would later become the non-profit Red Poppy Art House—in fact, the MAPP and the Red Poppy have been connected since their nearly simultaneous inceptions. Todd Thomas Brown, one of the early founders of both the Red Poppy and the MAPP, told me about the beginnings of the MAPP:

Our sense of the MAPP was really more about our sense of being an artistic community than about the event itself. The group met weekly for every month and was very consistent during that period, with everyone joining in post-potluck dinners. It was rare to have curators not present at meetings. One important point was that through the early years we were very intentional in keeping the MAPP concentrated within a radius of about 4-5 blocks. We knew of sprawling art walks and open studio events, and we wanted the MAPP to be more intimate, more personal, so that you could easily walk out of one space and see another down the street and walk to it. This is what helps make a neighborhood feel like a community... The Mission District has 96,000 residents... So to do a Mission-wide event seemed excessive, and overlooking an opportunity. I saw that there was a "town," well, many towns, within this one neighborhood. So I approached it that way, and other artists/organizers quickly caught on. (Personal correspondence, 8/4/12)

In the early years of the MAPP, the entire event was located in close proximity to the Red Poppy Art House. The curators all gathered to see one another for planning meetings, and they cultivated the sense of having an artistic community.

Over the last ten years, the MAPP has been through transitions in leadership, strategy, places where meetings are held, and venues where the MAPP events happen. However, through the various iterations, some of the discourse has stayed the same. The MAPP website, which the earliest organizers created, is still used, though somewhat

irregularly; it is not always updated, and it does not necessarily contain comprehensive information on the events.

During the MAPP, artists of all kinds display artwork or perform at a variety of venues from bookstores, cafes, and bars to more intimate, informal spaces such as living rooms, private gardens, and garages. Roughly fifteen to twenty spaces participate in each MAPP, and roughly 150 to 200 people participate in organizing each MAPP. About a thousand people attend each MAPP, moving through one or many of the spaces hosting events. These numbers are estimated based on my own observations and hearing other people's observations. It is easier to estimate the number of organizers/artists/venue providers, harder to estimate the flow of attendees, since no one keeps track for official or unofficial purposes.

In this chapter, I have outlined the history of the Mission District, and given context for the current conditions of the neighborhood. It is a place of vitality and vibrancy, of community and pride; it is also a place of tension, loss, and fragmentation. Poverty and displacement are coupled with extreme abundance, as some of the wealthiest people in the world flock to the Mission. Art has a powerful history in the neighborhood, but its functions are multiple and multifaceted, demanding further examination.

In the next chapter, I address my first two research questions: What discourses and practices are produced by the MAPP, and how do these affect the individuals and groups involved? I do this by exploring the effects of the discourses and practices of the MAPP on the people who participate. I show that the discourses and practices are not always aligned, and I examine the reasons for this and the ways in which the various discourses and practices function in the overall workings of the MAPP. I present data

from my research in the summer of 2012, investigating how gentrifying processes are contested by the MAPP.

CHAPTER III

MAPP ORGANIZING: DISCURSIVE AND MATERIAL PRACTICES

At the MAPP Meeting

At 7:00 p.m., I showed up at David's house for the first time. A man in a bright lime-colored rain jacket rode his bicycle up next to me on the sidewalk, his gray and black curls dangling out from under his helmet. He locked his bike up and went inside; I followed him through the door and went up a staircase with lavender walls. At the top of the stairs the room was big and bright and felt warm and pleasant. There was a beautiful tile mosaic of a tree on one wall and a hammock pinned against another wall. There was a baby grand piano. I walked through the kitchen to the living room and immediately sat on the couch next to David's medium-sized black dog, Zooney. Even though I didn't know anyone and had never been there, I felt relaxed in the space; it was welcoming and comfortable. Slowly a few others arrived. David wasn't there when people first started arriving, but the man with gray and black curls was Jorge, and he encouraged people to make themselves at home. Although he doesn't live there, he often goes there and plays music on the baby grand. He spends a lot of time there; Jorge and David have known each other for decades.

Sitting in something of a circle in the living room on various chairs and couches, we each introduced ourselves to the group, talking a little bit about ourselves in general and then our relationship with or interest in MAPP. David, who had arrived by then, playfully explained to me that the MAPP meetings are like the stock exchange. There are curators, there are people with spaces/venues, and there are artists/performers/musicians.

People talk and trade information, finding others who can offer what they need and who need what they can offer. In a later conversation, someone else described it as ping-pong; someone else said matchmaking.

In this first meeting I attended, I immediately began to get a sense of the current iteration of the MAPP by observing the people in attendance, the language used, and the environment of David's home, where the meetings are held. Early organizers wrote on the website that "the MAPP invites us to imagine a cultural setting in which participation in the arts is woven in the fabric of community life, where the value and cultural significance of each and every community member is given voice, and shared, through honest and meaningful exchange" (www.sfmapp.com). One of the project's aims is "facilitating community interaction across cultural divides" (*ibid.*) This discourse has been carried through to the current organizers, who still use the same website and much of the same language to describe the project. According to the discourse, the MAPP attempts to bring together multiple communities in the Mission neighborhood and to contest dominant spatial practices, especially those associated with gentrification, through the use of informal, intimate spaces.

Objectives

In this chapter, I examine the discourses and practices produced by the MAPP. I address the question of how discursive and material practices of organizing the MAPP affect individuals and groups involved; and I show how people are affected by discursive practices, on the one hand, and by material practices, on the other. Using the MAPP website and empirical data from my fieldwork, I reveal some discrepancies between the

discourses and the practices. I note these discrepancies, and I also hypothesize as to the reasons for them. In addition, however, I show that discursive and material practices each have an important function in the way the MAPP has been stabilized over the past decade, and in the ways that individuals and groups are affected.

Specifically, the discourses are inspiring and evoke possibility. They empower the people involved with their very sense, with their suggestion that creative potential lies dormant everywhere, that creativity can be transformative in material ways, and that neighborhoods and communities are one step away from harnessing this creative energy. I analyze four discourses I found to be prevalent in the organizing of the MAPP: informality, decentralization, being “outside” capitalism, and accessibility.

The material practices have a different function than the empowering, narrative function of the discursive practices. How informal, decentralized, and accessible is the MAPP in practice? To what extent does the project lie “outside” capitalism? Materially, the MAPP’s strategies have purposefully limited its growth, keeping the project relatively small while allowing more and more connections to be made over time through grassroots organizing and networking. In this way, the individuals and groups involved are afforded a degree of control over its trajectory; they are able to retain a degree of agency in the overall operation, as they work toward realizing their artistic, personal, social, and possibly their political motivations. More directly put, the individuals and groups involved are able to pick and choose, to a certain extent, who else gets involved with the project and where else events are held.

In noting discrepancies, my intention is not to criticize the discursive or material practices of the MAPP; it is, rather, to suggest the dynamism of the relationship between

discourse and practice within this context. What I call “discrepancies” are really something more like moments of incomplete translation from the discursive to the material. These moments I see as openings, opportunities for reflection; they are apertures, spaces that light can enter, and reflection is, in part, this process of allowing light in. There may be both positive and negative effects that result from such discrepancies, but their mere existence as such should not be judged as negative. My purpose here is not to cast normative judgments upon them, but rather to be attentive to them, their implications, and the potentialities they might represent.

In the following pages, I explore discourses that I found to be salient on the website and in conversations and interviews, and I interrogate the extent to which material practices are in alignment with these discourses. This chapter serves to analyze the relationships between the discursive and material practices relating to informality, decentralization, the notion of being “outside” of capitalism, and accessibility. In the next chapter (Chapter IV), I will tie this analysis to an understanding of how the MAPP contests gentrification. In addition, Chapter IV will examine two other discourses in the context of the MAPP: discourses of community and discourses of art/aesthetics. Here in Chapter III, I limit my analysis to discourses that relate specifically to organizing strategies in order to gain an understanding of the material and organizational aspects of the project.

Informality

Discourses of informal spaces

On the MAPP's website, as well as in conversations and in interviews I conducted, the notion of informality emerges as among the most significant aspects of the project. Referring to the organizing strategies of the MAPP, early organizer Todd said, "It's all happening along these informal channels" (Personal interview, 7/24/12). The website reads: "The MAPP focuses on... small and informal locations" (www.sfmapp.com). An interviewee who is a long-time organizer and an artist/musician/performer explained:

It's really manifesting or demonstrating an emergent process, in showing the way that the arts can travel and transform a community along informal lines. It's a lateral rather than a top-down thing. So, the top-down thing, even if it has the best intentions of community development, it's still formalized in a way that makes access harder. (Interview, 8/1/12)

Both informal organizing and the use of informal spaces are important aspects of MAPP discourse. As illustrated in the previous quote, informality is *defined against* formality, which is associated with "top-down" organizing and less accessibility. Informality represents access that is more distributed. (Later I discuss the discourse of *accessibility*.)

For many, informality also represents a feeling of openness, possibility, and warmth. Informal spaces offer the opportunity to experience "a feeling of neighborhood intimacy... that is rare in the context of urban living" (www.sfmapp.com). This quote reflects the feeling that intimacy works against the alienation of city life, and that art events happening in informal, intimate spaces have a different potential than official art events produced for public consumption and/or capital gain. The normal, hegemonic rules need not be followed in informal spaces. In spaces that are "formal," there is more

of a separation between attendees and artists, between performances and viewers. But in informal spaces, performance feels participatory. One interviewee who is an event volunteer told me, “MAPP events feel very cozy. It comes down to that. That whole warmth thing, that whole coziness; to me MAPP events feel cozy. I think that’s the right word” (Interview, 8/2/12). Emotional language was often invoked to describe MAPP events and participation in the MAPP. Another interviewee, AB, said:

It has that cozy, welcoming feeling. I mean it feels super, super homey. I always feel incredibly cozy and at home. It feels like too, that all these spaces just kind of come to life with the lights and the music and the people and it just feels warm. I don’t know. It’s something, it just feels super warm. (Interview, 7/23/12)

These sentiments were echoed in the words of many other interviewees, who used the words “warm,” “cozy,” “informal,” and “intimate,” to denote the feeling of MAPP events and spaces. For those involved with the MAPP, the informality of spaces and the informal organizing practices represent opportunity and intimacy, both of which are powerful and desirable for the individuals and groups that participate.

Spaces used in practice

How does the distinction between formal and informal play out in material practice? Living rooms, garages, and gardens are the spaces considered “informal” for the purposes of the MAPP. Interestingly, in being denoted as informal, these spaces are defined by what they are *not*. They are *not* cafes, *not* restaurants, *not* bookstores, *not* shops, and *not* nonprofits, all of which are considered “formal” spaces. To use the term informality is to imply that the MAPP should not be counted in the slew of institutions that are considered formal and that engage in practices considered formal practices. The

MAPP is *not* a nonprofit or a for-profit; it is *not* institutionalized. The MAPP, although it happens in many spaces, has no space of its own, no office or building, no physical institution (although I have heard a few people refer to it as a “cultural institution” in the Mission).

And yet the MAPP *does take place* in several nonprofits, most often in the Red Poppy Art House, Galería de la Raza, and Precita Eyes Muralists Association, among a handful of others (Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts as well as Brava Theater Center, which is owned by the nonprofit Brava! For Women in the Arts, have also participated). The MAPP takes place in several cafes and restaurants, often including the following: Café La Boheme, L’s Café, Progressive Grounds, Casa Sanchez, Philz Coffee, Sunrise Café, and Revolution Café. The MAPP also takes place in a handful of other for-profit spaces such as retail shops and bookstores, including but not limited to Alleycat Books, Artillery AG, Praxis, and Modern Times Bookstore.

In practice, both “informal” and “formal” spaces become MAPP venues. Both “types” of spaces are used. Sixteen spaces were involved in the August 2012 MAPP. Eight of those were or for-profit or nonprofit organizations, while the other eight were not. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the types of spaces that were involved in that particular MAPP.

Table 1: August 2012 MAPP Spaces

VENUE NAME	TYPE OF SPACE
Red Poppy Art House	Nonprofit (multidisciplinary arts)
Galería de la Raza	Nonprofit (arts/Latino/a)
Precita Eyes Arts & Visitors Center	Nonprofit (mural arts)

Secret Studios	Commercial (photo studio)
Artillery AG	Commercial (apparel/art/local)
Progressive Grounds	Commercial (café)
Cafè La Bohème	Commercial (café)
Revolution Cafe	Commercial (café)
The Box Factory	Residential
Area 2881	Residential
Pathos-On-Harrison	Residential
The Micro Museum	Residential (garage)
Magnetic Dreams and Static Shots	Residential (garage)
Patio 308	Residential (patio)
La Puerta Abierta/The Open Door	Residential (backyard)
El Jardín Secreto/The Secret Garden	Community garden

What is evident in the table shown is that only half of the spaces are “informal” spaces (the residential spaces and the community garden), while the other half are “formalized” nonprofit or for-profit organizations. I don’t imply here that the organizers are *unaware* that spaces usually considered “formal” participate in the MAPP. However, I will say that an *emphasis* on the informal spaces dominates the discourse of the current main organizers, and that the formal spaces seem to be talked about as exceptions—especially by those individuals who are involved with the organizing of an informal space such as a residence or garden. In fact, though, the incorporation of both “types” of spaces into the event is a stable part of MAPP practice.

