Chapter 7
Little Manila: The Other Central of Hong Kong

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The skyline of Central District is the face of Hong Kong.[1] Trophies of famous architects neatly line the harbor against a sea of neon lighting up the sky. It is a scene of wealth and prosperity, a glamorous picture of the vivacious city and those who live in it. Against the orderliness of this cityscape, a striking transformation takes place every Sunday. Picnic blankets and vibrant dresses bring color to the usual sea of dark suits of the week, while music and lively banter replace the dull march of heels on marbled surfaces. Underneath the imposing government and office towers, thousands of domestic workers from the Philippines congregate on their day off.[2] Beneath the arches of Norman Foster's HSBC Building on the overhead walkways that connect office towers, Statue Square and Chater Garden, passageways become destinations. Makeshift sitting areas marked out by blankets and cardboard boxes create space for social gathering of these workers. Some are chatting away, sharing food from their lunch boxes, while others are playing card games or flipping through magazines. Some groups are singing along to music on their boom boxes, while others practice their choreographed dance moves in the reflection of appropriated mirrored walls.

This well-known spectacle is known as Little Manila. There are currently about 300,000 migrant workers from the Philippines employed as foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong, accounting for some 3 percent of the city's population. The trend began in the 1970s when Hong Kong shifted from an industry-based to a service-oriented economy. Literate and educated middle-class housewives became increasingly drawn to the job market as working conditions improved and options for women were no longer restricted to housework. The result was an increase in dual-income households with dispensable income in need of assistance for domestic chores, elderly care, and childcare. Thus the 1973 policy that allowed foreign nationals to come and work as domestic helpers was regarded as an all-around positive solution to Hong Kong's modernizing economy: migrants filled the gap in household needs, enabling more

1. Central is located on the north side of Hong Kong Island. It is the financial and economic heart of the city.
2. While it might appear to be an undifferentiated crowd to passers-by, the self-organized groupings reflect different liaisons—in general Filipinas congregate in Central (with provincial groupings) while Indonesians gather in the Causeway Bay and Victoria Park areas.

