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Abstract

This essay examines the performance and video art piece *Cosmic Blood*, by Gigi Oltavaro-Hormillosa, a queer Colombian and Filipina American artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. It argues that *Cosmic Blood* is a performative intervention into dominant modes of reading the racialized and gendered Filipina body, as well as a critique of absolutist notions of national and ethnic belonging. *Cosmic Blood* challenges the inherent heteronormativity and masculinism of dominant notions of nation and kinship, accomplishing this imaginative intervention by its retroping of the past through a lens of queer desire. Within Oltavaro-Hormillosa's retelling of the moment of first contact, queer bodily desire is the locus of power relations between colonizer and colonized. In this vision of the past, the figure of the Filipina is presented as a desiring subject, resisting the overdetermined tropes of woman as nation, territory, and land that are both a legacy of colonization, and a persistent narrative within contemporary articulations of national and diasporic belonging. In doing so, *Cosmic Blood* presents a possibility for forms of belonging that exceed the absolutism of race, ethnicity, and nation, while also imagining a utopian vision of the future that critiques the material conditions of the present.

Keywords

Cosmic Blood, performance art, Filipina, heteronormativity

Disciplines

Asian Studies | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | South and Southeast Asian Languages and Societies

EL OTRO ENCUENTRO
GIGI OTALVARO-HORMILLOSA'S "NEO-QUEER
PRECOLONIAL IMAGINING"

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*This essay examines the performance and video art piece *Cosmic Blood*, by Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa, a queer Colombian and Filipina American artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. It argues that *Cosmic Blood* is a performative intervention into dominant modes of reading the racialized and gendered Filipina body, as well as a critique of absolutist notions of national and ethnic belonging. *Cosmic Blood* challenges the inherent heteronormativity and masculinism of dominant notions of nation and kinship, accomplishing this imaginative intervention by its retroping of the past through a lens of queer desire. Within Otalvaro-Hormillosa's retelling of the moment of first contact, queer bodily desire is the locus of power relations between colonizer and colonized. In this vision of the past, the figure of the Filipina is presented as a desiring subject, resisting the overdetermined tropes of woman as nation, territory, and land that are both a legacy of colonization, and a persistent narrative within contemporary articulations of national and diasporic belonging. In doing so, *Cosmic Blood* presents a possibility for forms of belonging that exceed the absolutism of race, ethnicity, and nation, while also imagining a utopian vision of the future that critiques the material conditions of the present.*

Given a history of colonization and a contemporary logic of global capitalism, the Filipina body is read through multiple lenses of corporeal difference in relation to race, gender, and sexuality. This essay examines the performance and video art piece *Cosmic Blood*, by Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa, a queer Colombian and Filipina American artist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. I argue that *Cosmic Blood* is a performative intervention into dominant modes of reading the racialized and gendered queer Filipina body, as well a critique of absolutist notions of

national and ethnic belonging. As such, the piece challenges the inherent heteronormativity and masculinism of dominant notions of nation and kinship. *Cosmic Blood* accomplishes this imaginative intervention by its retroping of the past through a lens of queer desire. Within this retelling of the moment of first contact, queer bodily desire is the locus of power relations between colonizer and colonized. In this vision of the past, the figure of the Filipina is presented as a desiring subject, resisting the overdetermined tropes of woman as nation, territory, and land that are both a legacy of colonization, and a persistent narrative within contemporary articulations of national and diasporic belonging. In doing so, *Cosmic Blood* presents a possibility for forms of belonging that exceed the absolutism of race, ethnicity, and nation, while also imagining a utopian vision of the future that critiques the material conditions of the present. The modes of belonging presented in *Cosmic Blood* suggest an understanding of diaspora based on a collectivity founded on shared historical trauma, common political goals, and hope for a better future, rather than heteronormative notions of family and kinship. In doing so, *Cosmic Blood* suggests both a critique of normative Filipino American cultural politics, and a call for a broader transnational imagination.

On March 1, 2003, Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa performed *Cosmic Blood* at Bindlestiff Studio, a small theater in the South of Market neighborhood of San Francisco. Described as the “epicenter of Filipino American arts,” Bindlestiff Studio serves as a center for Filipino American theater, live music, spoken word, dance and other performing arts.¹ *Cosmic Blood* combined video and performance art with live electronic music by Melissa Dougherty, a DJ and electronic music composer. Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s larger body of work explores themes of historical memory, racial performativity, sexuality, and belonging. *Cosmic Blood* explores hybridity as a mode of resistance to colonial paradigms of racial and gender difference. In her artist’s statement, Otavaro-Hormillosa describes her work,

I combine movement, text, video and percussion in performances that create possibilities for transformation in understanding the fluid, ethereal and sex-positive manifestations of subversive hybridity. My concept of (a)eromestizaje challenges stereotypical representations of identity, community and sexuality that I explore through the aerodynamic filter of a new “mestizaje” (the term that describes the Spanish/indigenous race mixture of Latin America and

the Philippines) in which there is a constant, yet shifting interplay between racial and sexual identities (www.devilbunny.org, accessed January 2004).

Cosmic Blood can be contextualized within her larger project of exploring the “shifting interplay between racial and sexual identities” (Otalvaro-Hormillosa 2004). In particular, *Cosmic Blood* retropes the narrative of colonization in order to reimagine the past and question how belonging is constructed in a postcolonial present.