The emphasis on the informal is partly a holdover from the MAPP’s beginnings, when the majority of the spaces were indeed “informal.” At the time, the Red Poppy Art House had a different name (Porfilio Is-Mission Art House), and it was not yet

formalized as a fiscally sponsored institution. The MAPP meetings were held there, and there were several garages and a basement that turned into art/music venues for the event. The very first MAPP included Porfilio Is-Mission Art House, two garages, and a basement; “so it was very non-commercial,” one of the early organizers told me (Personal correspondence, 8/4/12).

The MAPP has transitioned over the years—“growing pains,” said one early organizer (8/1/12). The main organizers, the spaces used, and the organizing structure are not the same today as they were ten years ago. Today, “formal” enterprises have embraced the MAPP, and are affected by its infrastructure. This is not highlighted in the dominant discourses of the MAPP, but it became apparent as I talked to people such as the executive director of Galería de la Raza, the managing director of the Red Poppy, and the founding executive director of Precita Eyes, as well as other people involved with businesses that regularly participate. During our interview, Galería de la Raza’s Ani Rivera and I had the following exchange about the MAPP:

A: Now, it's more formalized, but it's in a way that's very community... Everyone does it independently but we all know we're part of the larger sort of idea. So it's great. I really, really like it. I love that everyone has a say in what they want to do. Every organization or space does it the way they want to.

PI: So you said that it's more formalized now. What do you mean?

A: Before, people were doing it out of their garage, in their living rooms. I don't even know if formalized is the word I guess, that's just the word that came to mind. Now you have the larger institutions, and the larger institutions weren't as much part of it before. That was a difference. The larger institutions took several years to get in with the program and really adopt the concept and really make it part of the programming... So we all kind of inherited this program. It would be a disservice to not offer our space to artists when it's been such a well received and needed, obviously, event. So that's I think why I call it more formalized, it saw more organizations coming out to really support it and really sort of say we're taking it in regardless. People know that one day a month or one day every two months, you're going to be hopping around to see spectacular performances, one-

of-a-kind, that will never be replicated. I mean ad hoc all the time. And then sometimes you have people that come in the night of and say, I want to play. Is there room? And you say, okay well let's see what we can do. I feel like it has a true spirit of community arts, and it just kind of happens out of the love for arts. That's why organizations are doing it. It's not that we're getting money off it... but we put MAPP in our calendar of events. If we have a postcard, it gets included. That's what I'm saying, we all inherited this sort of baby, we said okay, we're taking it along. That's the beauty of it. (Personal interview, 8/1/12)

For Ani, the MAPP has become more formalized in that formal institutions now participate, incorporating MAPP into their regular programming. However, during the MAPP there is an element of spontaneity that doesn't usually accompany events in that space. Ani says, "We allow the artist that's using the space to curate the space for the MAPP night. Every night it feels a little different than the standard opening or reading, and it just depends on the creativity of the artist, and the curator" (*ibid.*). At least in the case of Galería de la Raza, it seems that the formal institution yields control of the space, giving the space to the MAPP temporarily.

Does a formal space, then, become temporarily informal? Is it governed by a different set of rules, for a time? Ananya Roy has argued convincingly that informality must be understood as an idiom of urbanization (Roy and AlSayyad, 2004; Roy, 2011), meaning that the formal and informal are mutually constitutive within the context of the urban. The relationship between formality and informality has been of great interest to urban geographers in recent years. Scholars like Roy seek to understand how and by whom the formal and informal come to be demarcated as such, and with what social, spatial, and political implications for urban life. Moving away from earlier conceptualizations of the informal and formal as spatial categorizations (as in the case of "slums") or organizational forms (as in the case of unregulated or casualized labor),

Roy's work on urban informality has conceptualized it as "a heuristic device that uncovers the ever-shifting urban relationship between the legal and illegal, legitimate and illegitimate, authorized and unauthorized" (2011, 233).

Building in part off of Roy's work, Colin McFarlane has argued for seeing the informal and formal as practice: "In other words, informality is performed: it names a way of doing things" (2012, 104). He writes, "This is a debate not just about the work done by different conceptualisations of informality and formality in different contexts... but about how we come to know and intervene in contemporary urbanism" (*ibid.*, 89).

McFarlane goes on to say:

Thinking of informality and formality as practices rather than as pre-existing geographies allows us to understand the ways in which geography helps to determine the particular politicisation of these practices. At the same time, it requires a shift in how we register informal and formal spatialities: they no longer exist in specific territories within the city... but instead are involved in the production of space. In other words, these practices do not just take place in particular places, but are productive of particular spaces. (*ibid.*, 105)

Informality as practice in the MAPP

The idea of informality as practice allows us to see the MAPP events themselves as productive of spaces in which the rules that usually govern those spaces might be suspended, if temporarily. But this does not only occur in the nonprofits and businesses; it is also happening in residences, where the norms of "private space" might usually apply. During the MAPP, private homes open their doors and invite the public in.

Looking more deeply into the apparent discrepancy between the discourse of informality and the practices, which clearly embrace both formal and informal spaces, allows for an understanding of nuances in how the words themselves are functioning.

When it comes to the practice of informal organizing, the word “informal” tells us more about what is *not* going on than what *is* going on. The word “informal,” more than anything, seems to dissociate the MAPP from hegemonic organizing structures associated with capitalism—the same structures that have in effect gentrified the neighborhood. “Informal,” then, tells us that organizers want something different than what is usually seen in many of our current systems: authorization and legitimation from above. Instead, they work for the empowerment of neighborhood dwellers, especially the long-term residents and Latinas/os who have been the most disempowered by gentrification. Therefore, the notion of informality is strongly linked to empowerment through discourses of decentralization and accessibility.

The formality of being blessed

At the first MAPP meeting I attended, there were ten of us. Jorge did a blessing for everyone; he does this at the beginning of each meeting. He sprayed a small bottle of rose water on everyone; he laughed, saying that in his native country of Peru, the real ritual is for the medicine man to put the rose water or other liquid in his mouth and spray it out at people, but that here he thought the spray bottle was more appropriate. He burned sage, lavender, and copal resin in a shell, going to each person and allowing the smoke to envelop them briefly while rattling a shaker in front of them, moving it up and down from head to feet and back again. Each person stood up for this ritual, and he spoke to each in welcome; he spoke in English or Spanish or both. He explained each item in the shell: sage for cleansing, lavender as an offering to “God, Allah, Creator, Buddha, or whatever you want to call the energy of the universe,” and copal to honor the earth and

living things.

I got used to these blessings from Jorge. I can't count how many times I received them during my time in the Mission District. His blessings, gracious and giving, opening each MAPP meeting as well as many other events at which he is present, could be described as *formal* in the sense of the word that means solemn or ceremonial. It's not that there are no recognized rules that govern MAPP practices; it's that the organizers are trying to create a different set of internal norms, a different practice. It is possible, then, that *informal* signifies, more than anything, a lack of language, of concepts that adequately describe these different practices, and that they are *other than* the norms that often govern organizing practices.

Decentralization

Along with (and related to) informality, the notion of decentralization is an important component of the MAPP for the people involved. Organizers define this aspect against its opposite, centralization—but centralization of what? One organizer said of traditional art walks, “Who has the decision-making power? If you want to participate you need to submit something to a committee” (Interview, 8/6/12). According to MAPP discourse, the power to make decisions is distributed among all those who wish to participate.

The idea of decentralization is connected to that of informality. Because there is no “formalized” process of becoming an organizer, anyone can participate (that's the discourse, at least): “There is no organization, committee, individual, or group of organizers in charge... [it is] not dependent on any one individual, organization, or

group” (www.sfmapp.com). There is an emphasis on an open, non-centralized organization process. One organizer said, “Something that’s top-down is being organized from a centralized agency that oftentimes doesn’t reflect diversity” (Interview, 8/1/12). For *mappers/as*, decentralization means that individuals and groups in the neighborhood across various lines of difference can get engaged, express themselves, and “take ownership of the cultural development of their communities” (www.sfmapp.com).

Rafael commented during our interview, “It’s completely, absolutely open... so whoever wants to come out and be a part of the event, there’s no application process, if you show up, *if you have a place*, go ahead” (Personal interview, 3/7/12, emphasis added). The notion of decentralization pervades MAPP discourse. Decision-making is shared by the many organizers, artists, musicians, venue providers, curators, and volunteers who participate in producing the events.

An interesting point must be noted here, which I return to later, and this is Rafael’s mention of *having a place*. In a neighborhood where many long-term residents and businesses have been priced out, having a place is crucial in many ways. People need a place to live, a place to work, a place to eat, a place to socialize, a place to feel safe; artists and musicians need a place to make art and music, and to show art and perform. According to MAPP discourse, anyone who comes to a meeting and says they have a space to offer as a MAPP venue can be put on the schedule. The main organizers help with the “matchmaking”—that is, putting together spaces with curators, artists, and performers. Often the person with a space to offer ends up being the curator of that space, finding and organizing their own line-up for the event. In this way, each venue maintains a degree of autonomy. This is one of the ways decision-making is distributed in the

MAPP. Cristina, one of the current main organizers, said during our interview:

MAPP is unique and we can't figure out why. There's something magic about it. I think it comes with the fact that it's so decentralized. There's no organizing body really. It's me, Rafael, Jorge, David, and Greg and it's because we show up the most. Three years ago, it was a different group of people that showed up the most. Six years ago, it was a different group of people that showed up the most, and because it's always shifting like that, you constantly have new energy that comes in, you constantly have new ideas and you constantly have this fluidity and this almost transient nature that keeps it very fresh and helps keep people from being burnt out on an event that happens pretty regularly, every two months. For an event that draws hundreds of people in dozens of venues, that's pretty serious. (Personal interview, 7/17/12)

The current organizers, though they are the ones who "show up the most," do not tell other spaces what to do. They act as facilitators; they network between many different artists, musicians, friends, and businesses in the area.

Even if there are no "formal" roles, no positions with titles, as one would, for instance, find in a nonprofit or for-profit organization, there are individuals who are doing much of the legwork. Meetings are held at David's house, which means that David has a certain amount of say when it comes to who is there. Although he is open to having acquaintances and strangers come to meetings, he would draw the line if he felt that someone was being disrespectful. "MAPP organizes itself," David said (Personal interview, 7/11/12). "We have these Monday meetings, people come, we go around and all chaos breaks loose, and people find what they need to find with a little bit of help." Then, at another point in the interview, he said, "There's a reality that when push comes to shove, it's my fucking house." He went on, "I just feel blessed that I can be part of this. It's so beautiful, it's so magical, and it's so wonderful. It's a sacred thing. I hope I'm honest enough, and able to put my ego to the side that I can do what needs to be done. So far that seems to be working." David uses a typewriter and makes bilingual (English and

Spanish) cut-and-paste fliers for each MAPP. They are black-and-white, and usually include some photocopied pictures from past MAPPs. He brings a stack of them to the meetings, and everyone takes some to post around the neighborhood.

I heard several stories about people coming to meetings and pushing for more promotion for the MAPP. One woman wanted colorful posters and glossy, professional fliers. I was told that some organizations have also offered the MAPP funding. But the main organizers, who do reserve the right to make certain kinds of decisions about the trajectory of the project, have gently maintained that more funding or fancier promotion is not necessary. In other words, there is definitely room for many different kinds of people to get involved, contribute, and participate; but there are boundaries too, which are not always made explicit.

Rafael is the person who makes the MAPP programs, which include a list of participating venues, a line-up for each venue, and a map showing the venue locations. The programs are not available until the day of the event, and there is a limited supply; they can usually be found in the late morning or afternoon at the Red Poppy, and regular *mappers/as* stop by to get one. Rafael sends out reminders to a list of all of those who have participated (or who have asked to be put on the list) and tells them to send him their line-up. Currently, the meetings are held mostly for new people; artists, musicians, or other performers who are looking for a space; and curators or venue providers who are looking for artists, musicians, or performers. Rafael and the other main organizers do the important work of helping people find what they need. In addition, all of the main organizers also curate and perform.