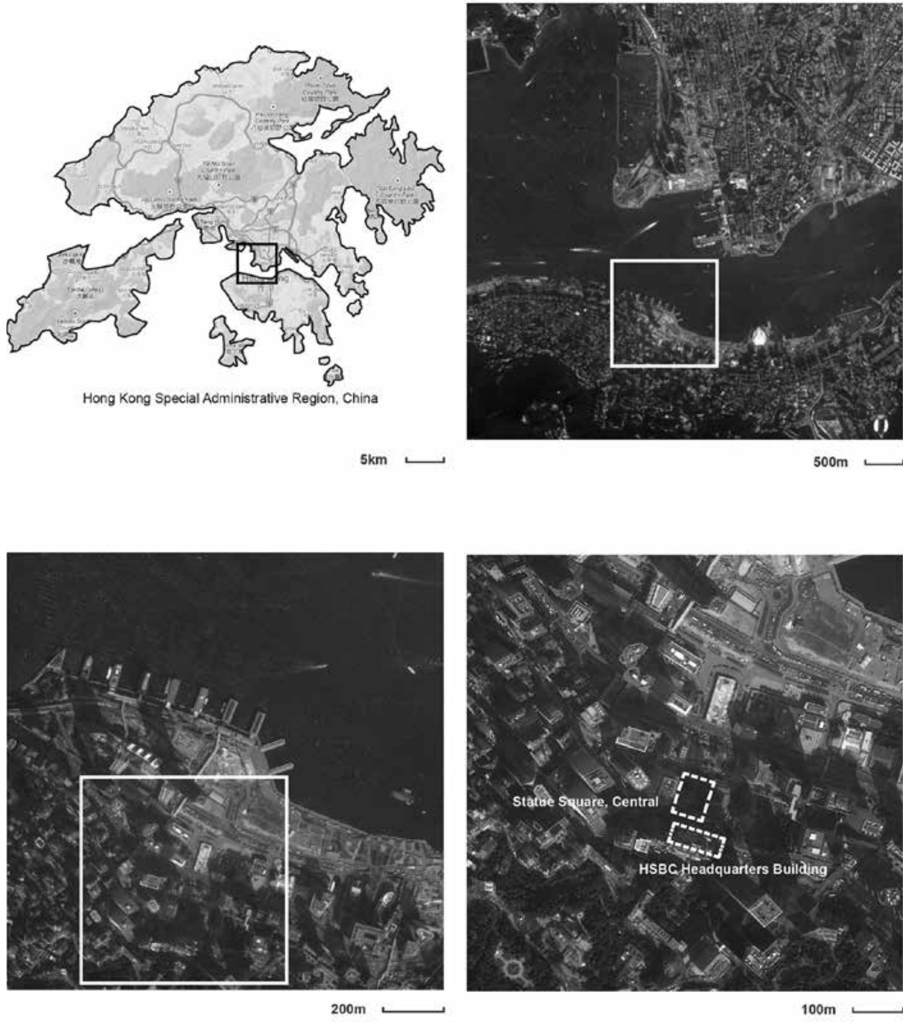

Figure 7.0
Map and aerial photographs of Hong Kong and the study site. Illustrations by Weijia Wang.

people to join the workforce, which in turn solved the labor shortage problem the city was facing.

More than just a timely answer to the burgeoning economy and resulting changes in individual household needs, during this time, Filipina migrants were seen to be a "better," more "modern" option. Chinese Amahs (the closest equivalent to domestic helpers) were no longer favored by young households as they were usually from an older generation and brought with them a specific tradition and know-how. Employers like Mr. Ho found it "difficult to communicate" with his Amah: the age difference made him like "her son," and instructions often fell on deaf ears as she would claim superiority of experience: "I already had my baby when you yourself were a baby" (Constable 2007, 29). By comparison Filipina workers were younger and more docile, spoke English, and were considered more Westernized. They were favored because, according to Mr. Ho, they were "easier to communicate with" and overall a better choice "by modern standard[s]" (30).

The "modern standard" that Mr. Ho speaks of encompasses a set of values that is reflective of this period in Hong Kong.[3] The city's rapid industrialization and strong economic growth offered a milieu within which individuals could aspire to a better, newer, more modern way of life. As Appadurai writes, aspirations are "never simply individual" (2004, 67); they are part of a relationally constructed system of understanding that "locate[s] them in a larger map of local ideas and beliefs about life"

Figure 7.1
The skyline of Hong Kong's Central District viewed from Victoria Harbour. Photograph by Daisy Tam.

3. Together with Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea, these four economic strongholds were known as the Four Tigers, or Four Dragons, or the Asian Miracle.

Figure 7.2
Domestic workers transform the corporate space of the HSBC Main Building into a site of weekend gatherings. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

(62). Mr. Ho's standard therefore does not merely point to linguistic ability but refers to the language that speaks to his generation—the language of progress, of modernity and the aspiration for upward social mobility. Migrant labor was also cheaper, thus having a full-time helper at home became a luxury that was more affordable. Hiring an English-speaking helper also affirmed the employers' status as a better-educated, more modern household.

However, as the numbers of Filipino workers grew, so did disgruntled voices. The increased visibility of domestic helpers gathering on their days off in public places became an "eyesore" (Yang 1998, 20 in Law 2001). Locals became intolerant of these maids "invading" and "taking over" the posh Central District and turning it into a "slum." They were a "nuisance" according to shop tenants, "too noisy," and they made the place "dirty" (Constable 2007). These complaints about visual and aural disturbances indicate an anxiety that stems from a wider interruption to the spatial, temporal, and socioeconomic order. The clear prescribed meaning of the Central Business District blurs as private activities spill onto public space; informal exchanges and leisure take over the carefully planned structures that frame the trade of formal markets. The system, unable to comprehend these activities, labels them as messy deviations from the norm. As Hou and Chalana state in the first chapter, the

incomprehensible becomes the unacceptable and casts a stain on the otherwise flawless face of Hong Kong. A fierce battle took place in public debates and newspapers in the 1990s, with suggestions of moving these workers out of sight to the nearby underground parking lots (Lowe 1997). The workers protested and defiantly continued to gather in the public spaces of Central. Today, Little Manila is acknowledged as part of the Hong Kong Sunday scene, and to some it is even "one of the most colorful and cheerful features of life in Hong Kong" (Donnithorne 1992).

