

SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN

BY BIA GAYOTTO

How can a sense of place be imagined, experienced, contested and represented? For a while I've been using travel and fieldwork as a methodology to investigate a sense of place. In previous projects I chose an element in the landscape or in the city life to explore my own and a local community's response to a specific situation or locale: the commute space in LA (*Xing LA*, 2007), the mountain and women explorers in Banff, Canada (*Wild Heart: Women Explorers*, 2008); the sea and islanders in the Azores, Portugal (*The Sea is Not Blue*, 2009); the bicultural community in Los Angeles (*Trading Places*, 2011). Collaborating with members of diverse communities locally and globally has brought greater complexity into my work allowing me to map and represent a certain place based on the encounters that I find there.

As a bicultural person from Brazil and the US, I often contemplate feelings of home, displacement and belonging. This book essay was created based on a video project that I did during a residency in Chicago on Spring 2011. "Somewhere In Between: Chicago" emerged out of an interest in representing the intercultural space typical of those who like me, moved to the US in their teen or adult life, and are in constant flux between two or more cultures. Through an open call, residents were invited to participate in an interview and video shoot that took place at a location of their choice. In their interviews, the subjects address their bicultural experiences from multiple points of view. The video's compositions—which take the form of portraiture, still life, and landscape—range from details to long shots. Inspired by John Cage, chance plays an important role in my process, from the demographic of people who responded to my call to the different neighborhoods where the video was shot. The two-screen installation juxtaposes cityscapes, architecture, and domestic settings with portraits of the participants performing simple, everyday actions.

From the moving image to the printed page, from voice-over to text, this book essay further inquires on issues of translation and representation, matching video stills of five participants, their environments and short quotes selected from their interviews - which focus on issues of home, belonging and place. The result is a multilayered portrait of Chicago mixing images of the city and its people with stories that reveal their sense of self and place in the world.

MARK NELSON (b. Oakland, CA, United States)



I spend most of my life living in different environments outside of the United States. I moved every two years, so while I was in the United States, I never quite planted roots. Eventually, as a young teenager, our family moved to the Republic of Panama where I thrived and lived for over twenty years. ... As an immigrant, you cannot let your dreams get spoiled by negative encounters. The best way to deal with negative challenges is to shelf it away and store it as knowledge. Being the minority gave me an interesting perspective when I came back to my own country of citizenship, where the minority was always considered a person of color. .. Chicago had become my home because of what I do as a teacher, and the ownership that I have taken working with kids and adults, I guess to do the same sort of healing for them that was done for me.

FAHEEM MAJEED (b. Charlotte, NC, United States)



My parents converted to Islam before I was born, I am the first generation of children that has Arabic name. One of the reasons you could consider me bi-cultural is that my mother was half Japanese. My mother was adopted so she didn't even know until she was older. ... I guess it's okay to have a couple of homes. My childhood [home] was Charlotte, and my teenage years were in Minneapolis. Being a father and an adult was in Chicago, and I do call it home. I kind of set up roots. I have three kids and a wife, and two mortgages. There are a lot of great things about Chicago, and a lot of problems about Chicago, but it's all Chicago. You love its imperfections the same way you love the things that are great about it.

DEIDRE COLGAN (b. Dublin, Ireland)



Home, to me, I don't think it exists anymore. Because I long for home and then I go back to Ireland, and then I don't really find home there either. When I first decided to leave Ireland, I had to make a plan for myself to have my home be kind of a movable feast, you know, that I would just make my home around me wherever I was. And I've moved fourteen times in seventeen years! I suppose that is what I think is part of my journey here, is finding my home inside myself. ... I had always said as soon as I felt like I am going to stay in a place for more than two or three years, I'll get a pet. So I got Edith, she's been with me as long as I've been in Chicago. ... Even as a child, I've always longed for anonymity and it's very difficult in Ireland to be anonymous even though I grew up in the biggest city. Here, I feel I can still invent who I want to be, if I so desire.

GERARDO SERNA (b. Chicago, IL, United States)



I'm the only one born here, so it's been rough because every time we travel to Mexico, my family in Mexico would always say, oh, you're a Gringo, you're not really Mexican, and I never understood what that really meant as a kid. ... During the 1980's, Latino and African-American males were being targeted heavily in white neighborhoods. This made it really clear to me, at the age of ten, that I wasn't American either. I found myself relating a lot to guys in the neighborhood that were disenfranchised and marginalized, and their identity became mine. The street gang became my culture, it became my flag and my loyalty, my nation. Culturally I am Latino, but, all and all, I am a brother from the neighborhood. ... Now I am comfortable in my skin. It's taken quite a bit and a really long time for me to be able to feel that, identity-wise. I am proud that I am still alive, and that I've made it this far, being me.

KAREN VILLAMON (b. Manila, Philippines)



I saw the Philippines as an adult and I was, like, this is me! I saw the similarities between the people and myself, just like the overall feeling of it, and I was like, this is home, this is my country! But I also feel the very same way.. that Chicago raised me, and I always say Chicago is also home to me. A lot of the things that I apply to my life now, I learned from my experiences here. I think my heart, it's kind of split in half between the Philippines and Chicago. Chicago itself, being so diverse, helped me grow. I went to Chicago public schools, and you are exposed to a lot of different cultures. For a few years, my best friend was Mexican, and I was speaking Spanish, I was eating their food .. you meet these people and it's like, I want to belong.

ANDREW GREGORY KRZAK (b. Chicago, IL, United States)



The wonderful thing of a big industrialized city like Chicago is the amount of immigrant people that do come here. I really like the fact that I can hop the train or get in the car, and go to almost a different world, a different part of the world, in a fifteen minute drive. Bridgeport, for instance, was settled by the Irish and then Poles and Lithuanians moved into the West side of it, and then it became largely Hispanic, and now it is gentrified and there are Chinese. It is fascinating to see how the ethnic groups disperse and how they become sort of less saturated as they disperse. Like my family's story after coming from Poland, starting in this closer neighborhood and then moving farther and farther out, till you get to me who is jumping back in, not as an ethnic person but just as an American with an university job looking for a cool neighborhood.

ANNA JONES (b. Chester, England)



We are a multicultural family. I am not an American and we have adopted children from a different culture, completely different from mine. My kids can understand the fact that I am English and they are Chinese, and we live in America. We are quite a strong immigrant family, really. ... I think my children keep me rooted here in the US because this is their home. This is really all they've known but I kind of feel exiled from my own culture. ...I think it would be good for humans to if we all put away our flags and respected a human being for who they are, if we were more accepting of [other] people. We don't all want to look the same.