Although there have always been several individuals (not always the same

individuals) who are the main organizers of the MAPP, hundreds of artists, musicians, performers, and curators and many dozens of spaces have indeed participated over the past ten years, and the potential for empowerment and autonomy within the structure of the MAPP is great. If you want to participate in the MAPP, the advice you're most likely to hear from the current organizers is, "Great, do it!" This will be followed by questions: "What do you want to do? Do you need anything? What can I do to help you? What kind of thing are you looking for? Can I give you anyone's phone number?"

As with the discourse of informality, the discourse of decentralization tells us more about what is *not* going on than about what *is* going on in the MAPP. There is indeed a core group of organizers who do the most work and guide the MAPP's trajectory the most. They emphasize, however, that they do not intend to follow the model of a top-down organizing structure in which the power to make decisions is centralized. Instead, their attempt is to distribute decision-making amongst those who have the desire to participate, and this is the direction in which they move.

"Out of the Cash Nexus"

Many of those I spoke with about the MAPP highlighted that the events, which are free, happen outside dominant economic structures. This was said in various ways, but it became apparent that it was an important aspect of the discourse of the MAPP. David told me, "The fact that it's out of the cash nexus is critical" (Personal interview, 7/11/12). A curator/musician who often participates said, "you don't need money for it, and it's the most human thing imaginable" (Personal interview, 7/28/12).

A musician I interviewed elaborated on the notion of why the MAPP should stay

“outside” the dominant economic structures of capitalism:

For every arts grant, there's so much competition and everybody thinks that metrics are the answer to proving which one is more worthy of funding. But MAPP doesn't have any funding, we don't need any funding, any funding would actually be bad for it... a lot of really interesting and different people are involved every time and I think if you start putting money in the equation and you start to prioritize groups, it sometimes become a different kind of opportunity, it's less about the creativity and the connection and more about the bottom line. (Personal interview, 8/6/12)

The MAPP organizers have resisted identifying the project as any kind of “art walk,” associating art walks with gentrification, commercial goals, and capitalist values. The website proclaims, “MAPP is not an ‘art walk’ (thank god)” (www.sfmapp.com). Interestingly, one of the main ways that organizers distinguish the MAPP from art walks is through the hosting of events in informal spaces such as people’s homes, instead of commercial venues: “One of the main things we love about the MAPP is that lots of venues are literally people’s houses, people’s garages, people’s backyards, if they have a little garden... that’s straight-up Mission Latinos, so it’s not just in venues, it’s people hosting in their homes,” Rafael said during our interview (Personal interview, 3/7/12). This is something that he distinguished as different from art walks: “...a lot of art walks are just art galleries or businesses, and they just bring in their own people.” Both in our conversation and on the MAPP website, there is the message of the project being something other than an “art walk.” Rafael commented:

A lot of art walks I’m really not too keen on. It’s usually bringing in artists, bringing in performers, who have nothing to do with the community, and they just kind of push out what’s already there... So the MAPP, we really go out of our way for the meetings to make sure all of our materials are bilingual, and we make sure we have meetings that aren’t just online, so folks who aren’t plugged in like that can show up. (*ibid.*)

Implied in his statement is the idea that gentrifying processes and cultural displacement

are implicit in “art walks,” and that many people may not have access to participation. MAPP, on the other hand, attempts to make the participation of multiple communities accessible, through bilingual materials, an open organizing process, and free events. “The MAPP demonstrates that an integrated arts festival does not require an expansive budget, outside funding, and commercial marketing strategies,” reads the website (www.sfmapp.com).

As Gibson-Graham have argued, capitalism can never be totalizing, and alternatives to an all-capitalist mode of production are always already present even *within* the structures that have allowed the stabilization of its processes (2006). Within the practices of the MAPP, it is inevitable that capital flows play a visible role. Donations are highly encouraged in every space, although entrance is always free; in fact, donations are probably pushed even more strongly than at commercial art walks. In addition, it should be pointed out that many art walks are actually free, and often include free drinks, snacks, and sometimes performance. If museums are located in the area of an art walk, they often participate and offer free entrance during given hours. Given that art walks are often free, the fact that MAPP organizers consistently point out that the MAPP events are free as a way to differentiate them from similar events is somewhat strange. Although art walks may be free, they are associated with commercial gain; the “bottom line” is about making business.

It also must be said that the relationship between capitalist processes and the MAPP varies widely from space to space. The Secret Garden (a community garden) and all the homes, garages, and patios are not formal organizations to begin with; in these “informal” spaces, guests are invited in to enjoy the art and events. Sometimes drinks and

snacks are offered with a suggested donation, and curators ask the audience for donations (which are given to the performers) after performances. Visual art pieces exhibited are often (but not always) for sale, although the focus of MAPP events is usually on the performances and there is not an emphasis on selling visual art.

In the commercial spaces such as the cafes, restaurants, shops, and bookstores, there is an atmosphere that is probably quite similar to art walks; many of the functional dynamics are nearly identical. A venue owner or manager is participating in a multi-venue event, and the venue also benefits financially because the people coming in will usually buy drinks or food items (in the case of cafes or restaurants) or books, clothes, and commodities (in the case of bookstores and other shops). In the retail shops, even though event attendees are not required to purchase items, the venue benefits from the exposure and publicity of the event. Aside from the MAPP, it is not particularly unusual for cafes, in particular, to have musical performances; for instance, open-mic nights and other musical events are a widespread practice in cafes. Admittedly, it is slightly less common for neighborhood bookstores, boutiques, and Mission District taquerías to host artistic and musical performances; but it's not unheard of. A unique aspect of the MAPP can indeed be when venues that seldom otherwise host such events are brought to life with performance.

The nonprofits, again, are another story. The executive director of Galería de la Raza explained:

We haven't received a penny from it. For us, the only way we make money for that program is by donations from the community, because the concept is that it's a community free event. So, we have to find creative ways to have donations. So we bring out a really good band or a well-known performer and then people naturally just know, let's donate for that. It's great... It happens and there is no funding coming in for it. And we're not even interested in really looking at that.

It's just what's happening in the community. (Personal interview, 8/1/12)

In this case, the event sounds not unlike events held in homes; nothing is being bought or sold, but there are cash flows in the form of donations. In addition, of course, the organization is getting some publicity. But the story is also different in that organizations include the MAPP in their programming and on their calendars. Galería de la Raza may not receive funding for the MAPP, nor does Precita Eyes, but the Red Poppy Art House is a slightly different story. The managing director said:

The other thing I will concede is that MAPP is a great way for us to earn some money. Given a great turnout, it could be the best night we've had for two months. There's fundraising that happens, we pass around the hat. Most times, if I'm here especially, we're passing around the hat. And then we're also making quite a bit of money in counter. (Personal interview, 7/17/12)

The MAPP is also a significant event in the Red Poppy's programming, and hence a salient component of its grant proposals to funders. This is in part because the MAPP and the Red Poppy were established at the same time by artist/musician/organizer Todd Thomas Brown and have been connected since their beginnings.

A curator of a patio space also brought up the important point that, without funding, people who still must support themselves are putting in a lot of work in their spare time: "It's been tremendously successful, but without any kind of money to support it, it also means also that somebody out there is working their butt off" (Interview, 8/7/12). This comment reveals an important and much less romantic point about projects like the MAPP: if organizers are volunteering and are not getting paid, then it is primarily people with time to spare that can participate, and these people must be supporting themselves at the same time. This necessarily excludes certain groups, such as parents who are too busy with work and families to engage in such an extracurricular activity.

David is in his 70s and retired, and has the time and space to offer to the MAPP. Jorge is in his late 60s, with grown children. Many of the younger people involved in organizing don't have children.

Yet many of those involved—the artists, musicians, performers, and venue providers—do have families, and are incredibly busy with work and multiple projects. The structure and frequency of the MAPP allows people to participate without too much of their time being consumed, except on one day every two months. Writing about the transition to the current organizers and organizing structure, an early organizer told me: “The strength was that a structure was in place that facilitated widespread participation with minimal time/effort/bureaucracy” (Personal correspondence, 8/4/12). It seems that the MAPP has been productive of a network of support in which many people get as much out of it as they put in. This network is connected to many other networks in the neighborhood that already existed, and it's not separate from them, but it is now imbricated with them. Businesses, artists, musicians, performers, and nonprofits get exposure, but also, close friendships and relationships develop and support people in their personal lives.

The idea of the MAPP being “outside” of dominant economic structures can be dismissed if one wants to lob at it the critique that capital flows are still present in the form of donations and the participation of formalized organizations. However, this ignores the vision and the goals of the *mappers/as*, and it ignores what they do achieve. Their vision is to create opportunities for a different kind of interaction that does not have commercial gain at its foundation. Todd commented:

All of our transactions are becoming monetized, if that's a proper word... they're *shaped around* consumer transactions... That is the floor that you stand on,

without that there's nothing, it can't happen. So... one of my big questions is how to create space outside of that economic transaction, which also means a space outside of the consumer relationship that we're constantly participating in. (Personal interview, 7/24/12)

It is not really a matter of being “inside” or “outside” capitalism for the MAPP. This binary is only accessible through the framework of capitalism itself; thinking “outside” capitalism must, then, necessitate thinking outside of this binary, and imagining other possibilities.

Accessibility

It should be clear by now that the MAPP discourses of informality, decentralization, and being “outside” capitalism are inextricably linked with the discourse of accessibility. A discourse of accessibility seems ubiquitous in conversations about the MAPP. “It’s open to anyone to get involved, and we post fliers for anybody that wants to participate. We are doing everything equally,” said Rafael (Personal interview, 3/7/12).

The idea is that because the MAPP is informal and decentralized, it is accessible to “everyone”; normal and “formal” limitations to access are not present because there is not an overseeing body that makes decisions; anybody can organize and participate. “Anybody can do it, I mean anybody,” said Cristina (Personal interview, 7/17/12).

And yet there are certain ways in which accessibility is limited. I was surprised to find that young employees at several cafes and shops right along the usual MAPP route did not even know about the MAPP. Purposefully limiting flyering, funding, and advertising are strategies that function to limit certain kinds of accessibility and to curb growth. The MAPP is a grassroots project that has grown slowly over the past ten years

in a neighborhood where it could very easily explode at any moment into a massive street festival extravaganza. Such events are actually quite common in the neighborhood.

Carnaval and Día de los Muertos draw many thousands of people to the Mission District from all over the Bay Area every year. Because the Mission has continued to gentrify rapidly in the past fifteen to twenty years, there is a population of people who will travel there with any excuse—a good restaurant, a friend’s party, a street party, a show, a new ice cream shop, an event.

Despite a romantic discourse of accessibility to all, the individuals and groups that have access are indeed limited. Those involved with the MAPP list the event in local newspapers and reach out to friends and to specific organizations and groups. They post a limited number of flyers in specific places. The vast majority of the flyers are posted within the neighborhood. The organizers do not go out of their way to advertise the event to the rest of the city or to the Bay Area. People from other parts of the Bay Area do participate, but connections are made, for the most part, through friends or other social networks.

Over a decade, the MAPP has managed to stay somewhat “underground” through its focus on grassroots connections. To have access to the MAPP, people must not only be able to physically get to the events; people need to know about it, and not all people do, not even all people in the immediate vicinity. In addition to knowing about the MAPP, it could be argued that people need to feel welcome in order to have access. Although a diverse range of individuals in the neighborhood do seem to feel welcome, safe, and comfortable in the context of the MAPP, this is not true of all individuals.

A discourse of accessibility, although prevalent amongst MAPP organizers, is

perhaps where the most interesting and important discrepancies can be found in the functioning of the MAPP. In Chapter IV, I will show that in practice, the MAPP contests gentrification processes *through limiting access*. The limitation of access ends up being an important factor in the project's success, although it also presents complicated challenges.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored four discourses that pervade the MAPP, and I have examined the relationships between these discourses and their material manifestations. What is apparent is that the discourses of informality, decentralization, being “outside” capitalism, and accessibility serve to inspire and motivate people. However, it is necessary to think through these discourses and to interrogate what is happening in practice, which we may not always have the language for. The MAPP discourses are in many ways idealistic, gesturing towards a utopia in which values of indiscriminate sharing and unconditional equity reign. In practice, MAPP's organizing strategies limit the event's growth, utilizing existing networks and expanding through intentionally made connections. On the ground, the MAPP has been both produced by and productive of Mission District (and beyond) networks of people, ideas, organizations, and spaces. The project has stabilized over ten years in a neighborhood where gentrification is both an ongoing process and an ongoing conversation, and where gentrification is generally understood to have a strong relationship with the presence of art and artists.

