Animacy Matters:
Animating Black and Brown Liberation in Artistic Counterpublics

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Animacy Matters:
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by

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Following Jane Bennett and Mel Y. Chen’s theoretical interventions regarding “levels of aliveness,” cultural production, animacy hierarchies and racial mattering, this study explores how twentieth and twenty-first century American literature can function as an emancipatory repository for African American and Latina/o embodied racialized subjects. The methodology involves close readings and theoretical interventions informed by Bennett, Chen, Gloria Anzaldúa, Bruno Latour, Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire and Erica R. Edwards, while investigating how art-tethered counterpublics can help resist the hegemonic forces of neoliberalism on the African American and Latina/o communities. Through the aforementioned methodology, Animacy Matters interrogates the following questions: Can twentieth and twenty-first century American literature, specifically, function as a source of
effective liberatory strategies for Black and Brown folk *operated on* in the sovereign sphere? What theoretical interventions, and practical applications, need to be animated in order that strategies found in literary-based cultural production can positively influence Black and Brown material conditions and mobilize their liberatory action “off the page”? How can art-based counterpublics, and the people who inhabit them, animate Black and Brown liberatory thought and action? Ultimately, in this present historical moment when racialized bodies are increasingly under violent attack by the State and the need is ardent for alternative solutions, this study affirms and seeks to build on Erica R. Edwards contention that “Literature is a repository for counter stories and alternative visions . . . narrative is a dialogic site for reimagining possibilities.”
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Introduction

La facultad is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing,” a quick perception arrived at by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world.¹

—Gloria Anzaldúa

Why the pathology of race was so dominant a part of Western consciousness or what might be done to change that character was of less concern than how Black peoples might survive the encounter.²

—Cedric Robinson

At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality . . . We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity will be transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force.³

—Ernesto “Che” Guevara

LIBERATION VIBRATIONS

Why is the embodied Black and Brown subject (operating as racialized matter for this discussion), too often the target of irrational violence? In particular, why are
alarming numbers of unarmed Black boys and men met with lethal force, while interacting with State-sponsored security apparatuses? Why does lethal violence against Black and Brown racialized matter go insufficiently punished? Why don’t Black and Brown lives matter?

A version of the aforementioned questions animated a lively forum on August 3, 2013, at Vibrations. The venue is a Black-owned, grassroots cultural center in an Inglewood, California working-class neighborhood with a primarily African-American and Latina/o population. The gathering was an intergenerational discussion and information sharing session organized to respond to a series of challenges facing the local and national African American and Latina/o communities, including, but not limited to 1) the February 26, 2012 Sanford, Florida killing of unarmed black 17-year-old Trayvon Martin by 28-year-old mixed-race Latino George Zimmerman, and the subsequent not guilty verdicts received by Zimmerman; 2) the “school-to-prison” pipeline in African American and Latina/o neighborhoods; 3) the intergenerational misperception and miscommunication in the African American and Latina/o communities, and the delimiting effects on social justice organizing work resulting from these misperceptions and miscommunications.

Another type of lively forum occurred on November 24, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri. The outdoor rally also addressed the questions that opened this chapter. The gathering was an intergenerational discussion and rally to address the announcement of whether or not Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson
would be indicted for the shooting of unarmed Black teenager Michael Brown.
Michael Brown's mother, Lesley McSpadden, was a rally speaker. When a media-
feed at the rally announced the nonindictment decision, a distraught McSpadden
said to the crowd, “Everybody wants me to be calm. Do they know how those bullets
hit my son? What they did to his body as they entered his body? Nobody had to live
through what I had to live through . . . They still don’t care. They’re never gonna
care.”

It is significant that McSpadden’s comments focused on the impact of State
violence on her son’s black body. Her interrogatives, “Do they know how those
bullets hit my son? What they did to his body as they entered his body?” are an
acknowledgement that the attack was an assault on an embodied Black subject, on
Black matter. McSpadden recognized that the assault on her son’s Black life was a
careless assault, evidenced by her statement, “They still don’t care. They’re never
gonna care.” This perceived careless sentiment is echoed by other rally participants
who can be heard shouting, “They don’t care about us.” “They don’t care about us”
can be read as a perceived lack on value that the State has for Black life, which is to
say, a perception that Black lives don’t matter. Black embodied matter doesn’t
matter.

Taken collectively, McSpadden’s response, and those of rally members, echo
national African American concerns that the perceived, relatively low value of Black
life is contributing to the startling phenomena of unarmed Black men being killed by
the State’s security apparatuses. In 2014 alone, State security forces killed the
following unarmed Black men: Ezell Ford, Akai Gurley, Eric Garner, Mike Brown, Dontre Hamilton, Rumain Brisbon and Charly “Africa” Leundeu Keunang.6

This study will analyze strategies, best practices and challenges related to the socio-political and economic liberation of Black & Latina/o subjects. The project will explore how the State’s hegemonic efforts to push Black subjects toward bare life provides the framework for the State’s efforts to push Latina/os—and other marginalized populations—towards bare life.

Responding to Aristotle, Foucault and Hannah Arendt in Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, Georgio Agamben’s bare life notion interrogates the space between biological existence (zoē)—what he terms “mere life”—and life tethered to political agency and speech (bios)—or what he terms “good life.” Agamben argues, “The fundamental categorical pair of Western politics is not that of friend/enemy but that of bare life/political existence, zoē/bios, exclusion/inclusion” (Agamben 8). Ewa Plonowska Ziarek asserts in “Bare Life” that, “bare life, wounded, expendable, and endangered, is not the same as biological zoē, but rather the remains of the destroyed political bios” (Ziarek 195). Their political bios targeted and destroyed, Black subjects like Michael Brown and Eric Garner can have their bare life, Black bodies destroyed without accountability, because they have been “[s]tripped from political significance and exposed to murderous violence, bare life is both the counterpart of the sovereign on the state of exception and the target of sovereign violence.”7 This lack of State accountability for killing Black citizens coheres with Agamben’s understanding of homo sacer.
Agamben makes a genealogical connection between bare life and the archaic Roman law concept *homo sacer*, sacred man. "The protagonist of this book is bare life, that is, the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man) who may be killed and yet not sacrificed (Agamben 8). “May be killed” is a referent to sacred man’s exclusion from the normal operations of the juridical order regarding citizens and “unpunishability of his killing” (Agamben 81). Sacred and expendable, Black life aligns with Anzaldúa’s understanding of the indigenous Aztec Coatlicue goddess/concept in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Coatlicue represents duality in life and “depicts the contradictory … she is the symbol of the fusion of opposites” (Anzaldúa 69). This Coatlicue contradictory concept of Black embodied matter—desired and despised—has been exacerbated by Black folk being in the State’s crosshairs. The members of the State’s security apparatuses, these sovereign representatives, who killed Michael Brown and Eric Garner are operating in “the sovereign sphere … in which [they are] permitted to kill without committing homicide” (Agamben 104). As a result, Black matter, the embodied Black subject, the sacred man, is operated on in this same sovereign sphere where Black life has been reduced to bare life. There is a need for this study because there is a need to explore, as Ziarek writes, “whether bare life itself can be mobilized by emancipatory movements” (Ziarek 194).

*Animacy Matters: Animating Black and Brown Liberation and Artistic Counterpublics* reframes Ziarek’s inquiry and drives the direction and scope of this argument in the following ways. What strategies can be effectively formulated to animate emancipatory thought and mobilize emancipatory thought into
emancipatory action? Can American literature, specifically, function as a source of effective liberatory strategies for Black and Brown folk operated on in the sovereign sphere? What theoretical interventions, and practical applications, need to be animated in order that strategies, found in literary-based cultural production, can positively influence Black and Brown material conditions and mobilize their liberatory action? How can art-based counterpublics, and the people who inhabit them, animate Black and Brown liberatory thought and action?

This study’s liberation-related nomenclature is purposeful. The historic and contemporary socio-political and juridical forces operating on Black and Brown communities in the United States have had the practical impact of delimiting the life courses of significant members these respective communities.  

Mobilizing bare life Black and Brown citizens presents a series of problems. When a citizen is excluded from the good life, and is pushed to the margins of the societal order, their individualized focus can be centered on mere life survival rather than emancipatory action. The energetic orientation involved in “trying to find a way out of no way” can tack subjects away from the port of collective action, the port of all hands on deck. This study argues American literature is a lighthouse that can show a way out of no way. Narrative can illuminate new liberatory possibilities.

Erica R. Edwards writes that “Literature is a repository for counter stories and alternative visions . . . narrative is a dialogic site for reimagining possibilities.”  
The counter stories of Cherríe Moraga, Toni Cade Bambara, Salvador Plascencia,
Ishmael Reed, Gloria Anzaldúa, June Jordan, Wanda Coleman and Kamau Daáood are so rich in alternative imagination and emancipatory vision that they can help guide bare life to justice—even in the sovereign sphere.

Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* is a narrative that follows the lives of a series of community activists with ties to the feminist, Civil Rights, Black Power, Chicana/o Power, and Anti-War Movements. The thrust of the narrative is propelled by the story of community activist Velma Henry, who has recently attempted suicide by cutting her wrist and placing her head in a gas oven. Burned-out from living bare life, death is possible. At the start of the novel, she is under the care of a community healer, Minnie Ransom, who accesses indigenous African religious healing modalities in her attempt to heal Velma. Velma resists the healing to such an extent that Minnie asks her, “Are you sure sweetheart that you want to be well?” Minnie Ransom’s question can be understood as “Do you want to be more alive?”

Jane Bennett and Mel Y. Chen are leading scholars engaging the intersection of “levels of aliveness,” cultural production and race. The scholars’ life-related nomenclature will be helpful in this study. Chen writes, “Using animacy as a central construct, rather than ‘life’ or ‘liveliness’—though these remain a critical part of the conversation in this book—helps us theorize current anxieties around the production of humanness in contemporary times” (16). Understanding the production of Black and Brown humanness is central to this project. In the context of the sovereign sphere, the State’s (and its representatives) inability to accept the full, rich humanity of Black and Brown subjects encourages other subjects to
devalue Black and Brown humanity—and encourages, at times, Black and Brown folk to devalue their own humanity, their own level of animacy.

There is no single standard definition of animacy, but it has been variously described as “a quality of agency, awareness, mobility and liveness” (Chen 15). Both Chen and Bennett couch their examination of animacy in a discussion of materiality. Chen imagines animacy “as a specific kind of affective and material construct that is not only nonneutral in relation to animals, humans, and living and dead things, but is shaped by race and sexuality, mapping various biopolitical realizations of animacy in the contemporary culture of the United States” (18). Bennett’s goal “is to theorize materiality that is as much force as entity, as much energy as matter” (Bennett 20).

Both Chen and Bennett explore the mapping of matter on animacy hierarchies. In this material hierarchy, a stone would be placed near the bottom of the animacy hierarchy because it has relatively low levels of agency, awareness, mobility and aliveness. Algae, dog and human being matter would appear as we move up the animacy scale. At the human being level, Chen introduces race into the equation, adding human differentiation and relative human value to the discussion.

What is the process by which one human life is deemed more valuable than another? Who determines the process of relative human value, how do they assume this position of power, and what determinative technologies do they employ along the way? For Chen, language, in the form of defining, insulting and shaming, is a technology employed to map racialized matter on the animacy scale. “[I]f animacy gradations have linguistic consequences and linguistic consequences are also always
political ones, then animacy gradations are inextricably political” (Chen 68).

Positioning Black and Brown subjects, Black and Brown racialized matter, at the bottom of the human animacy hierarchy is a political act; it has been and is being accomplished, in part, by subjects at the top of the hierarchy using political power to define Black and Brown subjects as less than human—as approaching animality.

Reading Marx’s understanding of capitalism’s impact on disenfranchised subjects, Chen writes, “[H]uman animality (barbarity) represents the simultaneous legitimation of enslavement, a relative lack of philosophical awareness other than recognition of one’s need to be ruled, and a dispossession of right to self-determination (hence, justified enslavement)” (60).

When subjects at the top the human hierarchy are able to define subjects at the bottom as less than human, it allows less than human treatment towards bottom dwellers to be normalized; it allows the normalization of State-sponsored violence against unarmed Black and Brown citizens to such a degree that said violence can go regularly unpunished, as in the cases of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. A similarly troubling negative externality of State-sponsored violence against unarmed Black and Brown citizens is that it contributes to an environment where non-State-sponsored violence against these citizens can go unpunished, as in the case of Trayvon Martin. The State sets the socio-political and juridical mapping for moving Black and Brown subjects towards bare life; subjects of the State (including, at times, Black and Brown subjects) follow the road map to assist in moving Black and Brown subjects towards bare life.
The who, why and how of bare life directional movement is critical in the aforementioned process and will be critical throughout this discussion. Both Chen and Bennett investigate various aspects of movement, as it relates to the ways in which power intersects with matter and how matter is mapped on animacy hierarchies. Bennett borrows Bruno Latour’s term actant to activate her analysis. “An actant is a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events. It is ‘any entity that modifies another entity in a trial;’ something whose ‘competence is deduced from its performance’ rather than posited in advance of the action” (Bennett vii). As sources of action, modifiers of entities, and producers of effect, actants literally move matter.

In her discussion of vibrant matter and the “thing-power” concept, Bennett expands on Latour’s actant notion by adding and highlighting affect: the movement of emotions. Bennett avers, “The notion of thing-power aims instead to attend to the it in actant . . . since things do in fact affect other bodies, enhancing and weakening their power” (3). Chen, too, highlights affect in her reading of Latour, but accentuates affect’s potential to move multiple bodies at once, a perspective that this argument will later explore. Chen writes, “I define affect without necessary restriction, that is, I include the notion that affect is not something necessarily corporeal and that it potentially engages many bodies at once, rather than (only) being contained as an emotion within a single body. Affect inheres in the capacity to affect and be affected. Yet I am also interested in the relatively subjective,
individually held ‘emotion’ or ‘feeling’” (24). Chen would likely be interested in Anzaldúa’s relatively subjective and individually held affect because it’s rooted in animating personal and and societal change. Anzaldúa writes about animating her creative process:

My ‘awakened dreams’ are about shifts. Thought shifts, reality shifts, gender shift . . . I am playing with my Self, I am playing with the world’s soul, I am in dialogue between my Self and el espíritu del mundo. I change myself, I change the world. Sometimes I put my imagination to a more rare use. I choose words, images, and body sensations and animate them on my consciousness, thereby making changes in my belief system (92).

Anzaldúa and Chen are concerned with the relationship between affect and animacy, especially as it relates to increasing agency in racialized embodied matter.

Bennett and Chen’s interventions into the relationships between matter, animacy, actants and affect allows us to return to the topic raised by Ziarek: whether bare life, itself, can be mobilized by emancipatory movements. White male subjects, as inhabitants at the top of the animacy hierarchy in the United States, operate as powerful actants. Historically and contemporaneously, European-American males have had the most power to effect and affect other subjects along the animacy hierarchy—including other White male subjects. Historically, European-American male subjects, as juridical agents and creators of juridical structures, have powerfully effected how Black and Brown subjects interface with the legal system. White male subjects legally institutionalized a system of forced servitude, whereby
Black subjects were sold as labor and had no legal claim over the rights of their own bodies. The affect of chattel slavery on some Black subjects involved debilitating depression, severe shame and self-destructive self-loathing.12

In the context of the aforementioned socio-political challenges to organizing bare life subjects, animating Black and Brown subjects toward liberatory action necessitates an embrace of aesthetics, affect and ethics. Bennett holds a similar position, while acknowledging the unpredictable, indeterminate and potentially dangerous nature of the aesthetics-affect-ethical relationship:

One can begin by acknowledging that there is no way to guarantee that an aesthetic disposition will produce or even incline toward goodness, generosity, or social justice. Affect can join narcissism, beauty can serve violence, and enchantment can foster cruelty . . . There are, however, some positive ways to respond to the ethical indeterminacy of affect, though here, too, no cure exists. One can, for example, argue on behalf of a particular ethical use of affect or, in what is perhaps, a more effective strategy, tell exemplary stories of such uses in the hope of enchanting bodies and inflecting imaginations towards them” (Bennett Enchantment 148).

Bennett is correct and prudent in addressing the unpredictable, indeterminate and potentially dangerous nature of the aesthetics-affect-ethical relationship. This study will acknowledge these concerns, while reading “exemplary stories” in American literature that illuminate liberatory technologies and strategies; it will argue that an embrace of aesthetics, in the form of “creative narratives,” can move Black and Brown subjects into emancipatory action. The project avers that novels, plays, and poems qua matter are actants which affect human matter enough to move human matter into liberatory action.
This study will argue that Black and Brown socially-engaged cultural producers (liberatory novelists, playwrights, poets, essayists) are also actants. These cultural producers’ subject positions as Black and Brown artists, places pressure on the idea that subjects positioned at the bottom of the human animacy scale have relatively little power to effect and affect subjects on the animacy scale above them. While acknowledging the problematics involved in “romanticizing” the artist, this study will demonstrate that some activist-oriented artists have the ability to affect individuals and groups, enough to animate them into ethical, social justice-related, emancipatory action. Socially-engaged artists have the affective power to move individuals and groups to think deeply about the moral underpinnings of injustice and help move these same individuals and groups from thought to action— from thought to “doing good.”

Reading Kant’s analysis of moral motivation, Bennett writes:

[M]oral motivation involves the power that [Kant] attributes to moral exemplars and archetypes. These ideal, true forms have a kind of centripedal force that draws humans in their vicinity into their orbit; they infect free beings and induce conduct resembling that of the exemplar or archetype (136).

Socially-engaged Black and Brown artists are not necessarily “moral exemplars,” but their activist orientation, access to public platforms to express their art, and general commitment to social justice can signify a desire to “do good”13 for their respective communities; they can operate as “examples” among the folk, while performing a “healing” role. *Animacy Matters* will examine American literature, featuring
socially-engaged Black and Brown artist-activist-healer-oriented characters, who are endeavoring to move community members toward emancipatory thought and action; it will analyze how these characters draw Black and Brown subjects “in their vicinity into the their orbit” and “infect” them with a to desire engage in conduct resembling that of an artist-activist-healer—which is to say, infect them with a desire to do good.