Cosmic Blood begins with visual metaphors of gestation and birth. A disembodied voice is amplified throughout the theater, describing “a girl with a tail in her ass” who emerges from “a gourd in the shape of a womb.” The text, “Change is God” is projected onto a video screen at the back of the stage. The text then rearranges itself to form the statement “God is change.” On stage, an eight foot high, hollow, white gourd-shaped object is visible, lit from within. The outline of a pulsing figure can be seen through the gourd’s semi-translucent white walls. The disembodied voice continues, stating, “the girl with the tail in her ass, a transformative being she was...their civilizations were in different stages of evolutionary process...the earth people were quite young in the cosmic scheme of existence.” Meanwhile, Otalvaro-Hormillosa cavorts about stage with a make believe “tail,” chanting, “girl with a tail in her ass” while holding a Jew’s harp behind her to represent the “tail” of the foreign, half animal, half human, native Other. This scene of gestation is followed by the second scene, which begins with the text “The Approach” projected onto the video screen at the back of the stage. Otalvaro-Hormillosa writhes on the ground, covered by what appears to be a fur skin, in a birthing scene of pain and transformation. While the performer writhes underneath the fur, mechanical sounds accompany her robotic, jerky movements. Still underneath the fur skin, Otalvaro-Hormillosa begins to crawl across the floor, rolling on the ground and partially crawling up the walls. This period of movement seems to stretch temporally, lasting for at least fifteen minutes without dialogue. The tempo is slow and consistent, drawing out the movement on stage. Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s character suggests both the birth of a new figure, a mestiza of mixed “cosmic blood,” as well as the animalistic corporeality of the native Other within colonial paradigms of racial and gender difference.

Described as “young in the cosmic scheme of existence,”

Otalvaro-Hormillosa's "girl with the tail in her ass" invokes a colonial past through a reimagining of first contact. Referring to evolutionist paradigms of the period of colonization, and to the figure of a native, primitive Other, Otalvaro-Hormillosa reimagines the moment of colonization through a speculative, science fictional mode. Analogizing evolutionist paradigms of the native Other to scenes of gestation and birth, Otalvaro-Hormillosa performs the birthing scene of "the girl with the tail in her ass." The gestation and birth represented onstage is a corporeal manifestation of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's vision of a new mestiza, a figure whose subjectivity – in which race, ethnicity, and sexuality are co-constitutive – emerges as the painful result of histories of colonization, genocide, and sexual violence. As a mixed race, queer woman of Colombian and Filipino descent, Otalvaro-Hormillosa draws on her own experiences to posit a theory of what she terms "hybridity as survival."² *Cosmic Blood* is both a reimagining of the past, a corporeal remembering of the colonizer/colonized dichotomy, and a hopeful vision of the future, one in which racial/ethnic/gender/sexual hybridity is necessary to survival.



Conquistador

Central to this retroping of the past is a focus on queer bodily desire as an organizing principle for reimagining the point of first contact. This reimagining of the relationship of colonization to the queer racialized body

is most apparent through the images and text Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents in her video work. These video images are projected on a screen at the back of the stage throughout the duration of the performance. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's dialogue, movement, and percussion occur in a dialogic relationship to the images presented on the video screen behind her. The sequence of images presented are composed of a series of short scenes, about 3-5 seconds long, with quick editing from one disparate image to another. The first scene shows a barely clad young Filipina woman with long flowing hair standing on a beach, ostensibly signifying virgin, unspoiled land. The next scene represents both a symbolic and literal conquest/rape. In this scene, Otalvaro-Hormillosa, wearing a helmet and cape, represents an androgynous figure of the conquistadoras she straddles the now naked young woman from the previous scene. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's conquistador figure struggles with the naked woman as she straddles her. The scene invokes a feeling of bondage and sadomasochism, as the sensual, violent interactions between the two women vacillate between eroticism and domination. At one point, the naked woman strikes the conquistador figure with her helmet. The naked woman then straddles the conquistador figure while she ties her up with a silky scarf. Interspersed between these scenes of violence and eroticism is a scene of the Filipina woman walking hand in hand with a light-skinned Latino man on a beach. Breaking up the sequence is a close-up image of a miniature nipa hut, a sign of Filipino rural/indigenous culture that is made ironic by its representation as a piece of tourist art. Meanwhile, Otalvaro-Hormillosa is on stage, performing what appear to be sexual gestures on stage while wearing a conquistador helmet. In the background, the video scene then switches to Otalvaro-Hormillosa's conquistador character pantomiming anal penetration of the naked Latino man. These graphic images of both eroticism and domination represent the sexual trauma of colonization through a different lens, that of queer desire. In doing so, this traumatic past is not negated, but rather, reimagined through the eyes of the desiring Filipina subject. The next video scene shifts to an image of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's conquistador figure passionately kissing the naked young Filipina woman. On stage, Otalvaro-Hormillosa ends this portion of the performance lying on her back. Is she defeated or merely sated with corporeal pleasure?

The next scene begins with the following text projected on the video screen,

“El Otro Encuentro
A neo-queer

precolonial imagining”

In the proceeding video image, Otalvaro-Hormillosa, dressed in a sarong, is sitting on a blanket in an open field, playing the Jew’s harp, followed by the text,

“When did you see me first?”

The subsequent scene shows an African American woman, dressed in a white gauzy material, cautiously approaching Otalvaro-Hormillosa. The following text then appears,

“How would we see each other now”

In the accompanying video image, Otalvaro-Hormillosa and an African American woman carefully consider each other as they draw closer, followed by the text,

“if we had never been taught to see each other?”