In Chapter IV, I examine the ways in which the MAPP contests gentrification. I turn my attention to issues of community, interrogating various definitions and

understandings of the concept that came up during my interviews. I explore specific ways that the MAPP processes work to support those individuals and communities most disenfranchised by gentrifying processes. This happens through the fostering of intentional, supportive relationships between specific individuals, groups, and organizations, and through the engineering of specific kinds of encounters.

CHAPTER IV
CONTESTING GENTRIFICATION:
THE ENGINEERING OF AESTHETIC ENCOUNTERS

Introduction

The MAPP is not a political organization or an activist group in any explicit way. MAPP discourse has much more to do with cultural exchange, civic engagement, community-building through the arts, and social networking than with resistance, protest, direct action, or anything else commonly associated with political organizing or activism. Many current and past groups in the Mission District can be characterized as anti-gentrification in a more explicit sense than the MAPP, such as the Mission Coalition Organization (from the 1960s and 1970s), the Mission Anti-displacement Coalition, and PODER (People Organizing to Demand Environmental & Economic Rights; *poder* is also a Spanish word most commonly translated as *power*). The MAPP is not a group fighting against eviction and displacement; it is not a group fighting for participatory urban planning or affordable housing. In what ways, then, does the MAPP affect gentrifying processes?

This chapter addresses my third question, that of how the MAPP contests gentrification. Building off of Chapter III's analysis of some of the organizing practices of the project, I show how the MAPP functions within the neighborhood to build and foster intentional, supportive relationships between specific individuals and groups. Although the project revolves around arts events, these relationships are not limited to artists and arts organizations. Events and their effects extend into the activity spaces of

many neighborhood residents. Notions of community and inclusivity are invoked in order to reach beyond the bounds of one particular group or another, but this does not mean that access to the physical events and to the social and cultural benefits is even. In fact, access and benefits are *unevenly distributed* in ways that work to empower individuals and groups that have been marginalized.

In this chapter, I make three points. First, although the MAPP espouses “a unified and inclusive vision,” the fact that the MAPP is not “formalized” allows the individuals and groups involved to have different, and sometimes contradictory, ideas, goals. Specifically, I look at how different people prioritize different communities. Second, many of the individuals and groups involved with the MAPP, especially the main organizers, preferentially make connections with long-term and/or Latino/a residents and organizations, thereby strengthening and supporting those that have been most disempowered by gentrifying processes. Third, I argue that the spaces temporarily produced by the MAPP are potential spaces of encounter, where cultural bridges can be crossed and where respect for difference is cultivated.

Communities: Different Spaces, Different Faces

The fact that the MAPP is not a nonprofit or other “formalized” institution allows multiple motivations and goals to co-exist. Different individuals and groups that participate in the MAPP often have different priorities. For example, a visual artist’s goal may simply be to exhibit their art in one of the MAPP spaces. A singer/songwriter who is new to the Mission may get involved to perform and meet other people in the neighborhood. A shop owner may want to draw a crowd, or may want to offer their space

for community use. The main organizers may have goals that are more long-term, such as supporting specific communities, or more conceptual, such as making the arts a more valuable and accessible part of the lives of Mission residents.

Community has been an unavoidable word in this project. It is all over the MAPP website and peppers virtually every conversation about the MAPP, as well as conversations about the arts and neighborhood projects more broadly. The website describes MAPP as an endeavor in which “individuals [are] in a community partnership with one another” (*ibid.*). A discourse is constructed of the MAPP as a recurring event that has the potential to bring together multiple and multivalent communities, and to strengthen a Mission neighborhood made of these communities.

Of course, community has different meanings for different individuals. In my interviews, I asked people, “What does community mean to you?” I heard a variety of responses. People almost always paused for a few moments, or answered quickly but then wanted time to think about their answer. Sometimes people returned to this question at the end (without prompting), telling me they were still thinking about it and articulating their ideas further; in one case, an interviewee emailed me days later to say something more about what he thought about community. These behaviors reveal the importance as well as the dynamism of the concept for many individuals, which did not come as a surprise to me. I have had such conversations for many years and amongst various groups of people, and I myself have felt the pull—the belief in and the longing for something called community.

Interviewees often used *examples* of community rather than a strict definition of the word: the Latino community, the Spanish-speaking community, the hipster

community, the Asian community, the Mission community, the community of long-term residents, the artist community, the music community, the punk community, the gay community, the queer community, the activist community, the techie community, the environmentalist community, the Catholic community. When people attempted, then, to come up with a definition, they would try to identify what makes these specific examples communities. For example, people talked about a community as a group of people who share a given space, or who are bound by some other common identity such as race/ethnicity, language, nationality, gender, or sexuality. A community can also be bound by a shared interest or occupation such as people in the tech industry, musicians, artists, activists or academics.

There are undeniably many identity groups³ in the Mission District centered around ethnicity, language, nationality, sexuality, and class, as well as around citizenship status, homeowner/renter status, occupation, and what “scene” one is a part of (which can overlap with the other categories, but can include things like a particular style of music or art, particular food practices such as veganism, or lifestyle habits such as riding bicycles, among other possibilities). During my fieldwork, I heard most often about two communities in the neighborhood: the Latino community and the hipster community (the latter is usually associated with whiteness as well, although not all “hipsters” are white). The Latino community is generally thought of as the long-term community, while the hipsters are associated with the incoming population of gentrifiers. Although this is a vast

³ This thesis does not engage with theories of identity; however, I will say that the notions of identity that best suit my purposes here are in alignment with the many scholars who understand identity as performative and reflexive, and as an ongoing, complex process that is never complete, shifting not only through time but also as one moves through and between spaces. In this thesis, when I use various identifiers, I am referring to how individuals self-identify or how groups are discursively identified most commonly in my research area.

oversimplification of the groups that constitute the Mission, it is nevertheless a binary often used in conversations and articles about the neighborhood; in addition, it is the case that the vast majority of the population of the neighborhood is made up of white and Latina/o ethnic groups. Overall, though, it is important to remember that the “Latino vs. hipster” binary is one that shapes and is shaped by many people’s experiences, even though almost everyone I’ve talked to in the Mission also readily admits that the neighborhood is much more diverse and complicated than that, and that communities and identities often overlap.

In her book *Against the Romance of Community* (2002), Miranda Joseph undertakes multiple definitions and critiques of community and uses empirical research to expose how processes of capital and practices of community are mutually imbricated. She writes, “Marx articulates the necessary role that historically particular and differentiated social formations play as the bearers of capital, as the medium within which capital circulates...” (p. 13). As the title of her book indicates, Joseph resists the romantic, utopian notion that community is somehow the opposite of a capitalistic society, or that community practices are always an antidote to capitalistic practices. Using the example of a nonprofit gay and lesbian theater in the Mission District,⁴ she shows how defining a community and practicing solidarity within that community is necessarily exclusive; in addition, and more importantly, she shows how capitalistic structures *encourage* this kind of community formation and exclusion. Her example of Theatre Rhinoceros (which at the time tried to solidify its identity as a gay and lesbian space to

⁴ Theatre Rhinoceros was a gay and lesbian theater at the time of Joseph’s research. Currently the theater identifies itself as a queer theater. Joseph’s book is particularly relevant to my research because of the Mission District as a common site, as well as community and the arts as common themes. In addition, one of my interviewees happened to be a bookkeeper at the theater for a time.

the point of being exclusive), demonstrates this through an exploration of the competition for funding in the nonprofit world and in the arts. Joseph shows how crucial it is to remain critical of these practices, *especially* if we want to remain open to possibilities for empowerment. Joseph's work has been important for me in that it has reminded me to be attentive to the ways in which discursive and material practices of community are operating in the context of the MAPP.

Jorge often invoked the notion of community; in addition, I heard other *mappers/as* who look up to him refer to his words on the subject. Thus it is worth quoting him at length here:

For me, community are the people that I'm close to that might not share all my political views. I know community when people have trouble, health trouble, money trouble, food trouble. People come together, people come and feed people. We have a free farmers market that feeds people. That's community to me. MAPP is a community. When we see each other, we like each other. We don't have attitudes against each other. When we see each other, we treat each other with respect and we carry ourselves with dignity. We might be playful and crazy and all that stuff. But you don't lose that touch. Community is not an abstract word. It's something that you work for. People know you. And there is a real palpable feeling of love. That's community. It's not a romantic notion. You have to feel it when you are in the middle of them and everybody has a common goal: the benefit of everybody, not just one person, but everybody. That's community. (Interview, 7/16/12)

What is clear from Jorge's words is that for him, friendship and caring relationships play a fundamental role in the constitution of community. Although this often was not what interviewees first said when I asked them about the word, many people eventually brought up care, friendship, love, and material support. One interviewee, an early organizer as well as a writer, scholar, and published translator of Pablo Neruda's poems, emailed me after our interview with this statement: "Popped into my head last couple nights re your question what is community and maybe I said it or

implied it but it's the incredible friendships, the bonds that nourish, the connections that connect you to more friendship and bonds..." (Personal correspondence, 8/23/12). It began to seem that many people, rather than seeing community as a group of people with *a shared interest*, thought of it as a group of people with *an interest in sharing*.

The structure of the MAPP allows people to have an empowering experience of community as a discursive and material practice. Different individuals are able to define "their" community differently while maintaining connections and collaborations with people inside and outside of it. Because the MAPP is not an operation funded by an outside organization, they are accountable to each other, and possibly to their goals and the neighborhood, rather than needing to be accountable to an economic overseer. This allows flexibility in participants' definitions and feelings regarding community; they do not have to write a single mission statement together.

During our interview, Todd used the word "community" twenty-one times before I asked him the question: "What do you think is a definition of the word community for you?"

"I always struggle with that word," he said. "I don't know if I could give it a definition. I feel we should struggle to find other words... It's tough. That's why you'll hear me say there are many different communities. In other words, trying to get rid of community as a singular, compared to plural—communities." He went on:

I think when you listen to people talk—and you'll hear this in the MAPP or the Poppy, in the Mission in general—the word community is used a lot in the singular sense. And a lot of times when people are talking about community in the Mission, they're implying a certain community. A lot of times I think they're implying the more long-standing Latino community that people identify with the neighborhood... And then, especially in a place like the Mission where gentrification is such a major issue with controversy around it, you have a sense of people invading the community. So you have people that maybe have more

economic power, they can come in and set up shop or buy a house. And there's a sense of the long-standing people, long-standing residents that are the community... feeling invaded by people coming in. (Interview, 7/24/12)

It is not at all uncommon to hear people in the Mission District talk about gentrification and the tensions between different communities. These conversations, and the realities that they reflect, constitute a main feature of the neighborhood's personality. In correspondence before my main fieldwork began, Rafael referred to the MAPP as "our alternative street curating model combating gentrification" (Personal correspondence, 3/3/12). Hence, some of my very first questions in this project were about how the MAPP contests gentrification. Despite this, I was surprised at how little gentrification was actually discussed at the MAPP meetings I attended; and the website does not go into any specific details about the gentrification of the neighborhood.

It was really in the interviews (as well as in many conversations) that perspectives on the relationship between community, gentrification, and the MAPP were revealed.

When I asked AB about the meaning of community, she responded:

Well, there are different types of community. There's community because you share a neighborhood. That's a community... In my case, yeah I discriminate. Yes, I do. So when I talk about my community, I normally talk about brown people... I was thinking about that whole community thing the other day, because I'm always talking about community, community, community. (Interview, 7/23/12)

AB was born in Nicaragua and came to the Mission as a teenager. She has attended many MAPPs and knows some of the organizers and artists involved. I met her at a MAPP meeting on July 16th (the second meeting for the August 2012 MAPP); she came because she wanted to help get her friend's new shop, Luz de Luna, involved. Luz de Luna was opened on 24th Street in June by a middle-aged, Latina, long-term Mission resident,

Denise Gonzalez. AB told me:

I called Jorge, and he on the spot told me just show up tonight. And I showed up. I had no clue what the fuck was going on. I was just sitting there. And then it came together. Like oh, I see: this is how it works. I wanted to get Luz de Luna involved. She wants to open up the space for local artists... So I wanted it because of her. I wanted to get her involved. I wanted to get information for her. And I know she doesn't have time, so I thought, then I'll do it. Let me see what this is all about. (*ibid.*)

AB came to the MAPP meeting because of connections she already had with Jorge and Rafael, and because she is a regular MAPP attendee. She came out of a desire to support a new local business run by a Latina woman; she wanted to bring the new shop publicity, connections, and a crowd.