This project is also interested in understanding how an artist’s ability to move liberatory ideas into liberatory action can infect a critical mass of Black and Brown subjects, so that these subjects will be inspired to co-create a “movement” of people working to turn liberatory ideas into liberatory action. Aligning with Chen’s reading that affect “potentially engages many bodies at once,” Animacy Matters avers that individual socially-engaged Black and Brown artists, creating alone, or in concert with other artists, have the potential to affect “many bodies at once,” helping to animate a liberatory movement. Using African American and Latina/o literary narratives is a productive approach to study the ways in which Black and Brown socially-engaged artists perform leadership roles in emancipatory movements, because, as Erica R. Edwards argues, “[T]wentieh and early twenty-first-century African American narrative has been a site of discursive struggle whereby ideals of black leadership have been both made and unmade, post-civil rights black fiction and film have often forged political contestation through the formal achievement of curiosity: a politics and aesthetics of serious interrogation, playful questioning, thoughtful puzzling, and fantastic reinvention.”14
For example, Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* and Salvador Plascencia’s *The People of Paper* are liberatory literary narratives marked by serious interrogation, playful questioning, and fantastic reinvention. A novel published in 1980 at the dawning of American neoliberalism’s rise to pervasive influence, *The Salt Eaters* is cultural labor that chronicles Black (and people of color) community activists struggling to develop and implement discursive best practices to help their fracturing communities resist hegemonic state pressures. Published in 2005 near the apex of American neoliberalism’s rise, *The People of Paper* is a novel that examines the ways in which Latina/os seek liberation from the hegemonic gaze of a disciplining, mysterious, force in the sky. Aihwa Ong understands neoliberalism as a construct that introduces a market-based rationale to a brand of governance that is disciplinary and is rooted in the notion of optimization. Specifically, Ong asserts that the American form of neoliberalism (the most pervasive and most frequently exported model) is a “market rationality that promotes individualism and entrepreneurism that engenders debates about the norms of citizenship and the value of human life.” For Timothy Brennan, along with the goal of dismantling the welfare state, “neoliberalism argues that an unrestrained market logic, freed from governmental restraints, will cure social ills and lead to general prosperity.” David Harvey maintains, “Neoliberalism is, in the first instance, a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within a institutional
framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.”

If neoliberalism can be understood as a vulgar embrace of human commodification masquerading as liberatory technology, then Plascencia’s and Bambara’s novels can be understood as cultural labor that unmask human commodification masquerading as a liberatory technology. In these novels, ankhing animates Black and Brown liberation within neoliberal-era artistic counterpublics by employing “spirit” as an actant to resist State hegemony towards Black and Brown subjects. Ankhing can be defined as stage in socio-political and economic struggle, whereby individuals and groups organize themselves to resist hegemonic forces, which seek to delimit their subjectivity, social, political and economic agency, and delimit their power to determine their own life courses.

ANKHING AND THE SPIRIT

For this argument, the ankh functions as an indigenous Egyptian spiritual iteration of a kind of animacy. In Kemetic (ancient Egyptian) traditional spiritual cosmology, the ankh represents “life, to live, living.” This Kemetic representation has a useful relationship to this project’s understanding of animacy (a quality of agency, awareness, mobility and aliveness). The understanding of the ankh as animacy is critical because it underscores the agency and mobility of this indigenous African spiritual technology. Ankh qua animacy is particularly productive in a study that examines Black and Brown liberatory agency and is mindful of Ziarek’s
concern: “Whether bare life itself can be mobilized by emancipatory movements.”
The action, movement and affect that ankhe gerund signifies is the action, movement and affect which animates socio-political movements. Ankh builds upon and reinvents action, movement and affect in the context of liberatory communal labor, whereby men and women meet in counterpublics to bring life to themselves and others, by animating emancipatory, spirit-infused movements. During the aforementioned processes, ankhe operates as an actant, a “source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events.”

Social justice is the goal of Bambara’s and Plascencia’s ankhe-tethered, socio-political movements. Molefi Kete Asante links the ankhe to the Kemetic notion “maat,” an ethics-related concept that values living a life rooted in justice, and to the ancient Malian notion “nommo,” the generative and productive power of the spoken word. In The Salt Eaters and The People of Paper, nommo breathes life, breathes spirit, into social justice work during the ankhe process.

The etymological origins of the word “spirit” includes the Latin “spirare,” which translates as “to breathe.” Spirit is breath and speech and song; its expression signifies that life is indwelling, and with each exhalation, the spirit hails to all present: recognize—I am. This call for recognition is both a power play and power trap. Spirit’s self-hailing is a power play in that it is a declaration of identity, an establishing of subjectivity in the world of phenomena; it is a power trap in that it
is a call for recognition in the context of unequal power relations that leaves the relatively less powerful caller at the mercy of the relatively more powerful receiver—who may choose not to recognize a racialized caller. Franz Fanon argues:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose himself on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been recognized by the other, it is this other who remains the focus of his actions. His human work and reality depend on this other and on his recognition by the other. It is in this other that the meaning of life is condensed. There is no open conflict between White and Black. One day the White master recognized without struggle the Black slave. But the former slave wants to have himself recognized . . . It is when I go beyond my immediate existential being that I apprehend the being of the other as a natural reality, and more than that. If I shut off the circuit, I make the two-way movement unachievable, I keep the other within himself. In an extreme degree, I deprive him even of this being-for-self.24

Resistance to this lack of recognition, and resistance to this deprivation of the being-for-self, necessitates a breath, a speech act, a song of resistance. Sometimes the song is a shout or a shriek, because that is all that spirit, all that breath, can produce when responding to dehumanizing forces. These are the hegemonic forces that are seeking to rob the body of life and spirit—forces trying to give the spirit the blues.

In The Spirituals & the Blues25 James H. Cone, whose foundational work in liberation theology connects Black freedom possibilities to socio-cultural institutions accessible to working-class black folk, argues that African American spirituals, and their secular progeny, the blues, are critical liberatory cultural productions of the Black expressive culture tradition. Cone posits that the power source of Black spirituals, and the blues, is “Black Spirit” (5). Cone sets the context
for his definition of Black Spirit, by first sharing his spiritual hush harbor\textsuperscript{26}

experience of growing up in a Black church in Bearden, Arkansas.

At Macedonia A.M.E. Church, the Spirit of God was no abstract, no vague perception of philosophical speculation. The Spirit was the ‘power of God unto salvation,’ that ‘wheel in the middle of the wheel.’ The Spirit was God himself breaking into the lives of the people, ‘building them up where they were torn down and proppin’ them up on every leanin’ side.’ The Spirit was God’s presence with the people and his will to provide them the courage and strength to make it through (Cone 2).

Although Cone is specifically defining, here, the “the Spirit of God” (and not the Black Spirit), he is suggesting that the two notions are imbricated. Cone is suggesting that the “spirit that was God’s presence with the people” is the Black Spirit, and suggesting that the Black artists, the Black spirituals singers, who helped to bring the Black Spirit to Macedonia A.M.E.’s parishioners, were able to do so because that same Black Spirit was in the Black spirituals singers. Cone argues that as a result of this Black Spirit presence, the singers were able to invoke the Black Spirit throughout the congregation, like a dialectical contagion that spreads the weary blues, while simultaneously serving as a liberatory blues vaccine. The Spirit resists the state’s biopower, the state’s ability to make live and let die;\textsuperscript{27} Spirit rejects social death\textsuperscript{28} as it embraces Black becoming. The holy shout, yell, and scream announce, “I’m alive.” This spiritual dialectic between artist and community creates a unity that can be placed in the service of collectivist emancipatory labor inside and outside hush harbor walls:

‘Have mercy, please.’ This cry is not a cry of passivity, but a faithful, free response to the movement of the Black Spirit. It is the to the
movement of the Black Spirit. It is the Black community accepting themselves as the people of the Black Spirit and knowing through his presence that no chains can hold the Spirit of Black humanity in bondage … Black music is unity music. It unites the joy and the sorrow, the love and the hate, the hope and the despair of Black people; and it moves the people toward the direction of total liberation (Cone 5).

The speech act operating as moan and lyric, 'Have mercy please', is a public acknowledgment of immense discomfort; it is a blues lament inoculating fellow blues people. Shared epistemic sorrows visited upon the racialized Black subjects animates the conductivity of the Black Spirit in the communal space. Experiential knowledge of the blues allows the Black Spirit to pass from person-to-person in a hush harbor black church, or pass from person-to-person in a hush harbor black cultural center. This transference can occur during an ankhing process at the moment of artistic performance. The Spirit can pass from ancestor to person (when invoked by a speech act, operating as a moan and lyric) when, as Fred Moten asserts, “shriek turns speech turns song.”