In between the lines of text on the screen are images of the two women embracing, of two men (Latino and Filipino) struggling and having sex, a close-up of two women’s bodies moving against each other, of the men engaging in oral sex, of hands gripping a back and caressing it from behind, and finally a return to the original scene in the open field, in which Otalvaro-Hormillosa is lying on top of the African American woman. Throughout this scene, the electronic music shifts from a slow and ethereal mood, to a quicker, more frenetic beat as the intensity increases and the tempo of the editing between the images becomes faster.

In these video images, Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents an alternative figuring of the point of contact, what she terms a “neo-queer precolonial imagining.” Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents a reimagining of the past in which queer desire figures as a locus of relations of power between the colonizer and the colonized. Through the temporal disjuncture implied by the juxtaposition of “neo-queer” with “precolonial” (“across time and space”), Otalvaro-Hormillosa suggests both a different moment of contact and an alternative mode of recognition between colonized peoples – one that is shaped by queer desire. She asks, “How would we see each other now, if we had never been taught to see each other?” Otalvaro-Hormillosa

foregrounds the hybrid body as the site in which a “queer” history of colonization can be envisioned. In doing so, Otalvaro-Hormillosa challenges the equation of colonized bodies to territory. As the text on screen states, “Our bodies once land,” Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents images of the colonized, queer body which challenge the conflation of body with land. Further, the images presented in *Cosmic Blood* challenge the equation of woman with territory, nation, and land. The nude Filipina woman presented in these images exists as a *desiring subject*, that is, a subject who both desires and resists the violence of the colonizer. As a desiring queer subject, the nude Filipina woman functions neither as a figure for the nation, nor as a passive victim of colonial violence.

As Norma Alarcón, Caren Kaplan, and Minoq Moallem remark in their introduction to the collection *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, “...notions such as country, homeland, region, locality, and ethnicity and *their construction through racialization, sexualization, and the genderization of female corporeality* become crucial sites of inquiry and investigation” (Kaplan et. al 1999, 14, emphasis mine). As such, the bodies of women have historically been constructed as signs of national belonging. In contrast, the figure of the Filipina body presented in these video images resists the overdetermined tropes of woman as territory or woman as nation — heteronormative and masculinist tropes which typify colonial paradigms, as well as more recent anti-colonial nationalist movements. Interspersed between scenes of the nude Filipina woman walking hand in hand with a light-skinned Latino man are scenes of physical conflict and eroticized violence between the nude Filipina woman and Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s androgynous conquistador figure, as well as explicit gay male sex. Through the sequence titled “El Otro Encuentro: a neo-queer precolonial imagining,” *Cosmic Blood* presents images of queer bodies struggling to both dominate and recognize each other, an intimate act that is ultimately a dance of recognition. The animated sequence that follows depicts two figures, one emerging from the Americas, the other from the African continent, superimposed upon a map of the world, suggesting an imagining of the past in which colonized subjects learn to see each other’s racialized bodies across national and hemispheric borders. Here the sensual exploration of bodies functions as a different way of *knowing each other*, beyond the colonizer/colonized paradigm.

“HYBRIDITY AS CREATION, AS DESTRUCTION, AS TRANSFORMATION”

The theme of hybridity as a strategy of survival is foregrounded in Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s writing, performance, and video work. Positioned as a site of resistance, hybridity functions within the realm of the utopian in *Cosmic Blood*. In the fourth scene, Otalvaro-Hormillosa plays conga drums as she states, “Cumbia! A product of mestizaje,” invoking the Afro-Latin dance, the “Cumbia” as a metaphor for postcolonial hybridity. In this act, Otalvaro-Hormillosa exhorts the audience to begin a “mixed race movement.” She begins a litany of praises of ethnic and racial mixes in the San Francisco Bay Area, “Thank Creator for the Bay Area! Thank Creator for Mexipinos! Thank creator for Chicanoriquenos! Thank Creator for Afro-Korean military children! Thank creator for JaimaicArgentinians!” She then goes on to discuss her own body as a sign of mestizaje, by humorously referencing the racial and ethnic stereotypes that her queer Filipina-Colombian body negotiates in the context of the U.S. Shifting from her self-description as “petite Oriental girl” to “macho/a oversexualized Hispanic — whoops, I mean Latino!” Otalvaro-Hormillosa demonstrates the shifting codes through which her queer, mixed-race body is read within discourses of U.S. multiculturalism. Although located in a humorous monologue, Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s call for a mixed race movement is earnest in its yearning for forms of belonging that exceed the existing modes of reading the racialized queer body. The colonized subject survives the sexual violence of the colonial past through a hybrid existence in the present.

The title of the performance, *Cosmic Blood*, is a play on Jose Vasconcelos’ idea that the mix of European, indigenous, Asian, and African peoples in the Americas creates a “cosmic race.”³ Within the piece, Vasconcelos’ notion of “the cosmic race” is emblematic of a reimagined past and a hopeful future, both of which rely on a perhaps overly utopian notion of hybridity as survival, hybridity as resistance. Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s use of the terms “cosmic blood” and “mestizaje” implicitly references Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of “mestiza consciousness.” In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa quotes Jack Forbes in her discussion of Jose Vasconcelos’ notion of “the cosmic race,”

‘Jose Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, envisaged una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color – la primera raza sintesis

del globo. He called it a cosmic race, la raza cosmica, a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world.’ Opposite to the theory of the pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity. At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination, an “alien” consciousness is presently in the making – *a new mestiza consciousness, una consciencia de mujer. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands* (Forbes cited in Anzaldúa 1999, 99, my emphasis).