The phenomenon of Little Manila is ruled by several discourses. On the one hand, the cityscape showcasing trophies of the miracle economy celebrates the success of a laissez-faire economy. On the other, the mass gathering of workers and transformation of Central lend itself to a de Certeau reading of appropriation. Despite the inequality of global capital, these workers employ their own tactics to deflect, even if only temporarily, the effects of gendered labor migration. Little Manila therefore represents a space of resistance, where these women reappropriate the space and architecture that symbolize the capitalist system within which they are oppressed. The dichotomy of power/victimization and resistance appearing as spectacle of modern life might seem like a well-rehearsed argument, but the multiple layers of activities and modalities of action that take place within these frameworks challenge and disturb what seem to be set discursive borders and offer more nuanced readings of this urban space.

This chapter is comprised of two parts: the first section traces the "messy" geographies of Little Manila, bringing the work of Michel de Certeau to bear on the activities, economies, and exchanges that take place. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate how workers regain some of their agency with their capacity to disturb the formal structure by imbuing their own meanings to "metaphorize the dominant order" (1988, xiii, 32).

The second section looks at the Filipino population and its relation to Hong Kong, engaging with Michel Serres's work *The Parasite*. Through his understanding of the theoretical argument of a general parasitism, I will illustrate how this moves us beyond the binary dynamics of subversive politics. The chapter moves toward a cognitive framework that encompasses the fluid relations among places, people, and relationships and acknowledges this mess as part of a complex network of dependencies without which society would not be able to function effectively.

The Making of Little Manila

The network of overhead pedestrian walkways that provide sheltered passage between office buildings during the workweek becomes a holiday destination on Sunday. Temporary barriers made of nylon raffia strung along plastic cones split the path in two—one side marked out for cardboard boxes and picnic blankets and the other reserved for thoroughfare. This flimsy barrier, while not offering any real

obstruction, nevertheless marks out a very real border. Foreign domestic workers, who are bound by their visa status to live in with their employers do not have a place of their own; their pleasure and leisure time take place in public spaces, subject to the heat of the summer, noise of the traffic, and gaze of passers-by. Security guards from private developers and the government patrol their respective plots of privately/ publicly managed public spaces, responding agilely to leisure activities that spill over the visible or invisible line.

> Is Statue Square on Sundays an example then of the *détournement* or diversion of a space of power into space of pleasure? This is unfortunately not entirely the case because the weekly congregations take place only by permission, and come Monday everything returns to "normal." No contestation has taken place. Perhaps the takeover of Central is more clearly an example of the fascination that the symbolic spaces of power exert on those excluded from them. The powerless are allowed to see Central—like looking at so many goods through a shop window—but not to touch it. (Abbas 1997, 87; emphasis in original)

In the book *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*, Ackbar Abbas's semiotic analysis of Central suggests that the urban cityscape upholds the symbolic borders of political and economic power. While this might ring true to a certain extent, this perspective has nevertheless been criticized for not acknowledging the potential for subversive readings or alternative practices. Lisa Law (2001) takes the example of Little Manila and argues that privileging the visual experience of Central places the focus on the specter[4] that appears as a symbol of social hierarchy, subjecting workers to a Foucauldian panoptic gaze where they are rendered powerless under the hegemony of global capital. Law offers, instead, an alternative sensorial experience of Central, where the chatter in Tagalog rises above the din of traffic and the distinct aromas of Filipino dishes that emanate from Tupperwares supersede the sight of Central. From this perspective, the smells and sounds contest and disrupt the organized space and order and offer an alternative reading of diasporic experiences. In Little Manila domestic workers repose from their work week and "express a creative subject capacity" (266) through their activities of eating, singing, and chatting.

The depiction of Little Manila through Law's "sensuous geographies" brings the focus to the everyday practices of migrant workers. Whether it is the simple act of talking in their own tongue, eating Filipino food with their hands, listening to music, or exchanging photos, these activities allow workers to break from their disciplined work lives. "As they congregate, it brings back a slice of life from their country, which in a way alleviates their loneliness and homesickness. It has become an emotional blanket for many as it fortifies and recharges them from the rigours of the week's work" (Arellano 1992). These activities transform Central into a workers'

4. I use the word "specter" to refer to the appearance of, the apparition which is in line with Guy Debord's idea of the spectacle, that is a social relationship mediated by images (1977).

Figure 7.3
The gatherings of domestic workers spill into the network of skybridges throughout Central. Photograph by Jeffrey Hou.

Figure 7.4
Temporary barriers, not offering any real obstruction, but nevertheless marking out a very real border. Photograph by Daisy Tam.

playground: against the railings of walkways, by exteriors of buildings, public spaces become meeting venues for interest groups, glass walls serve as dance studios, and park benches set the stage for choir practices. These leisure activities playfully adapt the environment for them, grafting private practices onto public space and creating a temporary dwelling in which workers feel at home. Little Manila is more than just taking over of Central; it is about ways in which everyday life invents itself by making do with the space or the property of others and, in doing so, introducing and inscribing new sets of meanings.