However, Cone makes access to this elegiac/emancipatory dialectic restrictive. He makes the essentialist argument that “it is not possible to render an authentic interpretation of black music without having shared and participated in the Black experience that created it. Black music must be lived before it can be understood . . . And that experience is available only to those who share the spirit and participate in the faith of the people who created these songs” (5). Certainly, the specific, racialized experience of a Black subject (whose ancestors began their sojourn in North America as Black objects, as property, as capital) is likely to have
unique insight into the meaning and spirit of spirituals and the blues. However, relatively low melanin levels do not occlude the spirit from entering into a nonmelaninized subject, especially when that nonBlack subject has experienced their own specific type of spirit-saturated, elegiac/emancipatory dialectic. It is possible that a White, transgender whistle-blower, who has been imprisoned for revealing State secrets (that State citizens have a right to know), probably understands enough about the blues to moan her way through 16 bars until shriek turns speech turns song.

The powerful artistic beauty of the spirituals and the blues, and the powerful artistic beauty of the Black Spirit that animates them, has the potential to liberate Black subjects; Black Spirit is informed by nature, by embodied experience, but not confined by nature, by racialized phenomena; the epidermis cannot hold it. This cultural production has the potential to liberate any subject who has known significant subjugation and is willing to let the powerful, emancipatory spirit of art have its way. While remaining aware of his aesthetic and philosophical racism, G.W.F. Hegel’s insight is productive:

For the beauty of Art, is beauty that is born and born again of the Spirit; and as the Spirit and its productions stands higher than nature with her phenomena, so does also the beauty of Art stand higher than the beauty of nature . . . for in such a fancy there is involved both spirituality and freedom.30

It is this spirituality and freedom, the spiritual and the political, that the ankhirng process seeks to honor, cultivate and use as liberatory technologies in artistic
counterpublics. Ankhing technologies embrace the power of the sensorium; in the ankhing process, feeling and the rational are not strange bedfellows, they are embodied bedsisters. Audre Lorde argues:

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling . . . It has become fashionable to separate the spiritual (psychic and emotional) from the political, to see them as contradictory or antithetical. ‘What do you mean, a poetic revolutionary, a meditating gunrunner?’ In the same way, we have attempted to separate the spiritual and the erotic . . . The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge.31

Lorde is interrogating masculinist modalities of power and advocating for a more expansive, gendered subjectivity that is open to the use of “what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings” (Lorde 56).

Building upon Lorde, erotic power is erotic energy and erotic vibration. This vibration can be transformed into liberatory motion and liberatory movements. The aforementioned transference was on display at Vibrations during that warm, August night in Inglewood, California, described in this chapter’s opening. The social justice passions in a crowded room of articulate, committed activists exchanging ideas and exchanging energy, engendered a palpable eroticism to the proceedings. In physics, the Law of Conservation of Energy dictates that energy cannot be created or destroyed but only changes forms or is transferred from one object to another.32 Yet, in this transference, a percentage of heat and energy is lost. When Lorde
suggests transforming erotic energy into liberation energy, she does not seem to take into account the energy lost in the process. This slippage is why artistic counterpublics like Vibrations are so critical; they are venues where activists can re-energize with like-minded individuals, generating the life force necessary to maintain effective engagement in liberatory labor. Paradoxically, in the re-vivifying exchange of erotically-charged, liberation energy—liberation energy is lost in the fire. In circular fashion, this lost energy re-emphasizes the need for artistic counterpublics similar to Vibrations.

Coterminous with Lorde’s understanding of erotic power, the power propelling ankning technologies in Vibrations-like artistic counterpublics is often suspicious of rigid hierarchies, though not immune to them. Ankning-tethered processes seem to have an epistemological openness, though not replete, to nonpatriarchal modalities of leadership, a respect for the generative potentialities of the communal, and a battered weariness from what Erica R. Edwards calls the “violences of charisma,”33 which emanates from “one of the central fictions of black American politics: that freedom is best achieved under the direction of a single charismatic leader” (Edwards xv). Echoing Edwards, the ankning process, itself, resists the Great Man approach to community liberation and embraces an emancipatory communal labor approach.

Although the ank (and ankning by association) is an understandable and productive technology to employ, given the subject, direction and scope of this project, the icon’s use is problematic due to its connection to 1960s through 1990s-
era Black Nationalist/Afrocentric misogyny, homophobia, and narrow, exclusionary Black essentialism. In the context of virulent 1960s through 1990s-era anti-Blackness and a long tradition of non-Africans demonizing Africa, its culture, history and progeny, emancipatory-oriented African Americans looked to reclaim and embrace Africa by reclaiming outward expressions of “Africaness” (i.e. dashikis, braids, afros), and African iconography, including the ankh. However, this reclamation project was often rooted in romantic, simplistic notions that privileged men, masculinist ideas and male folkways, while marginalizing women, their ideas, and folkways. As a complement to the hyper-masculinity, the African reclamation project often included a hyper-homophobia that aggressively demonized same-gendered lovers as “unnatural,” “un-African,” white-minded traitors to the race.34

A series of effective feminist and queer critiques emerged to address the aforementioned misogyny and homophobia. In “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” Frances Beale wrote in the foundational The Black Woman, “Those who are exerting their ‘manhood’ by telling Black women to step back into a domestic, submissive role are assuming a counter-revolutionary position. Black woman likewise have been abused by the system and we must begin talking about the elimination of all kinds of oppression” (Beale 93). Writing in the same anthology, which she edited, Toni Cade Bambara wrote, “[The Black woman] is being assigned an unreal role of mute servant that supposedly neutralizes the acidic tension that exists between Black men and Black women. She is being encouraged—in the name
of the revolution no less—to cultivate ‘virtues’ that if listed would sound like the personality traits of slaves.”

Critic and activist Barbara Smith, who was active in the Civil Rights, Black Liberation, Women’s Rights and Gay Rights movements, opined about interlocking nature of racism, misogyny and homophobia, “Black power activists and Black nationalists generally viewed lesbians and gay men anathema—white-minded traitors to the race . . . Because I came out in the context of the Black liberation, Women’s liberation, and —most significantly—the newly emerging Black Feminist Movement that I was helping to build, I worked from the assumption that all of the ‘isms’ were connected.”

Jean Bond and Patricía Peery wrote about the aggressive attacks that Black women endured from Black men—in the name of revolution:

> For their part, many Black men berate Black women for their faults, faults so numerous and so pronounced that one is hard put to discern in their tirade, any ground, short of invisibility, on which Black womanhood may redeem itself. They do this, blind to the age-old implications of such a vociferous rejection of a part of themselves. Others run on about the necessity of subordinating women to their superior and manly will in the planning and execution of revolution (Bond and Peery *Black Woman* 114).

Sharon Patricia Holland argued that the genealogy of these intra-community attacks and connected “isms” can be traced to religious institutions and ideologies that claim to be “pro-Black,” but whose “pro-Blackness” morphs into “anti-Blackness” when referencing Black gay community members. Responding to Ron Simmons’
essay, “Some Thoughts on the Challenges Facing Black Gay Intellectuals,” Holland concurs that there is great deal of homophobia in organizations like traditional Black Church and the Nation of Islam and that “religious figures like Farrakhan, Asante, Madhubuti, Baraka and Staples often ‘equate homosexuality and adultery with rape and child molestation’ and interpret religious and critical texts to fit this equation.”

Given the aforementioned queer and feminist critiques, and the voluminous number of unmentioned queer and feminist critiques, why employ the ankh in this emancipatory-centered study, when the symbol is tainted by association with some of the most vile aspects of the Black Power and Afrocentric Movements? This study is utilizing the ankh, despite problematic associations, because the ankh is too valuable as a spiritual technology, historical artifact and cultural touchstone to be dismissed due to illicit associations over the last 50 years, when it’s been a transformative animating force for over 5000 years. In some ways, this study is a recovery project for the ankh. In a Kemetian spiritual approach to meditation, the ankh (along with other ancient Egyptian iconography) plays a central role. While using extremely deep breathing to reduce the breath count and slow the heart-rate, which facilitates access to the trance state, the practitioner visualizes the ankh (often paired with other icons in the spiritual system) moving through their body as a healing modality (when there is a physical ailment) or visualizes holding the ankh and other icons in their hand as a way to “bring into their possession” the qualities that the ankh and the other held icons represent. Originally, the ankh was a
technology of healing and self-liberation, which are critical pieces to community liberation—and why the ankh is worth recovering.

ANKHING IN SPACE

It may be productive to summarize a series of defining elements that ankning includes and expand upon the nomenclature found in these defining elements. 1) Ankhing is a stage in socio-political and economic struggle, whereby individuals and groups organize themselves to resist hegemonic forces, which seek to delimit their subjectivity, social, political and economic agency, and delimit their power to determine their own life courses. 2) Ankhing is a stage in socio-political and economic struggle, whereby inspiration, strategy and communal labor comingle to serve the aforementioned subjects in their efforts to collectively think through the most effective means to resist hegemonic forces—and through this idea-exchange, inspire, motivate and move each other towards best practices to resist hegemonic forces seeking to delimit their subjectivity, social, political and economic agency, and delimit their power to determine their own life courses. This process includes rigorous self-interrogation and group interrogation towards creating a healthy, whole, ankning process that can result in healthy, whole, ankning practices and outcomes.