Anzaldúa utilizes the metaphor of racial/blood mixing in her positing of a feminist, queer understanding of belonging in relation to race and ethnicity. While invoking corporeal metaphors of blood and genes, Anzaldúa’s notion of mixing occurs not at the level of the corporeal, but rather, at the level of consciousness. A “mestiza consciousness” relates less to biologist notions of blood/genetic mixing and more to an understanding of subjectivity, and of belonging, that foregrounds queer sexuality as a destabilizing site, one that unfixes stable notions of race or ethnicity. Otalvaro-Hormillosa implicitly draws on Anzaldúa’s notion of “mestiza consciousness” in her use of queer sexuality as a deconstructive lever for unfixing the overdetermined relationship between gender, nation, and belonging. Resisting masculinist and heteronormative cultural nationalist formations, Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness” proposes a different mode of belonging, one that resists the trope of woman as a maternal figure for the nation. Anzaldúa states,

As mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.)...I am participating in the creation of yet another culture; a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet (Anzaldúa 1999, 102, emphasis mine).

Here Anzaldúa proposes a mode of belonging that produces different narratives of ethnic or national belonging. Anzaldúa’s notion of “mestiza consciousness” is one that foregrounds queer sexuality as a destabilizing intervention into cultural nationalist modes of collectivity constituted by

masculinist and various heteronormative understanding of the relationship between race, ethnicity, kinship, and nation. In doing so, Anzaldúa creates the possibility for other origin stories.

In some senses, Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" is a more theoretically specific notion of mixing than the more generalized notion of hybridity. A term that has been mobilized by many postcolonial and diaspora theorists, hybridity is a dominant model for understanding postcolonial subjectivity (Bhabha 1994, Muñoz 1995, Clifford 1997). Embedded as it is within racialized discourses of eugenics and miscegenation, hybridity is a problematic metaphor for theorizing alternative relationships between corporeal difference, bodies, and belonging. Alternatively, concepts such as "mestiza consciousness" and Jose Muñoz's "queer hybridity" foreground the constitutive role of queer sexuality in destabilizing notions of difference and belonging in the postcolonial/neocolonial present. Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" and Muñoz's "queer hybridity" allow for a deconstruction of the binaries produced both by cultural nationalist modes of belonging and paradigms of the colonizer/colonized. Refusing the cultural nationalist paradigms which conflate women with nation, and subsequently reify the colonizer/colonized distinction, Anzaldúa calls for a "border consciousness" that remains attentive to postcolonial subjectivities produced across the interstitial spaces between race, nation, gender, and sexuality. In contrast to teleological narratives of belonging, Anzaldúa calls for other origin stories, beyond the heteronormative framework of kinship, which position women as the (re)producers of a stable national culture. *Cosmic Blood* is another kind of origin story, one that reimagines the colonial past through queer desire, while presenting a future in which alternative modes of kinship and belonging can exist.

Although not explicitly in conversation with Anzaldúa's notion of a "mestiza consciousness," Jose Muñoz's discussion of queer hybridity is useful in conceptualizing the relationship between queer sexuality and the postcolonial subject. Muñoz juxtaposes the terms "queer" and "hybridity" not to essentialize the meanings of either term, but rather to suggest that the combination of "queer hybridity" can function as a matrix of understanding for unfixed or unstable identity formations. Muñoz states, "The important point here is that identity practices like queerness and hybridity are not a priori sites of contestation but, instead, spaces of productivity where identity's fragmentary nature is accepted and negotiated" (Muñoz 1995, 85). Muñoz posits the notion of *disidentification* as a performative mode

of resisting the interpellating call of race and ethnicity issued by dominant discourses of multiculturalism in the U.S. (Muñoz 1999, 166). Within a dominant discourse of multiculturalism in the U.S., racial and ethnic differences are “celebrated” while a white dominant culture is reaffirmed as the norm. The notion of “celebrating difference” buttresses a racial hierarchy in the U.S. in which a white cultural norm is validated, while ethnic and racial difference is reduced to banal stereotypes, as well as commodities to be consumed. In contrast, Muñoz’s notion of disidentification involves not a reformulation of identity, but rather a rejection of the very discourses through which a dominant U.S. multiculturalism interpellates racialized and ethnic subjects (Muñoz 199, 166). Muñoz understands queer hybridity as a performative act of disidentification with dominant discourses of race, nation, and belonging. He states,

Thus to perform queerness is to constantly disidentify; to constantly find oneself thriving on sites where meaning does not properly “line up.” This is equally true of hybridity, another modality where meaning or identifications do not properly line up. The postcolonial hybrid is a subject whose identity practices are structured around an ambivalent relationship to the signs of empire and the signs of “Native,” a subject who occupies a space between the West and the rest (Muñoz 1995, 84).