During my interview with AB, a few interesting things became apparent. She told me that during the MAPPs, she almost always goes only to Artillery Apparel Gallery, a Latino-run clothing, jewelry, and art shop/gallery on Mission Street that features local designers and artists. This was interesting to me because I was slowly realizing that a number of regular *mappers/os* just go to one or two of the MAPP spaces. AB talked about the importance of Latina/o involvement and Latina/o spaces in the MAPP:

With MAPP, I think that if Latino music and Latino artists and Latino art and Latino merchants are participating in this, I think it's really going to make the community, or my community, feel welcome into establishments and feel more part of the neighborhood. Because there are a lot of people that live here, but do not feel part of, are not part of the neighborhood. And I think that MAPP turns that around. At MAPP parties at Artillery, it's nothing but a brown crowd and everybody's having fun. And everybody's welcome. It's just very Latino, warm, back-home type. (*ibid.*)

At Artillery during a few MAPPs, I observed that the crowd was more diverse than her representation conveyed (it was not solely a “brown crowd”); however, the space was certainly majority Latina/o, one could hear mostly Spanish being spoken, and the artists

featured were Latina/o, as were the musicians, who performed songs in Spanish. It did not feel exclusive, and yet it was obviously a Latina/o space.

In fact, this is true of many of the MAPP spaces. They seem centered around a particular group (or community), but inviting to others. One interviewee whom I will call W, for example, described the Box Factory as follows: “They produce something for every single MAPP, and it's 100% queer. And you walk into that space and you know it's queer. You know. And there are no ifs, ands, or buts; you know... No other space has that queer spirit that I've been to within MAPP” (Interview, 8/2/12).

If a given space is Latina/o, for instance, or if a space is queer, this usually means that the venue provider and/or the curator has a specific community in mind while planning what is going to happen in that space on the day of the MAPP. Therefore, the programming of each space's events is very intentional and not at all indiscriminatory; on the other hand, during the MAPP, all of the spaces feel indiscriminately welcoming to diverse audiences, as long as everyone is respectful. The organizers of the spaces enjoy the autonomy of programming, prioritizing their own community and their own values; then, during the events, they enjoy sharing their space with the neighborhood, and seem to feel great pride in being able to showcase particular artists and musicians. They are able to share with the neighborhood their culture and to share their own space's “vibe.”

AB told me that when she came to the MAPP meeting, she only brought a few business cards with her. She gave one to a Venezuelan couple that was new to the neighborhood. They were a musical duet, a young man and woman, she a singer and he a guitar player. AB felt that they would be perfect for her friend's shop. She'd already given away all but one of her cards when a young white man approached her:

And then here came this white guy. He was like so who are you, and I started talking to him. I was like this is my last business card, but I didn't want to be a bitch and exclude him. But at the same time, I was there focusing on—Luz de Luna is a Latino business. So I already had in mind what I want for them. I want that Latino mellow feel. And I know these guys were not necessarily that, but then at the same time I felt like, well, they're artists too. And they're participating. Let go of the card... As long as it doesn't become a Caucasian event and all we see are like hipsters singing, I'm cool. I mean I like that stuff too. So, but I would prefer it was brown folk at least. (Interview, 7/23/12)

This anecdote reveals AB's priorities when it comes to the MAPP and her community.

She said directly about the MAPP: "I would prefer it was focused. Yeah, community, Latino, brown. But again, my entire life is focused on community, Latino, brown" (*ibid.*).

It became clear that different individuals, such as AB, Cristina, or W, have different goals and ideas when it comes to the MAPP. Cristina is a main MAPP organizer and often curates the Secret Garden/el Jardín Secreto, a community garden space. She also sometimes sings with her band in the MAPPs. She spoke about curating the garden space: "I always try to have half the music in Spanish, because that's what I like, but also because I think it's part of the spirit of what the garden is part of" (Interview, 7/17/12).

Because the MAPP has not become formalized in the traditional sense, various people and groups are able to pursue different goals and prioritize different communities without these differences conflicting with any official MAPP rules or policies. The Box Factory can prioritize a queer community, Artillery can prioritize a Latina/o community, the Secret Garden/el Jardín Secreto can prioritize a bilingual program, and nonprofits like Galería de la Raza, which is focused on local Latina/o artists already, can simply allow the artist or artists exhibiting work to take over the space for the evening. Friends of the curators, artists, and performers, or people who regularly spend time in one of the venues, might spend the entire evening in one space. But inevitably there are hundreds of people

from the neighborhood who move from place to place, using the MAPP program (which includes a map) as a guide, and on that evening all of those involved are unified under one name—the Mission Arts & Performance Project.

Intentional Relationships: Countering Marginalization

The MAPP is a grassroots neighborhood arts event that focuses on making connections between (and among) artists, residents, and local organizations. The MAPP does not have only one focus, but overall the event series cultivates and highlights the participation of Latinas/os, long-term residents, and neighborhood artists, as well as locally owned and run organizations.

In other words, there is an emphasis on those most marginalized by gentrifying processes in the neighborhood; all of the main organizers want the MAPP to benefit the marginalized individuals, communities, and establishments in the Mission. Three of the organizations featured in the August 2012 MAPP program, Galería de la Raza, Precita Eyes Muralists Association, and Café La Bohème, were all established in the mid-1970s and are considered neighborhood institutions. This is also true of the Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, which wasn't featured in the August 2012 MAPP but has participated in MAPPs in the past. There is also Brava Theater Center, owned by the nonprofit Brava for Women in the Arts, which has a history going back to the mid-1980s and sometimes participates in the MAPPs. While many other establishments have closed in the last couple of decades, these have remained open; this is not *because of* the MAPP, but the MAPP forms one of the many overlapping social-cultural networks in the neighborhood that supports establishments by regularly instigating new supportive

connections and regularly bringing neighborhood crowds into traditional and nontraditional venues.

Several other venues that didn't participate in August 2012 but are often on the program are Casa Sanchez, a small family-owned and run Mexican restaurant known for decades for its tortillas; L's Caffé, owned and run by three Latina sisters; and Sunrise Café, owned and run by Alba Guerra from El Salvador. With these three spaces, all located on 24th Street, the story is similar to that of AB and Luz de Luna. Through grassroots connections, these spaces joined the MAPP; these places offer a much-needed space for artists to display work and for musicians to perform, and in return, the artists and musicians support the organizations by bringing in a crowd. Casa Sanchez and Sunrise Café almost always have Latina/o performers playing music at the MAPPs, and L's Caffé has a diverse program that features mostly non-white performers.

Additionally, limiting access through grassroots organizing keeps the MAPP relatively small and keeps the focus on these supportive neighborhood connections fostered in the spirit of empowerment. Every year, there are a number of events that bring many thousands of people to the streets of the Mission District, including Carnaval, el Día de los Muertos, the San Francisco Food Fair on Folsom Street, a street closure celebration called Sunday Streets, the Clarion Alley Block Party, and transgender and dyke marches held in conjunction with San Francisco LGBT Pride Celebration. This list is not exhaustive, and all of these events are promoted, highly advertised, and have varying amounts of funding to back them. On those days or nights, the Mission teems with tens of thousand people from all over the City of San Francisco and beyond. Although many neighborhood residents attend and enjoy these events, a number of

people I spoke with indicated that the space ceases to feel like it belongs to them. In addition, many neighborhood residents don't even attend, preferring to wait until the crowds have cleared out.

Across the Bay, the monthly art walk Oakland Art Murmur is a fiscally sponsored nonprofit and has been heavily advertised; it has dozens of donor organizations, including the City of Oakland, and it has drawn tens of thousands of people. Its stated vision is “for Oakland to be recognized as a nationally and internationally-known and respected contemporary art destination” (Oakland Art Murmur). Also on the website one can read the following:

OAM continues to contribute to the economic health and reputation of downtown Oakland by **filling storefronts, attracting new visitors and residents** to the area, and **providing a positive and engaging cultural experience** for those who come. OAM also supports its community by generating not only local but also **regional, national, and international press** attention to Oakland, providing **good-news stories** about the city's thriving art scene and cultural renaissance. (*ibid.*, emphasis original)

The organization estimates that it brought 84,000 visitors to its events in 2012. Art Murmur has been controversial, as Oakland becomes more gentrified (McDonald, 2013); these processes are much more recent for Oakland than for the Mission District. The language of the Art Murmur smacks of gentrification—the desire to attract new, desirable bodies and new capital into an area with a diverse, low-income population.

I mention these other events to contrast them with the MAPP, to show why it's so important to *mappers/as* that the MAPP has stayed small and grassroots, and to demonstrate why so many of the main organizers have resisted the temptations of funding and sponsorship (though they've been approached by organizations offering them money). They've gently rejected these offers, as they've gently resisted people like the

woman (discussed in Chapter III) who wanted to make nicer, flashier posters.

The MAPP contests gentrification through discursive and material practices, supporting and empowering those individuals and groups that have been the most disenfranchised by gentrifying processes. This support can be economic: artists and musicians help local establishments by bringing in a local crowd, members of which might become future patrons; the establishments also help the artists and musicians, giving them a much-needed space to showcase their work before the public. In addition to the potential economic benefits that come along with participating in MAPP, individuals and groups feel empowered by the autonomy afforded them by the structure of the MAPP. They also feel and are able to express pride in their culture, a very empowering thing especially for the Latinas/os who have felt so disrespected and disenfranchised in the Mission over the last two decades. As Rafael told me, part of the goal of the MAPP is “...to make sure we really feature *rancheras* and *salsa* and *cumbia colombiana* and *musica folklórica*, to make sure it doesn’t become just a bunch of rich white kids going into a community of color and just taking over and not having respect for the folks who came before...” (Personal interview, 3/6/12). The MAPP has been going on for ten years and has managed to be a socially integrated event while focusing on long-term residents, artists, Latinos, and locally owned and run organizations.

Spaces of Encounter

Gill Valentine (2008) has asserted that geographers should pay more attention to sociospatial inequalities but also to the specific conditions under which shared space provides opportunities for encounter, for “meaningful contact” between individuals and

disparate groups, even if brief, in order to build towards understandings of a civic culture forged out of difference. She defines “meaningful contact” as “contact that actually changes values and translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for – rather than merely tolerance of – others” (Valentine, 2008). This is an interesting lens through which to see an important aspect of MAPP, that of bringing together individuals and groups, and it is an area of ongoing struggle and worthy of ongoing (and various) examination. The main organizers of MAPP are actively exploring this question of how to best produce spaces where meaningful contact can occur. Todd, who is one of the earliest organizers, said:

I think of the MAPP as how to create a space of encounter. It's a space where different aspects of a community can come to see itself and meet itself. And that the diversity and eclecticism of a potential neighborhood can be reflected... the idea of creating a space of encounter, where we come to know each other. I don't have the expectation that you should be like me, and you don't have the expectation that I should be like you. And I show myself to you, you show yourself to me and we come to know each other, and know ourselves through encountering somebody who is different from us. (Personal interview, 7/24/12)

The production of spaces of meaningful contact in the context of the MAPP challenges dominant narratives of art's role in gentrifying processes; or, at least, this research shows that there are different roles art and artistic communities can play. Shaw and Sullivan (2011) have explored the racial exclusion produced by a commercial art walk in Portland's gentrifying Alberta Arts District. Their results showed that long-term black residents in the neighborhood feel uncomfortable and alienated at the neighborhood's Last Thursday Art Walks. Their research reflects the strong relationship between the arts and gentrifying processes. It reflects the common narrative in academic research that represents the arts as disenfranchising to long-term residents of color in

gentrifying neighborhoods, and that associates the arts with white newcomers. These realities and power dynamics are important and perhaps prevalent, and scholars have done much to uncover and trace the associations between aesthetic practice and appeal (especially under the auspices of government programs and branded “revitalization,” “redevelopment,” “beautification,” and “renewal”), and gentrifying processes.

However, it is evident that in the MAPP, many of the event-spaces are sites (though sometimes produced temporarily) of empowerment for long-term residents and Latinas/os, rather than disenfranchisement—and that artists themselves can in fact be long-term residents and people of color, something that is curiously left out of the gentrification literature in geography. Additionally, rather than creating or enhancing divides between communities, the MAPP actually provides conditions under which different groups of people collaborate to produce something together. Although separate groups might organize their own spaces, they then share those spaces with one another, inviting each other in so they can reveal themselves to one another.