This is not to suggest that Little Manila represents a successful insurgency, colonization of Central, or the subversion of the neoliberal order it represents. These individuals are still "other within the very colonization that outwardly assimilated them" (de Certeau 1988, 32). Yet, through the multiple ways in which individuals make do with the environment, workers introduce a plurality of goals and desires that "metaphorize the dominant order" and make it function in another register (xiii, 32). The art of reappropriation and making do blurs and disturbs the meanings marked out by the governing boundaries of string barriers, where everyday practices spill and drift over imposed terrains that defile an established order. "Beneath what one might call the 'monotheistic' privilege that panoptic apparatuses have won for themselves, a '*polytheism*' of *scattered practices* survives, dominated but not erased by the triumphal success of one of their number" (48; emphasis in original). The meaning of such

Figure 7.5
Sunday picnics in Chater Garden. Photograph by Daisy Tam.

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spaces is therefore *produced* by the everyday practices of individuals and not defined by authorities.

Yet as Abbas points out, these congregations take place only by permission; the festivities are allowed only so long as they remain within the confines of what is permissible. Singing, dancing, praying, reading, chatting are all sanctioned activities, so where does the contestation take place? But what the scopic power misses with its bird's-eye view is that within the marked boundaries of overhead walkways, the confines of temporarily closed-off traffic, the authorized time and space, behind the façade of leisure, myriads of entrepreneurial endeavors are taking place. Small food businesses run by groups of individuals sell their chicken adobo, embodito, curry, and pinakbet dishes in plastic bags—undercutting even those Filipino eateries in the nearby World Wide Plaza.[5] Other individuals wander around taking orders surreptitiously for buco ice (homemade coconut ice lollies), and deliver from their cooler box. What might appear as friendly girlfriend activities are in fact mobile nail salons where colorful motifs are painted skillfully at a price.

The legitimacy of these subterranean economies is questionable—many are done on the sly—and from an official perspective illegal. These forms of disguised activities can be understood in terms of what de Certeau called *le perruque*, the "wig" that masks its owner's baldness: the appearance of carrying out legitimate activities effects a trompe l'oeil, a trick that diverts attention away from the clandestine activities that are taking place. These tactics allow workers to capitalize on the possibilities offered by circumstances of the moment. As such, these techniques are seen to be playful, cunning, and resourceful—de Certeau describes *le perruque* as "sly as a fox and twice as quick" (1988, 29); its nature is often shifty, fragmentary, and elusive, as its success counts on its ability to slip between formal structures and rules and to recognize the limits of what it can get away with; it surfs on the margins of what is permissible and teases the boundaries of that which is punishable, probing the willingness of the authorities to turn a blind eye. *Le perruque* is a guileful ruse that occupies liminal spaces and survives in the interstices of the mainstream. In de Certeau's terminology it is a tactic, an art of the weak, determined by its "absence of power" (38); tactics do no keep what they win, for they do not have a proper place in which to capitalize acquired advantages, prepare future expansions, and gain independence. Tactics are a victory of time over space. They depend on the "clever utilization of time, of the opportunities [they present] and also of the play that [they introduce] into the foundation of power." They "are procedures that gain validity in relation they lend to time—to the circumstances which the precise instant of an intervention transforms

5. World-Wide Plaza is a three-level shopping center in the commercial tower of World-Wide House. Unlike its surrounding malls that house the world's luxury brands, World Wide Plaza is filled with small kiosks that cater mainly to the Filipino population—Filipino supermarkets, remittance companies, telecommunication companies, small eateries, and canteens.

into a favourable situation, to the rapidity of the movements that change the organization of a space, to the relations among successive moments in an action" (39).

Host/Guest/Parasites

The temporal and transient nature that characterize Little Manila also symbolize, to a large extent, the plight of the Filipino population in Hong Kong—both share the liminal space of being an exception to the norm: domestic helpers are an integral part of Hong Kong's labor force, but they are not necessarily recognized as such by the public or the government. Their particular social status recalls Partha Chatterjee's concept of "populations," which he defines as "empirical categories of people" (2004, 136); in *The Politics of the Governed*, he explains that populations are "identifiable, classifiable, and describable by empirical or behavioural criteria: but they are not part of what the city considers as citizens;[6] their specific social or economic attributes are relevant for the administration of developmental or welfare policies, but they are not included in the centre of politics" (34). This socially visible but excluded population is an oxymoron that has been termed aptly by Erni as "included-out,"[7] referring to those who dwell as strangers in the sphere of home (Erni 2013).