In relating queer performative practices of disidentification to postcolonial subjectivity, Muñoz presents a productive framework for understanding Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood*. Through both her video images and her performance, Otalvaro-Hormillosa conceptualizes queer sexuality as a mode of destabilizing the colonizer/colonized paradigm and cultural nationalist models of conflating race and ethnicity with belonging. Her presentation of the visual images of queer bodies and queer sex could be considered a performative act of disidentification, in Jose Muñoz’s sense of the term. The desiring Filipina subject is central to this figuring of queer desire as a mode of disidentification towards colonialist modes of reading corporeal difference on racialized and gendered bodies. Further, *Cosmic Blood* presents a *resignification* of the signs of Native and Empire, framed within a lens of queer desire. These visual images — the naked Filipina woman standing on a beach, the macho, yet androgynous, conquistador figure, the “girl with tail in her ass” — reenact and resignify colonial relations of power through an eroticized same sex desire. Their struggles, to both recognize and dominate each other, are represented through the visual images of the video art projected on screen, and through the dialogue and movement on stage. In

“El Otro Encuentro: A Neo-Queer Precolonial Imagining,” Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents a reimagining of the first meeting of “African” and “native” peoples. Here Otalvaro-Hormillosa imagines an alternative mode for colonized peoples to recognize each other, one that is fundamentally shaped by queer desire. This imagining of a different kind of first contact rejects the overdetermined discourse of colonial visibility by presenting queer, colored bodies that resist the taxonomizing imperative of colonial visual regimes.

THE CYBORG BODY: IMAGINING OTHER MODES OF (TRANS)NATIONAL BELONGING

The last act in *Cosmic Blood* continues the theme of hybridity. However, instead of returning the colonial past, this scene presents a cyborg future. The scene begins with the following text on the video screen, “Beginnings of Endings,” accompanied by Otalvaro-Hormillosa stating,

“Blood
Dispersion
Thought
Time
And
Space
Hybridization as survival”

The next video scene is an animated image of a spaceship arriving on the surface of a planet, followed by the text, “Mestiza from Another Planet.” The following video scene is a close-up of Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s shaved head, her entire face and scalp painted blue. Her face undergoes multiple contortions, eyes shifting back and forth in robotic, jerky movements, while mechanical noises can be heard in the background. On stage, Otalvaro-Hormillosa has transformed into an alien creature inside the huge gourd, which has been stripped of its walls and now only exists as a skeleton.

The new blue alien version of Otalvaro-Hormillosa is constituted by the performer’s shaved blue head atop a compact body draped in white cloth, with a mechanical motorized contraption for “legs” and a white fur tail. With jerky, robotic movements, the blue alien travels across the stage, transported by the wheels of its mechanical bottom half. At first the blue alien appears limbless, but later it raises its “arms,” made of shiny,

metal rods. The slow, shaking movements with which the blue alien raises its “arms” seems to be a process of growth, an expansion accompanied by the facial contortions of Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s blue alien/robot creature. The last scene of *Cosmic Blood* is a dark stage with a spotlight on a hole in the floor of the stage, through which the blue alien creature’s head protrudes. The head slowly raises and lowers through the hole in the stage, as Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s face contorts. Is this pain? Growth? Transformation? The final scene then ends with words from *Parable of the Sower*, a science fiction novel by African American writer Octavia Butler, “The destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars.”



Blue Cyborg

Beginning with the words “Mestiza from Another Planet” this scene analogizes European colonization to the colonization of other planets, a move that situates Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s retroping of the past in a science fictional mode. This science fictional mode is the basis for Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s imagining of the future, one in which hybridization is a means of survival. Beginning her performance with the words “God is change...Change is God,”⁴ Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa frames *Cosmic Blood* as a response to Octavia Butler’s science fiction novel *Parable of the Sower*. Throughout the performance, Otalvaro-Hormillosa references the words of the character Lauren Olamina, the African American prophet and leader of the multiracial collective called Earthseed, described in *Parable of the Sower*. In the context of a post-apocalyptic United States,

the members of Earthseed gather around their shared beliefs that “God is change;” that is, the only higher power to which one can pledge one’s faith is to the inevitability of change, and to the necessity of adapting to one’s surroundings. The novel is set in the year 2025 in a town close to Los Angeles. The context is one of urban violence and decay, in which few people have access to food, water, or shelter, and the material infrastructure is deteriorating or nonexistent. Few people drive cars, as there is no more fuel, water is expensive, and the few people who can afford homes lived in walled off communities. Diseases such as cholera and measles have become epidemics, as few people have access to clean water or health care. Arson, murder, mutilation, and robbery are the everyday risks of survival. Within this dystopic setting, Lauren Olamina’s collective, Earthseed, views change and adaptation as the only means of survival. As part of their beliefs, Earthseed idealizes space travel as the only path of redemption for the human race. Implicit in Octavia Butler’s description of Earthseed is both an affirmation of the need to transcend race in the post-apocalyptic order, and a statement about the pervasiveness of race in all social contexts. Here, racial integration is required for survival. Through her reference to *Parable of the Sower*, Otalvaro-Hormillosa reiterates the theme of hybridity, and racial integration, as necessary for survival in the postcolonial present. In referencing Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, Otalvaro-Hormillosa reiterates the necessity of hybridity to a vision of the future that can exceed colonial taxonomies of difference. In this utopian/dystopic vision of the future, one must change and become hybrid in order to survive and flourish. A multiracial coalitional politics, not a transcendence of race, must develop in order for the human race to survive the apocalypse.