Though not speaking specifically about ankning, Moraga offers insight into the efficacy of self and group interrogation: “In Toni Cade Bambara’s novel The Salt Eaters, the Black curandera asks the question, ‘Can you afford to be whole?’ This
line represents the question that has burned within me for years and years through my growing politicization. What would a movement focused on the freedom of women of color look like? In other words, what are the implications of looking, not only outside of our culture but into our culture and ourselves and from that place beginning to develop a strategy for a movement that could challenge the bedrock of oppressive systems of belief globally.”

3) Ankhing desires to animate and nurture nascent socio-political and economic empowerment movements by embracing the erotic, the spiritual, and other sensorium-tethered epistemes. This sensorium-embrace can produce a generative, liberatory power to start, nurture and sustain individuals and groups in their efforts to organize and move themselves in the direction of freedom. 4) The ankhing process privileges alterity, diverse ideas, democratic decision-making, and concomitant communal labor to implement democratically agreed upon courses of action, while explicitly rejecting the tired tradition of patriarchal, Great Man, top-down leadership-style that has historically marked racialized emancipatory organizing labor.

The preceding enhanced definition of ankhing is an appropriate segue into a spatial intervention. There is a symbiotic and dialectical relationship between the ankhing process and the site where the ankhing process takes place. In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Jürgen Habermas’ investigation of the history, the workings and the changing dynamics of the 18th and 19th century European (England, Germany and France) bourgeois public sphere, he begins his study by discussing that “public,” as it relates to physical buildings, doesn’t
necessarily mean that all citizens have access to these structures and the power they possess. “[I]n the expression, ‘public building,’ the term need not refer to general accessibility; the building does not even have to be open to the public traffic. ‘Public buildings’ simply house state institutions and as such are ‘public’. The state is the ‘public authority’. It owes this attribute to its tasks of promoting the public or common welfare of its rightful members” (Habermas 2). Brown and Black subjects share a history marked by juridical, social, political and economic maneuvers by the State to deny or limit Brown and Black citizens access to the public sphere, signifying that Brown and Black subjects are not “rightful” members of the State despite their nominal status as United States citizens.

The aforementioned “wrongness” of Brown and Black citizens, in relation to denied access to full State membership, necessitated the creation of alternative public spheres by these “wrong citizens.” Nancy Fraser argues:

[M]embers of subordinated social groups—women, workers peoples of color, gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.43

In contradistinction to Habermas, Fraser speaks of “publics” to denote that there is more than the “general” public sphere which Habermas identifies; instead, there are many spheres which can serve to counter the narrative regarding the “general” public sphere. The failure of Habermas to consider a more nuanced understanding
of public spheres, as it relates to subjugated peoples of color and sexual orientation, is curious given *Transformation*’s nuanced analysis of stratified classes. Fraser, rightly, sees the need for counterpublics like Vibrations to help subordinated peoples “formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.” Catherine R. Squires claims that “Marginalized groups are commonly denied public voice or entrance into public spaces by dominant groups and thus are forced into enclaves. At different times in history, African Americans have been forced into enclaves by repressive State policies and have used these enclave spaces to create discursive strategies and gather oppositional resources . . . [A]n enclave public sphere requires the maintenance of safe spaces.”

The maintenance of safe spaces is essential in the ankhing process, which includes the process whereby inspiration, strategy, and communal labor come into being to animate and nurture nascent socio-political and economic empowerment movements, via employing evolving democratic, nonpatriarchal, spirit-infused technologies. Physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, gender, racial and sexual-orientation/identification-based modes of safety are essential for empowering diverse subjects to speak, think and strategize freely in the communal effort to gather oppositional resources. At times, the embrace of diverse subject positions, within the confines of a counterpublic, is a kind of oppositional resource. Inclusivity, and the acknowledgment that epistemological labor can be generated from subjugated subjects inside a subjugated group, resists the troubling phenomena of the oppressed mimicking the hegemonic ways of dominant groups.
Embracing counterpublic inclusivity resists the counterpublic becoming *counter* to the counterpublic.

It may be productive to offer an expanded series of counterpublic characteristics. Squires’ generative understanding of the counterpublic involves:

Spaces and discourses: protest rhetoric; persuasion; increased interpublic communication and interaction with the state; occupation and reclamation of the dominant and state-controlled public spaces; strategic use of enclave spaces . . . Goals: foster resistance; test arguments and strategies in wider publics; create alliances; persuade outsiders to change views; perform public resistance to oppressive laws and social codes; gain allies . . . Sanctions: threat of violence, disrespect, or dismissal from dominant publics and state; co-optation of counterpublicity (Squires 460).

Squires, rightly, focuses on the resistance element of the counterpublic by identifying as counterpublic characteristics: “protest rhetoric”, “foster resistance” and “perform public resistance to oppressive laws and social codes”. For some subjugated subjects, subjects whose material conditions are adversely impacted by State policies, resisting hegemonic and societal forces negative impact upon their lifeworlds is a priority; for some subaltern citizens, lifting oppressive yokes is priority enough to move them toward counterpublics for solidarity with fellow oppressed citizens and solidarity with fellow communal laborers committed to developing and implementing strategic liberatory actions. Squires privileges intra-counterpublic and inter-counterpublic communication because the later performs the crucial labor of producing allies and changing minds outside the group, while the former performs the equally critical labor of identifying best emancipatory practices.
and helping to negotiate the difficulties that a diverse group is likely to face under oppressive pressures.

Squires’ listing of counterpublic characteristics can be expanded because: 1) Squires’ counterpublic characteristics do not include a prioritization of intra-counterpublic evolution. Evolution is a critical component to a liberatory group because its needs to be nimble when facing a State’s hegemonic powers; 2) Squires does not include spirit as an element; and 3) Squires does not include an explicit goal of transforming societies.

This project expands Squires’ counterpublic characteristics. Adding “intra-counterpublic evolution” promotes an evolutionary self/group interrogation about how the self/group creates, develops and adjudicates epistemological approaches and liberatory practices to respond to the State’s hegemonic forces. This type of evolution is required because emancipatory internal structures, and emancipatory internal systems, are not static—especially under the totalizing, atomizing gaze of a neoliberal imperative. As a result, any counterpublic characteristic listing must include an evolutionary-related term, because without an evolutionary element, a counterpublic is in danger of becoming a space that used to be safe, or a space that used to have counterpublicity or a space that simply used to be.

Secondly, counterpublic characteristics must include a spirit-related term. At times, the spirit is unrecognized (although present) in counterpublics because it does not hail itself; it does not call attention to itself. Spirit is. Spirit is embedded in the feeling, in the enhanced sense of self-worth that some oppressed individuals
may feel when standing up to defend their sense of human dignity. Spirit is the technology that can allow the dispossessed to feel good about themselves, their culture and their community; it can allow disenfranchised subjects to feel beautiful and valuable enough resist oppression. As Cone asserts, spirit is the generative power that literally “moves the people toward the direction of total liberation.” A listing of counterpublic characteristics must include a spirit element because it is the elevated spirit of the people, which can allow them to do the work of resisting inside—and eventually outside—the counterpublic.

Thirdly, a listing of counterpublic characteristics must include a goal of transforming societies. Transformation of societies must be a goal on a list of counterpublic characteristics because perpetual liberatory struggle is not a goal, it’s a curse of Sisyphus. Perpetual struggle is physically, emotionally and psychologically exhausting for even the most committed community laborer. There must be an end-game or burn-out is inevitable; not breathing is possible.

The addition of the aforementioned three elements to Squires’ understanding of counterpublics creates a discursive bridge to Margaret Kohn’s notion of heterotopias of resistance. In Radical Space, Kohn argues that the heterotopia of resistance is “a real countersite that inverts and contests existing economic or social hierarchies. Its function is social transformation rather than escapism, containment, or denial. By challenging conventions of the dominant society, it can be an important locus of struggle against normalization.”45
Kohn builds upon Michel Foucault’s notion of the heterotopia.

Foucault writes about heterotopias:

There also exists, and this is probably true for all cultures and civilizations, real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is localizable (qtd. in Kohn 90).

The “counter-arrangement” of which Foucault speaks allows for an arrangement in a space where resistance organizing, for example, can be effective. Resistance organizing can be effective at generating liberatory actions, while eschewing patriarchal approaches and while employing alternative spirit-based power technologies. This cultural labor can be accomplished as it respects and celebrates intra-counterspace subject diversity. Kohn notes that Foucault does not claim that heterotopias are a tool of political emancipation and social transformation (Kohn 91).