This research contributes insights into how and when the arts can produce spaces in which connections are made across difference. “The main thing about MAPP,” Rafael said, “is that instead of just creating those lines in the sand between the young hipsters and the immigrants, or the hardcore Mission *locuros*... you’ll see every extreme. And that’s the way we like it” (Interview, 3/7/12). During our interview, Rafael identified “hipsters” as the gentrifying group several times, commenting that he and his friends had frequently been the victims of racist attitudes and behaviors. But the following comment, in which he refers to the various groups involved with the MAPP, shows that this isn’t always the case in his experience:

There are a lot of white hipsterish kids. But they're totally down, the community's down with the scene. So that's the main thing that MAPP is trying to do. It's not trying to say, it's *us* versus *them*. It's more that we're *all here*, let's really create something that's vital and where we can actually relate to each other for a change. (*ibid.*)

Conclusion

In this chapter, I've discussed the ways in which different individuals and groups are afforded autonomy as a result of the structure of the MAPP, which allows people to pursue different goals while collaborating together on one event (or event series). I've explored how participants prioritize a variety of different communities and identities depending on the space. I've also delineated the ways in which the MAPP contests gentrifying processes. The MAPP contests gentrification by instigating supportive relationships in the neighborhood among those individuals, communities, and organizations most disenfranchised by gentrifying processes. The organizers have limited access by rejecting funding and suggestions to do heavier promoting, thereby keeping the focus on the neighborhood itself and keeping the event relatively small compared to some of the other major neighborhood celebrations. The MAPP has the potential to empower those most disenfranchised, and those I interviewed often expressed the feeling of empowerment that comes with the MAPP. People (once again or for the first time) experience what it's like to participate in the making of the culture of their own neighborhood.

In Chapter V, I turn to the question of art itself. While the majority of this thesis has not been dedicated to the question of art, the inspiration for this project has been a passion for the arts and a deep feeling of connection with other artists, their projects, and

their social commitments. I write Chapter V as an exploration of my own creative geographies. This chapter is written in vignettes and short passages that invoke moments and scenes of my fieldwork experience. Some pieces lead to theoretical investigations, in which I draw upon conceptual analytics help enrich my own understanding of real, lived experiences I had during my research in the Mission.

CHAPTER V

CREATIVITY: SPACES AND SITES

Jorge's Blessing

One morning, I awoke in my Mission District bedroom to the low, sweet sound of a shell horn. I heard the rattling of a shaker. Jorge is nearby, I thought. I went to the window, pulled the curtain back to peer out. The sun was both soft and bright, shining on the streets between shadowy buildings. There he was, on the sidewalk across the street below, at Galería de la Raza. He was performing his customary blessing before Galería's mural billboard, which features a new digital mural every month or two. Ani, the Galería's director, stood with him. Jorge was blessing a mural that dealt with issues around immigration laws. The mural was entitled, "Legalize Hate Out of My State" (see Fig. 3).



Figure 3: "Legalize Hate Out Of My State" mural by Favianna Rodriguez, featured on the Galería de la Raza's mural billboard 8/5/12 through 10/10/12.

Like the Mission Makeover Mural (discussed in Chapter I), this art piece has aesthetic appeal while also having a powerful social and political message. This work is a response to Arizona's SB1070 law, a strict and extensive anti-illegal immigration law. Although the law has been criticized for encouraging racial profiling, it has been upheld by a Supreme Court ruling. In the words of the mural's artist, Favianna Rodriguez, and one of her collaborators, Rafael Lovato, "We will need to understand what [the law] means beyond Arizona; we urgently need a deeper understanding of what's happening to our country, our community" (quote from Galería de la Raza's website).

Jorge's blessing of this mural was a spiritual act, as well as an act of political solidarity with artists, activists, Latinos/as, and immigrants. His blessing was for physical protection of the mural and spiritual protection of the mural's purpose. I won't forget this moment of waking up to the sound of his horn outside; it was a moment that, for me, is crystallized as the embodiment of many different facets of my fieldwork. It recalls to me the intersection of political and social with artistic and spiritual practice that I observed and was a part of in the Mission. The memory is visceral; I awoke; I was there, and so were he and Ani, and so was the street, and so was the art. We were all there.

Creative Geographies

In order to honor the stories, moments, and creativity shared with me by *mappers/as*, this chapter is written in a somewhat nontraditional way. The following pages are composed of a series of vignettes and short passages that illustrate the importance of art and the imagination, as well as embodied experience. During my time in the Mission District, some of the most insightful and significant moments I had are

best served here by personal, creative narrative rather than analysis. Some of the moments here lead to theoretical exploration or explanation, while others do not. These next pages should have some effect on the reader in terms of real, embodied moments.

I am also doing this as an exploration of creative geographies—to explore my own geographic research through writing it creatively.

The *Beautiful Trash* Exhibit

On the evening of August 4, 2012, I hurry from the Secret Garden to the Galería. There, a beautiful black dancer named Kenya is dressed in a wardrobe of trash and performing a slow, beautiful, and improvised contemporary dance piece to go along with her friend's current exhibit: local Peruvian poet and artist Adrian Arias' *Beautiful Trash: The Lost Library*. This exhibit is a visually evocative futuristic piece that asks us to imagine that we are in the year 2086. The exhibit features "twentythree found books in the floating plastic island that arrived at the Californian coast in the summer of 2083" (from the Beautiful Trash blog). The description goes on:

Humans explored this island for three years before finally conquering and making it a state in 2086. The books seem to represent a period of time at the beginning of the 21st century when the element called "plastic" played an important role in economic development. It is believed that this plastic caused the auto-destruction of a series of basic human needs.

The explanations that go with each book item are written from the perspective of future analysts trying to understand the symbolism of the discovered art of another epoch. The book items are colorful and strange, carved out in the middle so that layered pages show through, revealing strings of gestural words. Where the pages are carved away, various plastic items and other trash-like items sit, framed by the edges of the enigmatically

wrought books. Some of the items: a plastic fork, tiny soldier figurines, a miniature chair, cling film, erasers, rubber bands. Each one is painted, textured, an odd diorama of sorts, a haunting aesthetic scene. These visual objects and their explanations (in Spanish and English) evoke notions of environmental catastrophe, great societal change, and the need for new interpretations of human existence on this planet.

After Kenya's dance, the audience, many of whose members I recognize, claps and cheers, and Kenya hugs Adrian. Adrian approaches a microphone and looks at everyone seriously before speaking to the crowd, plastic cutlery in his hands (see Fig. 4). "We are living in a dream," he says slowly in English accented with Spanish. "But they don't want us to know."

These statements might sound as though they are meant cynically: we are living in a dream if we think we have any control, if we think power is not corrupt, etc. But in fact, in this moment Adrian conveys to us standing before him his belief that life itself is mysterious, magical, and unknowable, like a dream. Seeing this and other of Adrian's projects, one gets the sense of a powerful imagination at work, an imagination that has an incessant need to create, to transform the world outside itself. In a sense, this is what an artist must be. When he says, "They don't want us to know," he is indeed talking about the people and groups in power. But rather than meaning, "They don't want us to know how badly they are fucking us over," or "They don't want us to know that all our rights are lies," what he means—and here I am being presumptuous by elaborating on his statement, but I will do it nonetheless—is perhaps this: "They don't want us to know the power of our own imaginations."



Figure 4: Adrian Arias at MAPP, August 2012.

The Face of Community

TM and I talked about different understandings of community. He expressed many different conceptions of the word, and he even said we should try using other words altogether (discussed in Chapter IV). At one point, though, he said: “Who lives in my neighborhood? Everybody who lives in my neighborhood, are they all part of my community? They are in a sense, right? And that’s a very inclusive vision of community that also leads to a sense of responsibility for all those people” (Personal interview, 7/24/12).

Geographer E. Jeffrey Popke has drawn upon the work of major poststructuralists

such as Levinas, Derrida, and Nancy in order to engage with notions of community and responsibility (2003). He invokes Levinas' philosophy of subjectivity, in which a "fundamental responsibility for the other" is an inherent part of our selves as subjects:

As a feature of our subjective being, the other does not refer to any specific individual, but rather to the anonymous call of the other, what Levinas describes as a 'face'. Our ethical responsibility is thus not bound to a cultural context; the face signifies beyond any social meaning that might be implied by race, gender, ethnicity, etc. (*ibid.*, 303-304)

Invoking Derrida, Popke then claims that "responsibility is an exposure to the event, in its singular and incalculable context, through which the call of the other enjoins an ethics and politics of decision" (308), emphasizing that out of poststructuralist deconstruction there could emerge new ways of thinking about political processes, decision-making, and the contingency of individual events and situations. He looks to Jean-Luc Nancy for "a spatial imaginary grounded in intersubjectivity, responsibility and community... a theory of space as an opening, but one which also pays heed to the intersubjective nature of being" (309).

In the Mission, Todd and many others have been discussing these issues for decades. How to relate to and see "the other," how to participate in both everyday practices and planned (or partially planned) events, and how to engage with and think about space and sharing space are present, and urgent, questions. Popke asserts finally that our goal should be "to participate in a collective spatial politics in which a commitment to the other is our abiding concern" (312); he writes of cultivating an ethics "within which the gift of space is offered unconditionally" (313). Todd and the other MAPP organizers seem to have come to a similar conclusion. Indeed, MAPP discourse emphasizes notions of sharing space, of commitment to multiple communities and

identities, of collectivity. If these ideals don't always play out perfectly in material practice, it's because there is so much unevenness and fragmentation to begin with. Ideas and theories do not emerge in a vacuum, but in response to problematic situations. People who want to change these situations incite new conceptualizations, so that they can then better conceptualize and effect change.

Daily Walks

During my time doing research in the Mission, it became part of my daily routine to walk through the neighborhood, making many stops along the way. My route varied, but often I would walk west on 24th Street, from the Galería over to Mission Street and Valencia Street. I would walk north up one of these two streets, and then south on the other, observing the two vastly different worlds (which I discussed in Chapter II). I would wind my way back, east and south, east and south until I returned home. I came to know many of the cafes, shops, and organizations, and many people would wave to me and say hello, or I would duck in someplace for a chat. I always asked people what they were up to, and inevitably it seemed that everyone was always busy, involved in a myriad of collaborative projects—not only the MAPP, but a variety of neighborhood-wide or city-wide artistic, social, and political project. In addition, of course, everyone had things to say about their own job, their own business, their own personal projects, their families. I started thinking that the Mission felt like an Italian village in a Fellini movie, so many familiar faces and names and hands waving hello. The warm feeling of knowing the people who live around you—not everyone has that. Is that the feeling of community?

Whose Imagination?

Before I met Todd, I had heard about him. He started the Red Poppy Art House. He was among the earliest organizers of the MAPP, and many of the material and conceptual parts of its development came from him. People kept asking me if I'd talked to him yet. He's a visionary, several people said. "I would walk through fire for Todd," David told me (Personal interview, 7/11/12).

When I finally met him, I remember a particular moment when he looked at me in the middle of our conversation about the Mission and the arts, and he said, "Sometimes I feel so disempowered" (Personal interview, 7/24/12). I asked him why, finding that I felt surprised. The way people had described him, and looking at what he's accomplished, I guess I thought that he would be a person who felt empowered—not a person who would feel the need to tell me very pointedly that he felt the opposite.

"We're living in someone else's imagination," he said.

This sentence struck me, and later it came to me again and again. It conveyed to me that, despite how much he's done, he is always keenly aware of the obstacles in place that keep artists (as well as most people) from doing more, from manifesting their visions of the ways that things could be.

Artists like Todd, Adrian Arias, and the *mappers/as* are working toward building what the Marxist Antonio Gramsci might call counterhegemonies. The concept of hegemony, specifically in the cultural sense in which the Gramsci explored it, can be understood as the processes through which the ruling class imposes its worldview and norms on the rest of society (i.e., on members of the non-ruling classes). This includes, especially, those norms propagated through discursive, material, and institutional

practices that support the ruling class's position as the ruling class. The norms and practices are reiterated and reproduced by the rest of society because of the perceived benefits thus offered—and because an alternative that seems feasible has not been presented. The MAPP is an alternative that is presented by the *mappers/as*. They want to show that things can be done differently—that organizing, gathering, and making art can happen in a different way, according to a different set of principles, produced by different relations.

Henri Lefebvre might say that the MAPP is changing the way space is produced through *representational* or *lived* space. Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space*, first published in English translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith in 1991, develops the idea that space is social and is socially produced. What exactly does this mean? A French sociologist and a Marxist philosopher, Lefebvre extended Marx's concepts of production and commodification to include space: space is produced, and reflects the specific ideologies, practices, and modes of production of a given society. Since the process of commodification is constitutive of the capitalist mode of production, *space* can be understood to become a *commodity* in the capitalist context. For instance, in the building of high-rise condos, space is produced, smoothed of differentiation, made abstract (similar to Marx's labor), and exchanged at market values. Lefebvre develops his theory of the (social) production of (social) space particularly through an interrogation of capitalist urbanization.