Repeating Earthseed’s belief in the necessity of adaptation, Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s blue alien creature is the physical manifestation of the hybridity she posits as both a necessity for survival and a site of subversive potential. Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s transformation to the blue alien robot creature forces a shift in the audience’s perception of the performer’s body. This is both a shift in embodiment, and a foregrounding of the body of the colonized as the ground upon which struggles between colonizer/colonized take place. The overt bodily presence of the previous scenes, of Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s writhing form, draped in fur, and of the naked forms of Filipino, African American, and Latino women and men struggling/engaging in sexual acts in the video scenes, shifts to the forced disembodiment of the blue alien’s robotic form, whose only movement is propelled by the obviously motorized nature of its “body.” The science fictional site of the future, represented through the blue alien robot, is the utopian site

of possibility, where hybridity is represented both by bodily pain, through the metaphor of birth, sexual violence, and by the disembodiment of the transformation from human to machine. In this sense, one of the ways to retrope the historical narrative of colonization is through the imagining of a *disembodied* future – a future that produces an alternative relationship of selves to bodies.

Cosmic Blood can be contextualized within a larger context of Surrealism, which emphasized practices of imagination in the service of radical social change. In Robin Kelley's *Freedom Dreams*, Kelley describes Afrofuturism as the Surrealist practice of imagining a different future through a reimagining of the past (Kelley 2002). Perhaps one of the most idealistic of utopian artistic movements, Surrealism sought to create a different world through practices of imagination. According to the Chicago Surrealist Group,

Surrealism is the exaltation of freedom, revolt, imagination, and love... Its basic aim is to lessen and eventually to completely resolve the contradiction between everyday life and our wildest dreams. By definition subversive, surrealist thought and action are intended not only to discredit and destroy the forces of repression, but also to emancipate desire and supply it with new poetic weapons... Beginning with the abolition of imagiNative slavery, it advances to the creation of a free society in which everyone will be a poet – a society in which everyone will be able to develop his or her potentialities fully and freely (Chicago Surrealist Group cited in Kelley, 2002, 5, emphasis mine).

Kelley links the futurist mode of such popular musicians as Sun-Ra to Surrealist art, describing both as utopian practices that produce counter-imaginings, alternative visions of the future that escape the material conditions of the present. Afrofuturism accomplished this through a reimagining of the past in a futuristic mode. Linking the music of Sun-Ra to the “Back to Africa” movement, Kelley describes Sun Ra and his band, the Arkestra, modeled after Sun Ra's idea of an intergalactic Ark that could return to Egypt through the metaphor of outer space. Sun Ra and other proponents of Afrofuturism “looked backward in order to look forward, finding the cosmos by way of ancient Egypt” (Kelley 2002, 31). In this way, a science fictional/futuristic mode functions as a Surrealist intervention in the present, a way to both critique and go beyond the

material conditions of the present. In discussing the Afrofuturism of Sun-Ra, Kelley states, “At the heart of Sun-Ra’s vision was the notion of alter/destiny — the idea that through the creation of new myths we have the power to redirect the future” (Kelley 2002, 31). Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s *Cosmic Blood* accomplishes a similar goal of creating new origin stories — reimagining the colonial past in order to envision a different future. As a practice of imagining that retroposes the past in order to posit a more hopeful, and perhaps revolutionary, future, *Cosmic Blood* employs the metaphors of intergalactic travel and cyborg transformation to reimagine a different relationship of the body of the colonized — specifically of Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s mixed race, queer, Filipina-Colombian body — to a history of colonization and forced assimilation. Thus, the cyborg body of Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s blue alien/robot becomes a corporeal manifestation of hybridity as a means of survival. A literal mix of the corporeal and the machine, Otalvaro-Hormillosa’s blue, mechanized body is a science fictional mode of imagining “hybridity as creation, as destruction, as transformation” (Otalvaro-Hormillosa 2003). Much like Sun Ra’s notion of the Ark as a means of returning to both the past and to an alternative future, *Cosmic Blood* functions as a Surrealist intervention into the reality of everyday life, in which subjects are shaped by multiple histories of colonization and forced assimilation. According to Kelley,

Surrealism recognizes that any revolution must begin with thought, with how we imagine a New World, with how we reconstruct our social and individual relationships, with unleashing our desire and building a new future on the basis of love and creativity rather than rationality” (Kelley 2002, 193).

In this sense, *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a type of Surrealist, futurist longing, one that retroposes the past in order to imagine an alternative future — a future in which the queer, racialized body of the Filipina possesses subjectivity outside of the logic of global capitalism. Within the logic of global capitalism, which is both an effect and extension of colonial taxonomies of difference, the Filipina body is commodified for the sexual and domestic labor that her brown body provides. In a global economy that is bolstered by gendered forms of migrant labor from the Philippines, the Filipina body is both commodified for her corporeal labor, while also rendered as a racial and ethnic Other.

As a Surrealist intervention into both the legacy of colonial

difference and the everyday logic of contemporary capitalism, *Cosmic Blood* imagines other modes of subjectivity for Filipina women. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's shift to the blue, alien robot in the last scene of *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a forced shift in the perception/recognition of embodiment. This shift in modes of recognition destabilizes the codes of racial, sexual, and gender difference that are inscribed onto the performer's (human) body. Rather than existing as the "petite Oriental girl" or "macho/a oversexualized Latino," Otalvaro-Hormillosa forces the audience to perceive her transformed body, one that is no longer anchored by the organic materiality of a human body, but rather exists as a hybrid, cyborg body. Here the codes of race, gender, and sexuality become blurry. In the realm of the surreal, the cyborg body allows for a recoding of racial and gender difference. *Cosmic Blood* can then be understood as an act of disidentification, in Muñoz's sense of the term — a performative and imaginative act through which subjects resist the interpellating call of race and ethnicity issued by both U.S. multiculturalism, as well as broader discourses of global capitalism (Muñoz 1999 and Chow 2002).