Consider the case of Evageline Vallejos—a domestic helper from the Philippines who has been working in Hong Kong for twenty-seven years. Despite fulfilling all

Figure 7.6
Practicing dance moves in Central. Photograph by Daisy Tam.

6. Which connotes the "normative burden" of participation and also the moral connotation of sharing in the sovereignty of the state and hence claiming rights in relation to the state (Chatterjee 2004).
7. Erni (2013), "There Is No Home: Law, Rights, and Being 'Included-out,'" conference paper presented at HKBU Where Is Home conference.

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requirements for the right of abode,[8] Vallejos had to launch a judiciary review to fight for her application, which was initially rejected. She won her case in October 2011, only to have the Court of Final Appeal overturn the ruling in March 2012. The shifting treatment and narratives of migrant workers over the past three decades have shown increasing emphasis on their status as guests. Guests are foreign, like Chatterjee's concept of population. They do not belong and are not regarded as part of the host country. Their stay is welcomed as long as it is temporary and the hospitality is extended to them based on the condition that they know their place.[9] During the judicial process, there is some public view that these migrants have forgotten their places as "guest workers"; they should be "grateful" for the opportunity that has been given to them and "should be on their best behavior" since they are "in a foreign country" (Lee 1993; Ong 1992; Constable 2007).

Like many of the discourses surrounding contemporary immigration debates, migrant workers are portrayed as a "burden for society," who threaten to "take advantage, abuse and exploit the system" (Pulse 2011). The government was concerned that if approved, the landmark case would open the "floodgates" for foreign domestic helpers and their families, claiming that new immigrants will come and "steal our rice bowls"[10] and "rob" us of our health, housing, and education benefits (Cheung and So 2011). Locals took to the streets, chanting "Hong Kong is for Hong Kong people." The discourse is one of guests versus hosts, us versus them, a Manichean battle of good versus evil. As Gilroy rightly notes, the sociopolitical narrative about the other often remains trapped within the discourse of "risk and jeopardy" (Gilroy 2004). Migrants are represented as welfare snatching parasites who take from our plates and live off the host society. They are thus understood to be a threat that needs to be overcome and controlled, often through exclusionary measures such as the reinforcement of borders.

Here, Michel Serres's figure of the parasite is well suited to the discussion. In contemporary political media, migrant workers, refugees, asylum seekers are often portrayed as poachers, perceived through metaphorical associations of taking without giving back, profiteers off the host country. The figure of the parasite regarded as a purely negative, destructive, or undesirable agent is widely deployed to stigmatize

8. Article 24 of the Basic Law states that "persons not of Chinese nationality who have entered Hong Kong with valid travel documents, have ordinarily resided in Hong Kong for a continuous period of not less than seven years and have taken Hong Kong as their place of permanent residence before or after the establishment of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region are eligible to be considered for permanent residency."

9. The New Conditions of Stay Act enacted in 1987 denies workers the right to change to another nondomestic job category; it denies their right to obtain residency after seven years; it denies the workers' rights to be joined by their families; the workers have to live in with their employers, and if workers' contracts have been terminated (regardless of the reason), the "two-week rule" requires the worker to leave Hong Kong if they have not secured a new contract within the time period (Asian Migrant Centre 2007).

10. A Cantonese expression which means to take away jobs. "Rice bowls" refers to jobs or income—the means to feed oneself.

and evoke distrust, for example, the blaming of economic problems and unemployment on migrant laborers or benefit cheats. Serres's reading, however, begins with the etymology of the word *para/sitos*, the being that eats *alongside,* and it proposes a paradigm in which the interdependent relationship of hosts and guests are foregrounded such that new dimensions can be approached through a consideration of the potential ethical and political implications of more universal questions of "living-together."