Lefebvre proposes a triad of concepts that, in conjunction, contribute to a conceptual understanding the production of space. None of the three concepts are meant to subsume the others in importance, and the formula is not meant to be fixed or

deterministic. Rather, all three influence each other and continuously and mutually shape each other. The three are: spatial practice, representations of spaces, and representational space. Spatial practice refers to the materials, infrastructures, and actions that make up the world that we experience. This concept corresponds to the *perceived* in Lefebvre's other triad of *perceived* – *conceived* – *lived*. In other words, spatial practice is what plays out on the ground. It is constantly changing and becoming, from moment to moment, even as it is rooted in history and in existing materials. Representations of space refers to the *conceived*; it is the discursive, the ideological, the rules and organizing systems (which then play out materially and spatially). "This is the dominant space in any society," says Lefebvre (1996, p. 39). This concept could be seen as referring to the hegemonies that influence everyday life, space, and spatial practice. Lefebvre emphasizes that this is the space of planners and politicians, of people in positions of power, of those who are making the "top-down" decisions that often determine the ways that space is used.

Representational space, then, is *lived* space. "This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate," (*ibid.*, p. 39). It is within this space that Lefebvre seems to believe we can *subvert* existing hegemonies, through living *imaginatively* and not passively, through contesting dominant discourses in our daily actions and practices. Representations of space and representational space are two spaces that are in constant negotiation, coinciding at times (for example, when individuals or groups adhere to spatial norms, using spaces in the ways deemed fit by planners), at other times responding and reacting to each other; and together they play out as spatial practice.

According to Lefebvre, it is through these social processes that space is produced.

He writes:

The perceived – conceived – lived triad (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces) loses all force if it is treated as an abstract ‘model’. If it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct from the ‘immediate’), then its import is severely limited, amounting to no more than that of one ideological mediation among others. (p. 40)

In other words, he meant his ideas to be applied to real situations and thus be further developed, supported, or contested, not to remain ineffectual in the realm of discourse only; he wanted his ideas to be useful.

Thinking through Lefebvre’s analytic helps us understand how the MAPP goes against the grain of dominant spatial practices. The *mappers/as* use spaces in unconventional ways that suit their own purposes and that make them feel empowered, rather than using spaces according to the hegemonic logics *conceived* by outsiders, by legislators and politician and planners. A garage is now a gallery; a garden is now a stage; a storefront, restaurant, or organization is taken over by neighborhood dwellers, who decide what will happen there. A private home becomes a public space, and a public space (such as a street corner, where several MAPP performances have occurred) becomes intimate.

Thinking back to the words of both Todd and Adrian Arias, the question of empowerment for them seems to become: How do we live in our own imaginations? And: How can our own imaginations shape our spaces and our lives?

Jorge's Prayer

Having been in San Francisco for scarcely three hours, I found myself in a conversation with Jorge about my father's death. I had met Jorge an hour or two before. This was the man I'd seen in front of the house on his bicycle. This was the man who had offered a blessing to start the meeting. Standing together in someone else's living room as people were leaving, we began talking, and suddenly he was speaking to me about my ancestors. My mother and my father, he said, were coded into my DNA, present with me at each moment. He spoke to me of being present for the passing of friends, and at some point I told him that I had been present for my father's passing more than four years earlier. And he told me that my father was still with me, in my cells, in my very body.

Many times I heard Jorge speak of ancestors, and how they are in our bodies. "We are products of ancestry, all of us are... This is you, you're curious, you're training yourself. You want to discover something about yourself. But your chords are buzzing against your DNA, all of that is working" (Personal interview, 7/11/12). He speaks often of connection to the earth, to the environment. When I interviewed him, he knew that I wanted to talk about art and the MAPP. Instead, he first talked about the earth, before finally discussing the MAPP. And I listened as he framed his experience in terms of the relationship between the earth, humans, and art. For Jorge, art, environmentalism, and spirituality are interconnected. Rather than interpret his words further, I choose simply to share them, as I believe he would want his own voice heard here:

There are people who think that nature is dead and can be exploited. It can be spent and maybe desecrated. The humanity that is in charge of corporate powers has very little concern for the actual spirit of the planet. Words leave me a lot of times very short. But I want to express a feeling about what it is that I'm witnessing. So I feel right now, we have tipped the balance in a way where it's going to demand a superhuman effort to change the destruction of our planet. And

it's a true story. We still are exploiting, taking from the planet. You know, we go into the planet and we carve holes into it and we suck out everything that we believe is valuable for our own selfish purpose. There is no giving in the process. It's only a small part of the population of the planet who is enriching themselves by destroying the planet and it's not changing. They are making all kinds of laws, but the laws are in the hands of people who are in the pocket of corporate powers. It is not changing. People are giving laws, people are explaining laws, people are expounding with great demagoguery why these laws have to be passed. And in simple language, none of those laws apply to the sacredness and the power of the planet. We have forgotten that because we are playing with words and power. So it's not a sacred formula we're practicing...

So as an artist, I feel like my only responsibility is, express those feelings through my art. But I never think of wealth in materials when I do my music or do my art. I only think about the joy it will bring people, the joy it brings me and I don't think that's selfish. I think that's part of my prayer...

The MAPP affects the neighborhood in a very positive way. It gives the sense of the ritual. Our attitude is basically, we'll remain fiercely independent and not allow any institution ever to get even close to making any change in MAPP, never. I will fight it, you know... I don't let go of my humanity. I never will let go it. (*ibid.*)

The Secret Garden

Woodward, Jones, and Marston have been exploring the implications of what they call site ontologies (2010, 2012), a perspective through which sites themselves are always both singular and variable, as well as interminably relational: “site ontology emphasizes the immanent, material connection between bodies and unfolding, situated practices.” They write powerfully of sites as emergent, self-organizing, and autonomous. In this view, human subjects are not prioritized as producing and determining spatial arrangements; rather, sites themselves in their myriad relations are self-determining and constantly in flux. They write: “the site is a processual bricolage of dynamic, continuous

change, the relative consistency of which is not an issue of maintaining an ideal form or structure, but rather relatively cohering within varying conditions” (2010, p. 276).⁵

The view of sites as *not* primarily produced by human subjects is as much about developing an awareness of the wildly complex and more-than-human narratives that sites themselves embody as it is about opening up a (literal) space through which new understandings of politics can emerge. While Lefebvre says that *space* is social and socially produced, Woodward, Jones, and Marston insist that *sites* are about much more than a simply human world. This difference seems a crucial one, especially if we are to understand more fully the relations from which our lived, embodied experiences emerge and the conditions—the sites—in which we are situated.

Perhaps this something intuitive to the *mappers/as*, who seemingly engage with particular sites with deep respect, as if the sites are themselves actors. This seems especially true in the Secret Garden, a community garden space usually curated during MAPPs by Cristina. The Secret Garden was built by the San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners almost fifteen years ago at the urging of the late activist Eric Quezada; before that it was a lot filled with car parts and trash (Martí, 2011). It belongs to the Mission Housing Development Corporation (MHDC), a nonprofit that works on affordable housing in the neighborhood. The organization PODER, an environmental and social justice nonprofit, regularly uses the space, and currently the MHDC is looking to transfer the title to PODER. The Garden is now a beautiful space nestled in the middle of a residential block. It is used to teach children from neighborhood schools about organic

⁵ Colin McFarlane moves toward this view of the site as well in his work on social movements formed around informal housing settlements in Dubai. He resists the notion, put forth by network theorists, of sites as “nodes” (2009, p. 564-565), advocating instead for a view of sites as assemblages.

gardening and art. Those individuals and groups who use the space maintain good relationships with the neighbors, who come out of their houses and wave hello. MAPP performances (though on Saturday nights) in the Garden end at 10:00 PM out of respect for the residential setting.

Jorge always blesses the Garden before the performances begin, and it is a ritual that carries significance for those primarily involved with that space. He burns his lavender, sage, and copal, filling the air with heady smoke; he rattles his shaker. He thanks the ground and the plants and the trees (they are part of his community too), and the ancestors of the Bay Area's native tribes. He tells everyone in the space that they are connected to one another and to the earth, and that they are each connected to their ancestors. Then the musical performances begin. "The Secret Garden," said Jason, who has been to several MAPP performances in that space, "I think has this kind of deep ecology, indigenous ecology spirit... in terms of the performers that get to perform there, and the way in which the space and the ground in itself is kind of blessed" (8/2/12).

In the summer, when I was there, the performances began in full daylight, and as they continued the crowd grew, and the sky grew dark. Now, through a series of photos, let me take you into the Garden (see Figs. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12).



Figure 5: MAPP sign, entrance to the Secret Garden on Harrison Street.

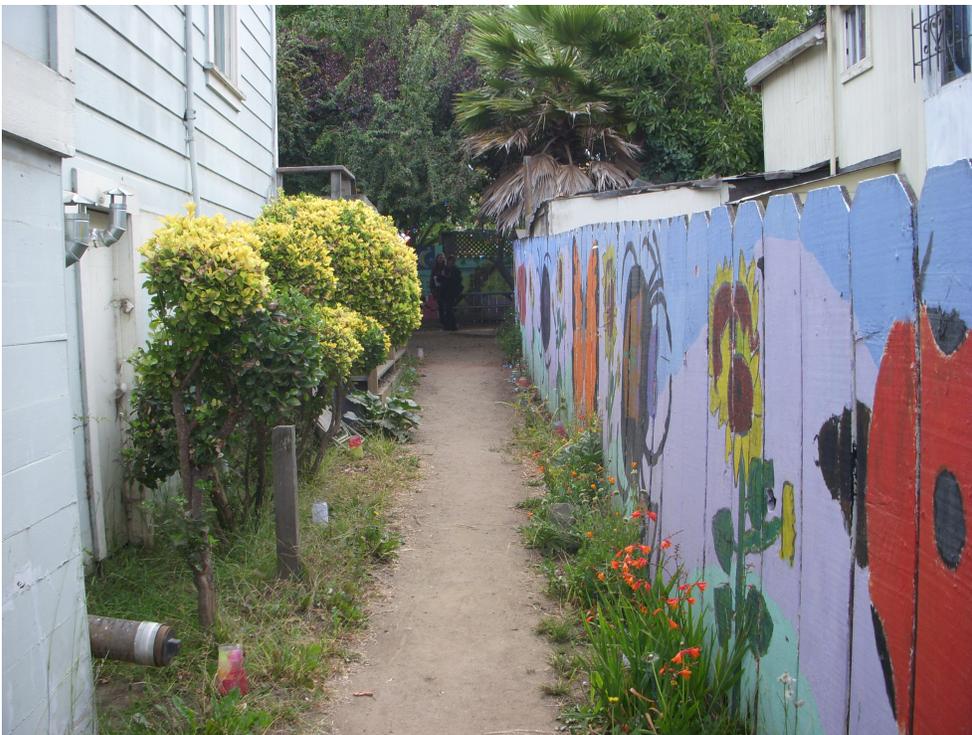


Figure 6: Pathway leading back into the Secret Garden, children's murals on the fence walls.



Figure 7: Garden walls painted by children with words in English and Spanish, a ladder, raised garden beds.



Figure 8: Someone helping prepare for MAPP by picking plums from the trees.



Figure 9: Bucket of free plums for people to take.



Figure 10: A Venezuelan couple performs in the Secret Garden for their first MAPP.



Figure 11: La Gente ("the people"), regular MAPP performers, play to a crowd in the twilit Secret Garden, singing songs in English and Spanish.



Figure 12: The band 3 Soulbirds performs songs in English and Portuguese under a dark sky in the Secret Garden.

The spaces and sites that are a part of the MAPP could also be seen as something like Foucault’s heterotopias, “something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (2009). These multivalent sites, while materially enacted and lived, also show those who experience them what most spaces in everyday, urban life are *not*. For most urban spaces are not at once intimate, diverse, informal, cozy, warm, aesthetic, and characterized by spontaneity and creative practice. For most urban spaces are not *blessed*. (See Fig. 13.)