ANOTHER TRANSNATIONAL IMAGINATION, OTHER ORIGIN STORIES

In Otalvaro-Hormillosa's theorization of belonging, blood serves as both solvent and coagulant. Throughout the performance, blood serves as a metaphor for belonging, kinship, mixing. It is through the biological metaphor of blood mixing that Otalvaro-Hormillosa imagines a different past and future. Invoking Vasconcelos' notion of "the cosmic race" through the title of the piece, *Cosmic Blood*, Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents other forms of belonging that escape the solitary and cohesive boundaries of race and ethnicity.⁵ Historically, blood has served as a biological referent for racial difference. A result of biological discourses which have solidified racial difference in the materiality of the body, blood is pervasive as a marker of difference, kinship, and belonging. In her juxtaposition of "cosmic" with "blood," Otalvaro-Hormillosa utilizes a science fictional mode to retrope the meanings of "blood." This juxtaposition shifts the meaning of "blood" from the level of the flesh to the ethereal nature of the "cosmic," that which is not rooted in the material reality of the ground, but rather exists in the stars. In doing so, this juxtaposition unfixes the biologism of "blood." The ambiguous biologism suggested by Otalvaro-Hormillosa's use of the term "blood" is partially reflected by the performer's shift in embodiment, from her ambiguously gendered, racially mixed, Filipina-Colombian body to

that of the blue alien robot — a shift from the organic to the non-human realm of the mechanical. Does this shift — from the biological fleshiness of the human body to a partially inorganic, alien hybrid — destabilize the corporeal materiality of “blood?” Otaño-Hormillosa’s notion of “cosmic blood” can be understood as an attempt to transcend the organic, biological meanings of the term “blood,” rooted as they are in discourses of miscegenation and eugenics.

What are other possibilities for conceptualizing difference and belonging, in relation to bodies? Donna Haraway calls for a mode of belonging that exceeds the framework of kinship,

I am sick to death of bonding through kinship and “the family,” and I long for models of solidarity and human unity and difference rooted in friendship, work, partially shared purposes, *intractable collective pain*, inescapable mortality, and *persistent hope*. It is time to theorize an “unfamiliar” unconscious, a different primal scene, where everything does not stem from the drama of identity and reproduction. Ties through blood – including blood recast in the coin of genes and information – have been bloody enough already. I believe that there will be no racial or sexual peace, no livable nature, *until we learn to produce humanity through something more and less than kinship* (Haraway 1997, 265, emphasis mine).

Drawing on Haraway’s call for another mode of imagining belonging, *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a different story of origins, one that exceeds the teleological framework of “the family.” As such, *Cosmic Blood* also functions as a critique of dominant cultural nationalist modes of belonging, which present a heteronormative model of kinship as the organizing model for community. Indeed, *Cosmic Blood* challenges the teleological narratives of origins produced by such cultural nationalist formations. Further, *Cosmic Blood* presents the Filipina body as a desiring subject; it is through desire that *Cosmic Blood* imagines another mode of subjectivity for Filipina women, as well as a mode of humanity, that exists in opposition to the logic of global capitalism.

Similar to how the juxtaposition of “cosmic” with “blood” unfixes the biologism of blood as a metaphor for belonging, perhaps Otaño-Hormillosa’s cyborg body can serve as a provisional figure for other modes of diasporic belonging.⁶ Awkward and uncomfortable in its “skin,” the

blue alien robot nonetheless functions as a figure for *mestizaje* that suggests modes of belonging that exceed normative gender and racial inscriptions, which are both legacies of colonial taxonomies of difference, as well as effects of global capitalist logic. Instead, Otalvaro-Hormillosa's blue cyborg body suggests that contemporary notions of belonging must transcend the limitations of dominant discourses of race, gender, and nation. I foreground a dominant capitalist logic that produces Filipina bodies as racialized and gendered commodities — as “bodies without subjectivity”³⁷ — as the *discursive and material context* in which modes of transnational or diasporic belonging are articulated. Given the national Philippine uproar following the execution of Filipina OCW Flor Contemplacion, it is clear that the gendered Filipina body continues to function as an ambivalent figure for both the Philippine nation and the Filipino diaspora. With this material context in mind, *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a performative intervention into gendered and heteronormative modes of representing the nation in the diaspora. Rather than presenting the gendered Filipina body as a sign of national or diasporic belonging, the figure of the Filipina in *Cosmic Blood* is presented as a desiring subject. Through her queer desire, other modes of collectivity and belonging can be imagined that exceed the tropes of kinship inherent diaspora. With this material context in mind, *Cosmic Blood* can be understood as a performative intervention into gendered and heteronormative modes of representing the nation in the diaspora. Rather than presenting the gendered Filipina body as a sign of national or diasporic belonging, the figure of the Filipina in *Cosmic Blood* is presented as a desiring subject. Through her queer desire, other modes of collectivity and belonging can be imagined that exceed the tropes of kinship inherent to masculinist and heteronormative formations of national belonging.