HETEROTOPIAS OF RESISTANCE

In contradistinction to Foucault’s heterotopias, Kohn’s heterotopias of resistance are “sites for political emancipation; their function is social transformation.” Furthermore, Kohn argues that heterotopias of resistance are “sites that foster oppositional practices by sheltering counterhegemonic ideas and identities” (Kohn 129). By “counterhegemonic ideas and identities,” Kohn suggests that heterotopias of resistance are “safe havens” for ideas that privilege democratic-
styles of information-sharing, decision-making and the communal labor, while functioning as safe havens for subjects (and their ideas), who may represent difference within heterotopias of resistance; Kohn suggests that alterity is not only acknowledged but seen as a source epistemological value and a resource for the effective implementation of collectively-derived strategies. Kohn asserts that heterotopias of resistance are “democratic. Their statues and by-laws establish rules to guarantee both voting and deliberation; they set up procedures to ensure that everyone [can] speak and to prevent anyone from dominating the conversation . . . These sites mediate individuals’ identification with an oppositional political project—a political project motivated by diverse experiences” (Kohn 129).

Kohn’s notion of heterotopias of resistance is also inclusive of the spirit; the sensorium has a home in the “house of the people.” Kohn’s research field for Radical Space is 19th and early 20th century European heterotopias of resistance, some of which she hails as “houses of the people.” These houses of the people provided workers, socialists and communists with safe havens to strategize, organize and fight hegemonic State forces. After the completion of a house of the people in Brussels in 1899, a poem was published on April 1, 1899 in the socialist newspaper Le Peuple (Kohn 151). In the poem, there is a clear acknowledgment of the generative role that spirit plays in heterotopias of resistance:

It is here, in this marvelous place
That we will raise the battle cry
It is here that ardor will awaken us
And will make us remember fecund debates
It is here that with words aflame
Our representatives will come to speak to us
Here that our souls will be sparked
Here that we will find consolation

It is here at the source of our study
Full of ardor, we [illegible word]
And it is here, connected to custom
That we will come to fraternize (qtd. in Kohn152).

Given the mundane construction and unimaginative nomenclature, it is understandable why Kohn says the poem has “no literary merit” (Kohn 152), but it is significant that a poem was written and published in a socialist newspaper to commemorate the establishment of a heterotopia of resistance. It is significant that a spirit-infused, cultural production was put in the service of a safe haven for political radicals and their supporters. Kohn writes, “The poem calls the house of the people ‘the source of our study.’ It is not merely a place where books, teachers and students come together; rather, something in the site itself provides a motivation for study . . . There is a reason to understand the workings of the social world because it is possible to change it. The poem also emphasizes the importance of place in encouraging emotional identification and motivating action. Words such as ‘aflame,’ ‘pride,’ ‘ardor,’ ‘soul,’ and ‘spark’ suggest that politics is about passion, and passion is more effectively captured by a material place than an abstract concept” (Kohn 152).

Kohn argues that heterotopias of resistance are sites where liberatory subjects, as Cone also argues, can “feel the spirit” (Cone 5). In heterotopias of
resistance, the spirit is a technology used to encourage liberatory subjects’ emotions because emotion is a source of power. Liberatory subjects in heterotopias of resistance recognize, as Lorde does, that “The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false, resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge” (Lorde 53). Heterotopias of resistance make room for the uses of the erotic because it is a democratic site that shelters “counterhegemonic ideas and identities” (Kohn 129); it is a counterhegemonic site promoting the knowledge that feeling and the rational are not strange bedfellows, they are embodied bed-sisters. As a result of the aforementioned qualities, heterotopias of resistance are the idea sites for the manifestation of the ankhsing process: that process whereby inspiration, strategy, and communal labor comingle to animate and nurture nascent socio-political and economic empowerment movements, via employing evolving democratic, nonpatriarchal, spirit-infused technologies. The synergy between ankhsing qualities and heterotopias of resistance qualities gives the ankhsing process the best opportunity to produce the best practices for the liberation of subjugated Brown and Black people.

**ARTISTIC HETEROTOPIAS OF RESISTANCE**

Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* is a productive space to start the interrogation of what this projects calls “artistic heterotopias of resistance” because the novel chronicles activists trying to defend the collective humanity of their communities.48 To complete the construction of this critical term, I will introduce this project’s understanding of “artistic.” By artistic, the study means to describe
spirit-infused cultural productions, the subjects who produce the cultural productions and the concomitant sites where cultural productions are created. Artistic can also refer to a previously “nonartistic site” that has been transformed into an artistic site by the spontaneous creation of art, which is to say, that a nonartistic site can be improvisationally “repurposed” by cultural producers actively creating art “in the moment.” In relationship to heterotopias of resistance, the primary functions of the artistic are to “bring the spirit” in greater measure and to enhance generative power in the service of emancipatory labor.

To set the context for this discussion of the artistic heterotopias of resistance on the pages of The Salt Eaters (briefly here, and fully in Chapter Two), it may be productive to discuss an “off-the-page” examples of artistic heterotopias of resistance-related sites. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries there have been organizations that have had several elements of artistic heterotopias of resistance and featured artists in leadership roles. The 1930s era League of Struggle for Negro Rights (the Communist Party’s frontline organization in its outreach to African Americans during this time) understood the role that artists could play in the League’s “transforming the world” agenda. Poet Langston Hughes was the League’s president in 1934. The effusive Hughes promoted a collectivist, inclusive, style of decision-making at the local level but ultimately the League of Struggle for Negro Rights was under the sway and vulnerable to the dictates of the top-down Communist Party.49
The Combahee River Collective is a more replete example of an artistic heterotopia of resistance. The Combahee River Collective had its origins in the Nationalist Black Feminist Organization. The National Black Feminist Organization was formed in August 1973 by Black feminists concerned that the National Organization of Women-led Women Liberation Movement was not adequately dealing with race and class, and concerned that the Black Liberation Movement was not adequately dealing with sexism. The first and only NBFO president Margaret Sloan explained that, "by organizing around our needs as Black women, we are making sure that we won’t be left out . . . which was what was appearing to be happening in both the Black Liberation and the Women Liberation Movements" (Harris 288).

As early as 1974, the Boston chapter of the NBFO began to organize themselves around a more explicitly anti-capitalist, socialist and Black lesbian feminist agenda, eventually resulting in the formation of the Combahee River Collective (Harris 292-293). In April 1977, the CRC published the Combahee River Collective Statement of definition, history, and intent. It became a foundational document in the establishment of strategic identity politics as a generative resistance tool. The statement reads in part:

We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the
manifest and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face (Harris 293).

In the context of cultural production, Tiffany López argues that the process involved in cultural and intellectual labor is as important as the labor itself. Process matters. After their initial meeting to see what they had, the Combahee members began the process of self-definition and strategizing in a series of meetings that involved an intense variety of consciousness raising (Harris 299). They were intentional about having an inclusive, democratic, and nonhierarchal approach. Combahee’s approach aligns with ankholing, which is a stage in socio-political and economic struggle, whereby inspiration, strategy and communal labor comingle to help subjugated subjects collectively think through the most effective means to resist hegemonic forces. Like Combahee’s approach, ankholing’s process includes rigorous self-interrogation and group interrogation towards creating a healthy, whole series of best practices and outcomes.

In Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters*, an ankholing-related process makes artistic heterotopias of resistance safer and more productive, similar to how ankholing worked with the Combahee River Collective. At the start of the activist-oriented novel, protagonist Velma is under the care of a community healer, Minnie Ransom, who accesses traditional African religious healing modalities in her attempt to heal the activist. Velma resists the healing to such an extent that Minnie asks her, “Are you sure sweetheart that you want to be well?” This question also serves as the novel’s opening line. In her work as a healer, Minnie is able to see and engage
spiritual deities or “haints” from “the otherside.” Minnie’s spiritual guide, main-helper and primary interlocutor is a haint known as Old Wife. Old Wife is a spiritual deity who Minnie knew as a child when Old Wife was alive.

In *The Salt Eaters*, the relationship between Minnie and Old Wife can be read as a signifier for the unstable lives of racialized and gendered bodies who are committed to community spaces and community healing. While resisting hegemonic State forces, the healing labor expended in racialized communities can be exhausting. In oppressive contexts, healing whittles away at the healer; energy and spirit are lost during the transfer of wellness from community healer to community in need. Old Wife was a community healer who gave to her community until she “gave up the ghost” and became a haint; Old Wife’s haunting presence is Minnie’s reminder of community healing’s inherent dangers. The transfer of spirit from healer to community can result in anti-oppression labor becoming self-oppression labor: laboring till breath becomes labored—healing to death. A community activist can transfer her spirit into nonexistence; she can heal until she “ain’t,” heal until she becomes a haint. Instead of healing the community, the healer simply begins to haunt the community. Arthur Redding argues that “[H]aints, thus combines a distinct regional pronunciation of the word *haunts*, or ghosts, with the traditional corruption of *ain’t*. Ghosts are haunt and ain’t; ghosts are the nonexistent, the ain’t, the other: They are both in the sense that they are immaterial or fugitive presences of the exiled and the abandoned” (Redding 9).
*The Salt Eaters* narrative begins with Velma Henry in danger of becoming a haint. Velma the Healer has given away her energy, given away her breath by sticking her head into an oven until she cannot breathe. Exhausted by healing activism, Velma relieves the State of its need to exercise biopower over her; she disciplines her own breath. This vulgar self-discipline animates the beginning of the text. Minnie asks Velma, “Are you sure, Sweetheart, that you want to be well?” Minnie seeks surety from Velma because Minnie is familiar with the world of haints; she knows they can choose nonexistence and be at peace with the choice.