Serres begins with Aesop's fable of the country rat and the city rat where the city rat eats well from the leftovers at the table of the tax farmer, who himself "produced neither oil nor ham nor cheese" but "can profit from these products" (2007, 3). The city rat's guest, the country rat, benefits from this flow of goods, parasiting from it in his turn. Rather than sets of isolated pairs (between citizen and tax farmer, tax farmer and city rat, city rat and country rat) conducting reciprocal exchanges, Serres examines this as a "cascade" of parasitic relations, where each flow of foods, energy, and information[11] allows a little of what is exchanged to be redirected to a third party. The focus of the fable becomes "dining at another's table," but, instead of casting such behavior as something to be condemned, Serres draws our attention to where each of these pairing is linked to the one before, and the overall cascade offers a generalized paradigm in which parasitic relations are considered the "atomic form" of all social relations. If parasitism is the process of intercepting "what travels along the path . . . money, gold, or commodities, or even food"—it is "the most common thing in the world" (2007, 11)—then it is possible that any figure or agent identified as host to a given parasite will be, when some other relation between them is foregrounded, identifiable as playing the role of parasite to its host. Serres draws frequently on the fact that the French word *hôte* is used for both "host" and "guest." Serres's point is that the parasitic relation is intersubjective, that roles of the host/guest are not fixed, that every identifiable actor is capable of taking up the place of the other with the shift of circumstances or what is conceived of as the plane or environment.

It is true that, from a scientific viewpoint, to be classed as a parasite an organism should live on or in its host, in permanent or semipermanent contact, and that rats or humans who merely benefit at the expense of others are not parasites at all. Serres admits that he is "using words in an unusual way"; however, he refuses to privilege either such a scientific discourse or that of the fable. Literary or fabulated applications of the term "parasite," he suggests, are not metaphorical uses of a scientific concept; rather, these discourses inherit their different notions of parasitism from a shared origin, in "such ancient and common customs and habits that the earliest monuments of our culture tell of them, and we will see them, at least in part: hospitality, conviviality, table manners, hostelry, general relations with strangers" (2007, 6). The

11. Serres also points out that the French term *parasite* is used to denote static or noise, an interruption to the message.

deployment of the term “parasite” entails, both in vocabulary and conception, an anthropomorphism belying its shared origins in this sphere of custom or habit.

The tax farmer is a parasite and benefits from the exchange of products that he himself did not produce. In a similar manner, Hong Kong could also be seen to parasite from its poorer neighboring countries for the provision of cheap labor. Institutional rule restricting qualified individuals to domestic work and upholding classification systems that maintain populations in their place guarantees the continuous supply of labor at such cost. Agencies profit from the complicated bureaucratic system and take cuts from contracts for workers and employers. Households profit from the affordability of hiring help for childcare and housework to take on more highly paid employment. The government benefits from a larger labor force without having to develop infrastructure for social welfare. Despite these stringent conditions, Filipinos themselves profit from the higher net salary that they can earn in Hong Kong. Their families benefit from their remittances, which money transfer agencies in turn profit from. Mobile phone companies and SIM card providers grow based on the large number of migrants who need to keep in touch with their families. The remittances also contribute significantly to the GDP of the Philippines. In essence, these parasitic relationships can be traced indefinitely through series of different planes as they extend into different directions involving multiple actors and circles.

Every medium of exchange, movement, flow of information, and migration of people generates new relationships forming new hierarchies. The parasite (no longer a purely negative figure) diverts, siphons off from the exchange, and in turn adds to the possibilities of new relationships being formed. At each level of parasitism, the individual is always already involved in several relationships of exchange, playing the role of host and guest simultaneously. This introduces the possibility of a quasi-equal relationship among actors, which prompts us to reconsider the political and ethical implications of the relationships among Filipino workers, Hong Kong residents, and the environment in which they interact. The host city and its guest population functions as interrelated collection of cultural, social, and economic spheres, where all levels of activities (both legitimate and illegitimate) contribute to the effective functioning of the overall system. Adopting Serres’s generalized model allows for a wider, more coherent paradigm where individuals are placed in a network of interdependent relationships, shifting away from the isolated conception of the essential character of parasites as nonreciprocal and subtractive.

In an increasingly global world, the applicability of Serres’s relativized logic of parasitism is vital—recognizing the interdependencies of host and guest and the ease with which such relationships can be constantly inverted and displaced is a step toward widening the horizon in which these relationships are valued. In reformulating the empirically determined systems of producing populations, we can see that these migrant workers are a necessary part of Hong Kong: they are an integral part of

the labor force; despite their low wages, they contribute to 1 percent of the city's GNP; they are also consumers, spending and contributing directly to Hong Kong's economy. Indirectly, their presence saves Hong Kong households billions of dollars in childcare (2.1 billion) and elderly care (2.5 billion). More than just figures and numbers, the awareness of the contributive role that migrants play in the development of Hong Kong ought to lead to a greater appreciation and acknowledgment of their necessary position within the socioeconomic system. Including out this population is a strange "illogical logic," an oxymoron that Derrida calls "autoimmunity"—a state that parallels the immune system of the body when it starts to attack itself (Derrida 2005).