With this context in mind, perhaps we can conceptualize Otalvaro-Hormillosa's cyborg body as a provisional figure for Anzaldúa's “mestiza consciousness” — a type of consciousness that would reimagine the very terms of belonging. Otalvaro-Hormillosa's cyborg figure suggests a mode of transnational belonging that exceeds notions of collectivity rooted in kinship models. In *Cosmic Blood*, queer sexuality functions as a deconstructive lever for destabilizing the masculinism and heteronormativity inherent to both Filipino American cultural nationalism and the Filipino diasporic nationalisms. However, queer sexuality does not function as a liberatory site in *Cosmic Blood*, but rather, as a site in which queer subjects negotiate histories of sexual violence, domination,

and desire. The diasporic imagination produced by *Cosmic Blood* is one that foregrounds queer desire as a necessary deconstructive lever for destabilizing teleological narratives of kinship, blood, and collectivity.

While not arguing for a transcendence of race, Otalvaro-Hormillosa does call attention to the processes through which bodies are disciplined and constricted by dominant discourses of corporeal difference, a legacy of both colonial and contemporary capitalist visual regimes of imaging the colonized body. As a form of belonging that invokes a common ethnicity or shared nation of origin, the trope of diaspora is one that both resists a dominant discourse of ethnicity and is complicit in the perpetuation of absolutist notions of ethnic identity.⁸ In contrast, Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" allows for a reworking of a normative transnational imagination – more simply put, these ideas allow for the possibility of queer diasporas to emerge. Here I use the term "queer diaspora" not to essentialize a mode of transnational belonging that relies on a fixed notion of queerness as identity, but rather one that foregrounds an understanding of queer sexuality as a destabilizing intervention into heteronormative cultural nationalist modes of imagining a diaspora.

By locating *Cosmic Blood* in relation to the cultural production of African American novelist Octavia Butler and Chicana cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, Otalvaro-Hormillosa positions *Cosmic Blood* as a response to multiple ethnic and racial communities in the U.S. Further, Otalvaro-Hormillosa foregrounds the experiences of the queer, colonized body as a mode of invoking collectivity across racial and ethnic differences, while not negating the difference in the experiences of colonized subjects. *Cosmic Blood* presents another kind of origin story, a different mythology that can serve as the basis for queer (in the most capacious sense of the term) modes of diasporic belonging. Rather than establishing a familial narrative of kinship, *Cosmic Blood* recognizes commonality in shared pain, historical trauma, resistance, and desire. Much like Donna Haraway's call for a different mode of belonging, one that transcends the family drama of race, genetics, kinship, and biology, *Cosmic Blood* imagines a form of transnational belonging rooted less in fixed notions of ethnic nationality, and more—in Haraway's words—in "partially shared purposes, intractable collective pain, inescapable mortality, and persistent hope" (Haraway 1997, 265). Hope is fundamental to the vision presented within *Cosmic Blood*—hope for survival, despite the genocide and sexual violence of a history of colonization; this hope is grounded in desire, a desire that

functions an anchor for a different mode of Filipina subjectivity, *one which allows Filipinas to exist as desiring subjects*. In this reimagining of the past, Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa answers Gloria Anzaldúa's call for a "*a new story to explain the world and our participation in it*, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet" (Anzaldúa 1999, 102). The transnational imagination presented in *Cosmic Blood* suggests a mode of belonging that, while specific to the Filipina body, resonates throughout the experiences of racialized queer subjects. In doing so, *Cosmic Blood* suggests a kind of transnational imagination in which commonality and kinship is imagined across racial and ethnic boundaries. Within the multiracial context of the U.S., this transnational imagination would include the development of a coalitional politics among minoritized subjects, calling on shared history of historical trauma and contemporary experiences of domination and subjugation as the basis for collectivity. Such a utopian vision is both a critique of contemporary Filipino American cultural politics, and a call for imagining a different kind of coalitional politics through modes of belonging beyond the nation. Through *Cosmic Blood*, Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa presents another logic, a counter-imagination to discourses of global capitalism, one in which Filipina bodies do more than labor – but rather, hope, dream, and desire.

NOTES

¹ *Bindlestiff Studio, San Francisco* (cited January 2004); available from www.bindlestiff.org.

² Gigi Otalvaro-Hormillosa, (cited January 2004); available from www.devilbunny.org.

³ Vasconcelos' notion of *mestizaje* was integral to the Mexican nationalist project of the early 20th century. In positioning the *mestizo* as the ideal national subject, the indigenous element of this hereditary mix was implicitly negated. Anzaldúa's use of the notion of *mestizaje* has been critiqued by indigenous scholars for this reason. See José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race/La Raza Cósmica: A Bilingual Edition with an Introduction and Notes.*, ed. Didier T. Jaén (Los Angeles: Pace Publications, 1979).

⁴ The phrase "God is change...Change is God," is a central tenet of the belief system upon which the collective Earthseed is founded in Octavia Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower*.

⁵ See footnote 3 for a discussion of the problematics of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's and Anzaldúa's citation of Vasconcelos.

⁶ Thank you to Andrew Wegley for suggesting the use of Otalvaro-Hormillosa's

cyborg body as a provisional figure for other modes of transnational belonging.

⁷Neferti Tadiar describes Filipina domestic helpers as “bodies without subjectivity.” While Filipina DHs are commodified for the corporeal labor they provide within a global capitalist economy, their subjectivity is foreclosed due to the non-recognition of their humanity. See Neferti Tadiar, *Fantasy-Production: Sexual Economies and Other Philippine Consequences for the New World Order* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).

⁸Ian Ang discusses the tendency for notions of diaspora to reify absolutist notions of racial and ethnic identity. See Ien Ang, “Indonesia on My Mind: Diaspora, the Internet and the Struggle for Hybridity,” in *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

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