**HOW THE CHAPTERS ANIMATE**

This study’s methodology is rooted in the literary arts (and not the Black church or West African dance, for example) because reading and writing—and the denial of reading and writing—play such an outsized role the experience African Americans vis-à-vis the State. When Fredrick Douglass is taught the basics of reading and writing by Mrs. Auld, her husband and slave master Mr. Auld forbade any further instruction because it would forever “unfit [Douglass] to be a slave.” Mr. Auld’s conviction about keeping Douglass illiterate provides Douglass with a revelation: “I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man’s power to enslave the [Black people]. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom . . . I set out with the high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read.” Douglass argues that the
acquisition of literacy can dramatically enhance a subject’s animacy level; reading and writing can move a bare life individual from bondage to freedom. In Animacy Matters, ankhing is the liberatory technology employed to read literature and theorize ways to enhance animacy levels within the Latina/o and African American communities. Facility with the literary arts is a generative means to move up the human animacy scale. In a liberatory study involving Black and Brown folk seeking heightened animacy in artistic counterpublics, the centering of literary arts is an essential move rooted in resistance.

The conflation of spirit, animacy and artistic counterpublic can create a productive energy that helps to resist the hegemonic, atomizing forces of neoliberalism on the African American and Latina/o communities. This project argues that socio-politically engaged Black and Brown artists operating in artistic counterpublics have the potential to facilitate liberatory, counterhegemonic labor against the totalizing gaze of neoliberal hegemons. Furthermore, this study contends that artistically-rooted liberatory labor is especially effective in the “ankhing” stages of socio-political and economic struggle. The Kemetic-based coinage ankhing is that process whereby inspiration, strategy, and communal labor comingle to animate and nurture nascent socio-political and economic empowerment movements, via employing evolving democratic, nonpatriarchal, spirit-infused technologies. Ankhing stages in African American and Latina/o communities often take place in Black and Brown emancipatory sites that, in many cases, would fall within rhetorician Vorris L. Nunley’s definition of hush harbors: “Black publics [and
this study argues, Brown publics] where Black [and Brown] common sense, ‘ideology lived and articulated in everyday understanding of the world and one’s place in it,’ is assumed to be hegemonic and normative.”

Since literary and cultural texts have been sites where artists have represented and re-imagined spirit-infused work in Black and Brown counterpublics, critically engaging literary and cultural texts engenders a better understanding of how creative representations and re-imaginings shape American literature. Placing literary and cultural studies in conversations with rhetoric, theology, and urban and political theory produces a more replete understanding of what American literature can teach us about liberation in Black and Brown communities. African Americans and Latina/o Americans share a history of state-sponsored juridical and socio-economic oppression; the emancipatory stories Black and Brown writers tell about themselves, and their respective communities, can provide insight into liberatory leadership strategies and discursive best practices to resist the State’s oppressive forces.

This project is divided into four chapters, each involving reading American literature (focused on African American and Latina/o literature) with the intent to bring to the surface emancipatory strategies, best practices and liberatory challenges. In Chapter One, Salvador Plascencia’s The People of Paper is placed in conversation with Ishmael Reed’s Mumbo Jumbo. Both novels are post-modernist narratives built around culturally-relevant, community-oriented, history-based mythologies. The People of Paper examines the cultural history of the working-class,
primarily Latina/o community of El Monte, California and interweaves this cultural history with a fictionalized, mytho-poetic world of a woman made of paper. *Mumbo Jumbo* mixes Kemetian mythology with Haitian mythology and historical figures from the Black Liberation Movement. Both texts are deeply interested in writing and literature as ways to access liberation for racialized subjects.

In Chapter Two, this project reads Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* in conjunction with Cheríe Moraga’s play *Heroes and Saints*. These two narratives deal with the motivations, folkways, strategies and challenges of people involved in emancipatory labor. Both stories feature activists whose troubled intimate relationships complicate their liberatory labor. The narratives explore the impact of environmental racism on Black and Brown communities. *The Salt Eaters’* protagonist Velma works as a computer programmer at a chemical plant. *Heroes and Saints* chronicles the travails of a farming community that is ravaged by chemical pesticide usage in the labor fields. Both narratives explore how the racialized body is devalued and debased in the neoliberal context.

Chapter Three examines two important anthologies driven by the work of women of color who are feminist activists. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cheríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, and *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint*, edited by Lauren Muller and the Blueprint Collective, are examples of emancipatory labor in the forms of collective knowledge production and collective book making. Both projects inform
the democratic, nonsexist, nonhomophobic, horizontal leadership approach to liberatory labor that ankhing seeks to privilege.

Chapter Four explores the virulent anti-Blackness of this present historical moment in the United States, and how, as Erica R. Edwards suggests, fiction can be a resource for forging political contestation through “the formal achievement of curiosity: a politics and aesthetics of serious interrogation, playful questioning, thoughtful puzzling, and fantastic reinvention.” Historically, the Black subject has been the testing ground for State-sponsored oppression aimed at America’s marginalized subjects, so a specific exploration of creative-oriented, Black resistance will be productive in understanding American-style oppression and resistance. By reading the superbly curious, thoughtful and imaginative work of Kamau Daáood and Wanda Coleman, this final chapter argues that especially creative and inventive cultural production can serve as technology to expand Black subjectivity and serve as counterforce to sovereign and societal pressures that move Black subjects toward bare life.
Chapter One

And if we had learned anything from this story it was to be cautious of paper—to be mindful of its fragile construction and sharp edges, but mostly to be cautious of what is written on it.57

—Salvador Plascencia

Well, Moses went on stage and began gyrating his hips and singing the words of the Book of Thoth, and a strange thing happened. The ears of the people began to bleed.58

—Ishmael Reed

PAPER CUTS

This project’s Introduction provides the context and blueprint for the argument that is to follow. In summary, the State has aggressively pushed African American and Latina/o subjects down the human animacy scale (a scale notating qualities of agency, awareness, mobility and aliveness) toward bare life via socio-political and juridical means. The ankh, as an indigenous Egyptian spiritual iteration of animacy, powers the liberatory ankhiing process, whereby groups organize themselves to resist hegemonic forces that seek to delimit their subjectivity and agency—and their ability to be fully alive. Ultimately, the Introduction argues that American literature is a repository to reimagine new possibilities for African Americans and Latina/os to resist bare life and elevate their animacy. Via reading avant-garde Black and Brown literature, Chapter One will argue that ankhiing’s valorization of community
folkways, spirit and art contribute to the elevation of Latina/o and African American animacy.

Books can paper cut. Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* and Salvador Plascencia’s *The People of Paper* suggest the lacerating potential of narrative on paper. The novels function as commentaries on knowledge production, the relationship between knowledge and power, and how written knowledge cuts racialized subjects in two: bare life ("wounded, expendable and endangered") and good life ("life tethered to political agency and speech").

The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that the origin and original meaning of "cut" is unknown, but the *OED* notes that the word’s earliest appearance (including "cutt" and "cutte") occurs before 1300 A.D. and its denotation bears no apparent connection to cut’s more familiar 16TH century Modern English signification, “The act or result of cutting.”59 The word’s pre-1300 entry reads: “1. =Lot: in the phrase draw cuts (or lay cut) applied to a ready way of casting lots, by the chance of drawing sticks or straws of unequal lengths . . . he who chances to draw the bit differing in length is the person to whom the lot falls.”60 The earliest appearance of cut dealt with difference—and its consequences. In *Mumbo Jumbo* and *The People of Paper*, subjects come up short when they draw cuts defined by their racialized bodies; the unequal ways in which their colored bodies are marked results in unequal treatment for their colored bodies. Yet, there is a dialectical aspect to the cut, to difference. Difference informs and defines “standard,” as oppressed informs and defines oppressor; there is liberatory power in the cut. The cut’s power is
produced by the improvisational act (and vernacular phrase) of turning a lemon into lemonade. Fred Moten offers a cutting derivation on this theme:

> What is needed is an improvisation of the transition from descent to cut, an audition of the ancient prefiguring trace of the cut in the depths, an activation of lingering by and in the cut (and of the possibility of action and lingering and the promise of freedom in action).61

In this chapter, I will also argue that ankhsing is a liberatory technology rooted in ancient indigenous African spirituality and that it contributes to the promise of freedom in action.