Figure 13: Ani Rivera and two others look at the destroyed mural outside Galería de la Raza. It was a Sunday, and most paint shops nearby were closed. They patched it up with colored packing tape and a little bit of paint someone had. After the fix, it looked almost the same as the original.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber writes:

Why is it that, even when there is next to no other constituency for revolutionary politics in a capitalist society, the one group most likely to be sympathetic to its project consists of artists, musicians, writers, and others involved in some form of non-alienated production? Surely there must be a link between the actual experience of first imagining things and then bringing them into being, individually or collectively, and the ability to envision social alternatives — particularly, the possibility of a society itself premised on less alienated forms of creativity? One might even suggest that revolutionary coalitions always tend to rely on a kind of alliance between a society's least alienated and its most oppressed; actual revolutions, one could then say, have tended to happen when these two categories most broadly overlap. (2002)

This research has been conducted in the spirit of Graeber's observation. Artists, whether the work they do is explicitly political or not, play an important role in social change simply because they are artists and are thus concerned with the work of imagining and creating. In addition, in a current urban context they can indeed be some of the individuals engaged with non-alienated production, and so perhaps they have a stronger sense of connection and potential when it comes to interacting with and transforming the material world. For the *mappers/as*, the process of organizing and engineering the Mission Arts & Performance Project events is a creative process in itself, one that requires thinking imaginatively about ways that things could be different.

In this thesis, I have argued that the MAPP contests gentrifying processes, empowering those involved rather than contributing to their disenfranchisement. It is a creative, grassroots project that has managed to grow slowly and create more and more connections over the past ten years, while staying relatively small and not exploding into

a huge Bay Area phenomenon, as it undoubtedly could have. The fact that its growth has been purposefully limited—by rejecting strategies like seeking sponsors, doing extensive flyer-ing, and engaging in other kinds of promotion—is important to how those involved have maintained autonomy and control over its trajectory.

In Chapter III, I discussed some of the discursive and material organizing practices of the MAPP, showing how the discourses function to empower and inspire those involved. Discourses of informality, decentralization, being “outside” capitalism, and accessibility are important to the organizers and to new participants they attract. These discourses are a response to hegemonic norms. They say, “We are doing otherwise.” In practice, the actual history, tensions, and conditions of the neighborhood affect what the *mappers/as* do. They use a combination of spaces and networks available to them, including nonprofit, commercial, and residential spaces, and they limit accessibility by allowing the organizing to remain primarily grassroots. They want the event series to grow, but they want it to still belong to them.

In Chapter IV, I illustrated specific examples of how the MAPP contests gentrification by engineering supportive relationships and aesthetic encounters between members of the neighborhood from various communities, contributing to feelings of respect and solidarity, and building affective relationships between long-term residents, newcomers, and organizations. These experiences have the potential to “combat” some of the psychological and emotional effects of gentrification; it doesn’t stop people from moving in, but it attempts to improve the affective environment produced by gentrifying processes. The MAPP acts as a social-cultural network that offers support to organizations (not necessarily arts-based) and artists, with an inexplicit focus on long-

term and/or Latina/o residents and long-term and/or Latina/o run organizations. This offers opportunities for the empowerment of longer-term and Latina/o individuals and communities. In this aspect, the MAPP is not working alone; it is plugged into a broader social cultural network in the neighborhood that has a history.

In Chapter V, I explored creative geographies by writing some of the moments, exchanges, and scenes I experienced during fieldwork in a more personal way. These moments often lead to theoretical investigations or musings. For me, theory is in fact a creative practice; for this reason, it is in Chapter V that I draw upon theoretical analytics to enrich and enliven my observations. What we often forget is that “analysis” is storytelling too; it is a creative practice of narrative that occurs not without biases, feelings, and deep commitments, not all of which we ourselves understand.

This research has not been exhaustive. There are many perspectives, many voices, and countless events, sites, and stories that have constituted the MAPP over the last ten years. Doing this project for the last year and a half, and conducting seven weeks of fieldwork and qualitative research in the neighborhood, I can only hope that I’ve done an adequate job sharing a necessarily partial and situated tale of what I saw, heard, and was a part of in the Mission District.

There are many issues that I have not had the space to delve into in this thesis, questions and themes that came up during my interviews that deserve more attention. One is the issue of youth involvement in collaborative neighborhood art projects. Nonprofits like the Red Poppy Art House, Galería de la Raza, and Precita Eyes Muralists Association are especially concerned with trying to reach out to youth in the neighborhood. This is as much about getting young people involved with art as it is about

providing a safe and nurturing space to spend time in. Many people say that participating in collaborative neighborhood art projects saves the lives of young Latino men: it can prevent them from joining the neighborhood's gangs, which have seen quite a number of fatal shootings. Galería de la Raza's Ani Rivera said of the effects the arts can have on young people: "It can be life-changing. It's life and death for some folks. It saves people. Particularly who we engage and work with... We have targeted two rival gangs. They come in through this door and they leave all that behind and they engage. That's life and death" (Personal interview, 8/1/12). Susan Cervantes, founding director of Precita Eyes Muralists Association, had a similar reflection: "I can say it has saved some people's lives, particularly young people who were... getting into a lot of trouble, then getting involved in a mural project and feeling that they are part of where they live instead of separate from it... So it is life-changing" (Personal interview, 8/1/12).

How do creative practices affect and change the lives of individuals and communities? This question has political consequences in a time when art programs are often the first programs to be defunded in primary and secondary schools. This year, a federal judge has ruled a 2012 ban on ethnic studies in Tucson Unified School District "constitutional" (Rodriguez, 2012; Santos, 2013). The ban halted literature classes at four high schools that were part of a Mexican-American studies program. This issue is racially charged in a border state that is infamous for racial profiling and where undocumented immigration is a polarizing issue. Unfortunately, it is difficult to quantify the effects on individuals and communities of having or not having creative learning and practice in a way that is obvious and dramatic enough that people have to take notice. It is too easy for people to see art, literature, and creative practice in general as non-essential. Creative

practice is not seen as a human right, not considered crucial to life; it's seen as a privilege, something to be tacked on if real needs such as access to food, water, health care, and the Internet are met. Yet the question of access to creative practice is also bound up with questions of politics, privilege, space, and social reproduction.

In 2003, feminist economic geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham examined what it might mean to actively participate in subject formation through research that explored “transforming ourselves as local economic subjects, who are acted upon and subsumed by the global economy, into subjects with economic capacities, who enact and create a diverse economy through daily practices both habitual (and thus unconscious) and consciously intentional” (55). They draw upon Foucault’s notions of the self-forming subject, investigating the implications of dynamically and intentionally cultivating their own ideas, language, values, and practices, alongside their research subjects. Speaking of the difficulty of attempting to form new selves that desire new, different, unknown possibilities, such as “a different relation to economy” (69), they invoke Judith Butler, who asks:

What would it mean for the subject to desire something other than its continued ‘social existence’? If such an existence cannot be undone without falling into some kind of death, can existence nevertheless be risked, death courted or pursued, in order to expose and open to transformation the hold of social power on the conditions of life’s persistence? (1997, p. 28–9, quoted in Gibson-Graham 2003, p. 69)

Gibson-Graham’s work is about subjects who discover new ways of talking, acting, and being, subjects who, for one reason or another, experience the possibility of doing things differently. The journey embarked upon in Gibson-Graham’s example is not individual; it is communal, and their hope is to continue developing these new possibilities, these

alternative ways of thinking and being, not individually, but within communities, in order to sow the seeds of social change.

This work is analogous to the productive work of the *mappers/as*, who explore new ways of thinking about community engagement, cultural production, and uses of spaces in their neighborhood. Rather than adhering to societal and spatial norms that tell them culture and art are for consumption, they seek ways to be the makers of their own culture through collaborative and creative practices. Cristina said, “The ideal is that it will be in every house and every living room and everybody will have their own MAPP and participate” (Personal interview, 7/17/12). Those involved also hope that others will be inspired to do their own neighborhood projects, both in other parts of San Francisco and the Bay Area, and even in other neighborhoods in the country and in the world. Theirs is a vision of a different way of living daily urban life, a different way of gathering, of sharing space, art, and creativity. This vision also changes how the *mappers/as* see *themselves* in relation to their communities, spaces, and neighborhood. This vision is empowering, although many of them acknowledge that it is a vision “toward which we strive, but will, invariably, always fall short” (www.sfmapp.com).

There is, however, the question of who is still left out when it comes to the MAPP. I spoke with two long-term neighborhood residents who have each been to MAPP events and have enjoyed them, but don’t necessarily feel compelled to go back. Both of these interviewees said that there isn’t really a space for punks (Personal interview, 7/15/12; Personal interview, 8/31/12). The punk scene that was alive and well in the 1980s and 1990s in the Mission has largely disappeared, and many of those who identified as punks have moved out, according to this interviewee. This includes both

white and Latino/a punks. Another interviewee said that there's not much queer representation in the MAPP (Personal interview, 9/1/12). This is interesting in light of the fact that the interviewee Jason said that the Box Factory is primarily a queer space (discussed in Chapter IV). This example demonstrates that queer is not a homogenous identity or group, and that what feels like a queer space to one individual might not feel like a queer space to another.

In addition, Latino/a identity is incredibly varied and multiple in the Mission District, as it is anywhere. Although the MAPP organizers work to empower diverse Latino/a communities, this does not mean that all people in the neighborhood who identify as Latino/a always feel welcome, included, or invited into the MAPP. For example, the *mappers/as* seem to be largely bilingual in English and Spanish, but there don't seem to be many involved who only speak Spanish (although many monolingual Spanish speakers do live in the neighborhood, including a continual flow of new immigrants). On the other hand, it could be argued that many monolingual English speakers, and many native English speakers who speak only some Spanish (such as myself), are involved and feel welcome. Such critiques are not unknown to the organizers of the MAPP, and because of the project's flexible structure, conversations are always going on regarding how to change and improve it, and how to reach out more to those groups that need support.

Those individuals and groups involved with the MAPP are not exclusively people from the neighborhood or people who grew up there. But the people involved are *invested* in the neighborhood. As Cristina said,

There's people that grew up in the Mission that participate in MAPP, there's people that moved here two months ago that participate in MAPP... I just feel like

all you can do is, if you benefit all from the incredible culture and opportunities that are magical in this neighborhood, you just got to respect and work twice as hard if you want to be a part of it, and that's what I'm trying to do, and through a MAPP I feel that I can contribute in that way... I recognize that I have to give back twice what I'm taking because, you know, I didn't help build this neighborhood, I'm just trying to help the next generation. (Personal interview, 7/17/12)

Cristina's comments speak to a passion for the neighborhood and its future. Although there are no signs that the gentrification of the neighborhood is over or slowing down, many individuals strive to find ways to contest these processes. They do this by investing their time and energy in the neighborhood's spaces, networks, and communities; and by attempting to stabilize relations that will continue to provide opportunities to those most disempowered by the processes at work.

Geography and Art

Although there is a growing interest among human geographers in art as an object of study (Hawkins, 2011, 2013; Rogers, 2012; Marston and de Leeuw, 2013), geographers have not yet taken full advantage of the fact that we are well-positioned to produce truly important work on the potential role of the arts in social and spatial justice. Scholars of other disciplines are utilizing concepts of space to begin to understand and theorize the practice of community arts (Chapple and Jackson 2010, Verschelden et al. 2012), but geographers can undoubtedly make important theoretical and empirical contributions to this work that can affect and empower artists, residents, community workers, planners, policy makers, and educators interested in social justice.

Chapple and Jackson (2010) discuss recent literature in urban studies and planning on community-based art projects that empower local communities:

This work is showing how smaller arts venues and cultural activities based in

low-income neighborhoods—including a host of nonarts amenities that allow for cultural participation and creative expression, such as community centers, churches, and parks—can serve as catalysts for gradual change while benefiting the existing community. (481)

However, as Chapple and Jackson point out, more collaboration is needed between social scientists and humanities scholars in order to conceptualize more fully the potential role of the arts in communities, neighborhoods, and cities, especially if we want (and here I will assume that we *do* want) to understand the most effective ways that aesthetic projects can be in alignment with social justice goals. Chapple and Jackson write: “Despite a common concern for social change, the humanistic arts and social science fields continue to be divided—by theory and practice, epistemologies, and even language” (478).

This research in the Mission District has brought to bear a few notable things to which future researchers should be attentive. First, artists of color are not adequately addressed in the scholarship on gentrification and art. Second, and in alignment with Gill Valentine’s geographies of encounter, geographers need to better understand when and how aesthetic practices, encounters, and sites are produced that are empowering for disenfranchised groups, rather than appropriating of their creative practices. Third, one of the crucial things that the “creative (re)turn” (Marston and de Leeuw, 2013) in geography can hopefully work toward is new language with which to describe and think about how situated creative practices open up new possibilities for empowerment and new conceptualizations for how urban life can be experienced. Specifically, instead of talking about art as “resistance” or as “political,” what I am calling for are ways to see politics, resistance, and social change as made up of creative, everyday practices. These practices are negotiated and lived in sites produced not only by social processes, but by a myriad of

human and non-human relations. These relations are not all knowable or sayable, but they demand to be explored, and like many geographers, the *mappers/as* are some of those individuals who feel the insistent call to explore new, more just worlds.

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