Conclusion

The various theoretical discourses on which I have reflected in this chapter have revealed different aspects of Little Manila. While Abbas's focus on the macro cityscape has painted a semiotic picture of dominating capitalist power, Law has argued against such perspective by bringing the scopic drive to the ground where workers' leisure activities challenge the established order of power. Michel de Certeau's work sheds light on the tactical power that everyday practices have on disrupting the system, highlighting how these creative ways of making do introduce interference and play. De Certeau names these practices *le perruque* to emphasize the trickster nature of these tactics—but also to denote the transient and temporal nature of their success. The focus on these guileful ruses is on how they subvert from within—not through permanent rejection or transformation, but by diversion. This perspective recognizes the ordering power structure from which the individual cannot escape, yet the individual is empowered by agency to divert without leaving the system; individual ways of making do or "procedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing" (de Certeau 1988, 32).

However, even de Certeau's perspective cannot break away from the dichotomized structured discourse of the powerful and the powerless. The significance of bringing Serres's theory of the parasite into the analysis is the introduction of a cognitive framework that encompasses the complexity of the interplay. Instead of casting hosts and guests in fixed roles, the foregrounding of their interdependent relations and intersubjectivity suggest a more fluid, less orderly model where actors share a quasi-equal relationship. The foregrounding interdependent relationships pushes toward an understanding of a general relation—understood as something that is almost universal within human society, able to play key roles in the cohesion of larger social structure. The benefits of such reconsideration are that the effects of these social and cultural relations may be understood as ethically significant, that when faced with any particular instance of parasitism, the process of widening one's perspective from the restricted and localized to the general view—such that the parasitic relation in

question is understood in the context of various others that parallel and intersect with it—may alter the basis on which value judgements about parasitism are made. This move from an isolated to a general view holds the potential of contributing to the production of a better and fairer understanding of what is at stake when parasitism is identified and named—whether it is the appropriation of public spaces or living with others—and to challenge the negative value judgements that often automatically accompany such identifications.

Whether guests are exception to the norm—strangers at home, foreign in the familiar—it is not enough to simply reassign or reclassify their status: this would amount to simply changing their status from exterior to interior elements, reinstituting and reinvoking the same purity of the original system, as when a migrant is granted citizenship. In any given instance, these may indeed represent positive steps away from the fetishization of purity and particular norms of identity. Yet they may easily be engulfed within a larger process of reinforcing such norms. This is why that it is not enough to remove the label of parasite in certain discourses, but, rather, to move from such restricted perspectives in which a given agent or group is constructed as having a purely negative, destructive effect (or reclassified as no longer parasitic), toward the perspective of a general parasitism, in which any such agent is recognized as materially and dynamically bound up in multiple parasitic relationships, in some of which it already functions as host. An ethics of care of the parasite would not entail welcoming parasites and parasitic relations of all kinds or fostering the reproduction of a particular "type" of parasitic relations, but recognizing the near ubiquity of such relations and taking care, in any given instance, to attend to their complexity, to the ways in which any identifiable parasite is simultaneously situated in the larger ecological context in which any entity we may consider worth preserving is always-already inscribed.

Serres playfully suggests constructing the fable in reverse: "at the door of the room, the rats heard a noise" (Serres 2007, 13). In the shadow of the towers of Central, the dark suits and the leather soles scuffle around and interrupt the festivities of Little Manila. The color fades away and the music stops. Who is the real interrupter/parasite? The parasite interrupts the system, but new systems form, and the host becomes the parasite and so on and so forth until the chain becomes a complex system of relationships that is the society. The tax farmer or the government, who try to expel or eliminate the parasite through policing of the borders, fix their position and identity in a singular context. They ignore that eradication brings with it the message and the documented system of which they themselves as parasites are part.[12] In Little Manila, migrant workers do not vandalize the face of Hong Kong. They are what *makes* Hong Kong.

12. Derrida calls it an autoimmunity in a biopolitical context—a system that ends up attacking itself, thinking it is expelling threats.

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