**FLOWER PICKERS AND REVOLUTION**

In *The People of Paper*, the residents of El Monte, a primarily-Latina/o city east of downtown Los Angeles, become aware of a sovereign-like force that has an outsized impact on their lives. Saturn—the sovereign (and a near homophone to the word “sovereign”)—seems to have a sophisticated spying apparatus; Saturn tracks the Latina/o residents’ comings, goings, public meetings and, at times, has access to their private conversations. Saturn’s surveillance power “is of a piercing strength able to penetrate asbestos and wood shingles, tar paper, plywood, the darkness of the attic.”62 The intense sovereign encroachment is coupled with the harsh socio-political and economic realities of the agricultural laborer field, where the “plantation paid thirty cents for each pound of carnations and fifty for the thorny stems of roses” (Plascencia 34). In a neoliberal context, the aforementioned labor realities help to produce:
The first street gang born of carnations. But for them there was no softness in petals and no aroma in flowers. They felt only splinters and calluses from tilling the land and smelled only the stench of fertilizer and horse shit. Their shoes were wet and the cuffs of their work pants crusted with mud. At midday they took off their shirts wringing the sweat and then tossing them over their shoulders. And always a cutting knife was in hand (Plascencia 34).

Tired of their lives moving towards bare life, El Monte community members decide to organize and fight back. An agricultural worker in the floral industry-dominated city, Federico de le Fe aligns with the local gang EMF (El Monte Flores) and begins to organize resistance efforts against the sovereign. Froggy, a veteran EMF gang member, recounts an early Federico de le Fe recruitment meeting directed at EMF gangsters. “[Federico de le Fe] said it was a war for volition and against the commodification of sadness. ‘It is a war against the fate that has been decided for us’” (Plascencia 53).

Federico de le Fe speaks of a war against fate. A war against fate suggests an unwinnable war against what has already been determined; it signifies a battle against the lot, the cut, one has drawn in life. However, the cut thrust upon the El Monte flower pickers, these citizens with knives at-the-ready, is not a cut of their own choosing. The cut at-hand is a hand-me-down cut from a sovereign on-high. During the recruitment meeting, Froggy “asked who had given us this fate. Federico de la Fe shook his head and said that he was not entirely sure. All he could tell was that it was something or someone in the sky” (Plascencia 53). This gap between the citizen’s cut, and how the cut came to be, is where enough hope resides to engage in
an unwinnable war. If a citizen doesn’t choose the cut, maybe the citizen’s fate is not sealed: volition can have its say.

The exercise of human agency amidst extraordinary obstacles, the making of a way out of no way, bespeaks to the experience of many racialized subjects in the United States: captured Africans surviving the Atlantic Middle Passage to endure the Mississippi Middle Passage and prodigal Mexicans surviving passage along the Rio Grande to their ancestral homelands where their native bodies are marked as alien. In the context of expansive discrimination, degradation and death-dealing, what is the relationship between volition, desire and resistance? Fred Moten avers, “To act on the desire to be the opposite, the desire not to collaborate, is to object. How might resistance suspend the process of subjection?”

Federico de la Fe, the flower picker, decides not to collaborate with the sovereign power who has drawn a lot, a cut, for him to live out: bare life. Despite the overwhelming odds, he is compelled by volition to fight an unwinnable war against fate by choosing the opposite of bare life; Federico de la Fe desires and picks the “good life”—a life tethered to political agency and speech. Federico de la Fe exercises his political agency by calling a meeting of local gang members and speaking resistance to them. “[If] we fight we might be able to gain control, to shield ourselves and live our lives for ourselves (Plascencia 53). Federico de la Fe is making an affective appeal to EMF; he wants to move them to believe that the good life is possible for “[T]he first street gang born of carnations,” who feel “only
splinters and calluses from tilling the land and smelled only the stench of fertilizer and horse shit.”

**As a resistance organizer, Federico de la Fe is operating as an actant, “a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman … which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events.”** Employing speech-tethered affect, Federico de la Fe is seeking to alter the course of events through a resistance movement by, as Chen writes, affectively engaging “many bodies at once.” The resistance leader is attempting to move racialized bodies, Brown matter, away from bare life towards the good life. Federico de la Fe animates this process by discouraging gangster flower pickers from collaborating with a sovereign force determined to draw unsavory cuts on their behalf.

Along with defining the battle as a war against fate, Federico de la Fe defines the battle as a war against the “commodification of sadness.” The bare life is a sad life. Removed from political agency and speech (and under the atomizing gaze of a sovereign), the bare life of El Monte’s Latina/o agricultural workers slides down the human animacy scale towards animality: a kind of subhuman object. The flower picker’s bare life becomes “sadness itself,” the “sad thing itself”; thingified, the El Monte agricultural worker becomes a candidate for commodification. In “Estranged Labor,” Marx writes that the worker:

[D]oes not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy … the worker’s activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to
another; it is the loss of his self. As a result, therefore, man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal. 64

Above, Marx writes about the worker whose fate is determined by a capitalist system (a socio-economic representative of the sovereign) determined to exploit the worker’s surplus labor. Marx’s solution is to foment a resistance movement to overturn the sovereign’s system: revolution. Federico de la Fe has a similar strategy. The initial recruitment and organizing meeting with the disenfranchised members of EMF is representative of the initial element in the ankhing process. The first element in the quarternate ankhing process is a stage in socio-political and economic struggle, whereby individuals and groups organize themselves to resist hegemonic forces which seek to delimit their subjectivity, social, political and economic agency, and delimit their power to determine their own life courses. Federico de la Fe’s war of volition against the commodification of sadness signifies that collective will is necessary to determine community life courses—and collective will is necessary to resist becoming a community of commodities.

LIBERATED WOMAN

Subcomandante Sandra’s role in The People of Paper highlights another element of the ankhing process. As the Introduction addressed, male-led liberation movements in the 20th century have been taken to task for trying to circumscribe,
and undermine women’s roles in emancipatory labor. Historically, women have been pushed towards “support roles” that didn’t fully respect their potential leadership, organizing efficacy and strategic contributions to the cause at-hand. Rampant misogyny in liberation movements is harmful to the morale, motivation and effectiveness of female emancipatory laborers—and it’s a costly strategic move. Constricting liberation-minded women’s contributions to freedom work constricts liberatory resources from movements that traditionally are “out-resourced” by the hegemonic power structures they are resisting; strategically, it is wise to encourage full participation from all willing liberatory laborers, especially those whose gendered subject position may result in a more comprehensive best practices pool. As a literary theoretical intervention with pragmatic real-world liberatory concerns, ankhdhing champions an inclusive approach to liberatory labor.

Subcomandante Sandra’s emancipatory role in *The People of Paper* is a productive arena to explore the positive externalities of the more inclusive approach to liberatory labor that ankhdhing encourages. The second element of ankhdhing is a stage in socio-political and economic struggle, whereby inspiration, strategy and communal labor comingle to serve subjugated subjects in their efforts to collectively think through the most effective means to resist hegemonic forces—and through this idea-exchange, inspire, motivate and move each other towards best practices to resist hegemonic forces seeking to delimit their subjectivity, social, political and economic agency, and delimit their power to determine their own life courses. This process includes rigorous self-interrogation and group interrogation
towards creating a healthy, whole, ankhing process that can result in healthy, whole, ankhing practices and outcomes.

In the El Monte Flores revolutionary campaign against the sovereign hegemonic force Saturn, Sandra is selected for a critical leadership position. As Subcomandante Sandra, she is in charge of overseeing the initiation of new EMF members. Only EMF gang members are trusted enough to engage in the revolutionary struggle against Saturn. Federico de la Fe’s exclusive utilization of gang members, and their humanizing depiction in the novel, serves as a powerful counter-narrative to gang members’ routine demonization. As the revolutionary in charge of initiating new gang members in a liberation struggle, Subcomandante Sandra has the power to vet each potential emancipatory worker. Philosophically, Federico de la Fe embraces the untapped liberatory potential of one of America’s most demonized populations; Subcomandante Sandra is in charge of transforming the liberatory potential of these gangsters into liberatory effectiveness. As a female leader in a primarily male organization, Subcomandante Sandra brings an alternative approach to leadership—and through her success, highlights the emancipatory benefits of inclusivity and intra-group difference. Subcomandante Sandra draws the cut of gender difference and employs its leadership benefits towards her community’s efforts to resist being stripped from political significance and exposed to murderous violence because El Monte’s racialized underclass have drawn the cut of class and political difference.
In order for a potential new member to join El Monte Flores, they have to show their courage and fighting skills by going through a “brinca.” A brinca is the “being jumped into the gang” process whereby the potential recruit has to simultaneously fight six current members. The novel implies that before Subcomandante Sandra’s rise in leadership, the six members selected for the brinca were the most violent EMF gangsters; this strategy was employed to test the new gang members’ toughness. Subcomandante Sandra approaches the brinca differently:

[Subcomandante] Sandra coordinated the initiations; though she honored the traditions of EMF, she did so in the kindest way, electing the meekest members for the brincas, sparing as much injuries as possible (Plascencia 68).

The passage above, narrated by the former brinca organizer Froggy, suggests that Subcomandante Sandra did not think the “testing toughness” approach to initiating new EMF members was the best practice; the passage indicates that the “testing toughness” approach was creating excessive injuries, which were counterproductive to resisting hegemonic forces.

However, it’s important to note that after the implied group interrogation of the former initiation practice (which Subcomandante Sandra determined not to be the best practice), she doesn’t completely eliminate the brinca practice. Instead, the initiation leader “honored the traditions of EMF” via maintaining the practice but adjusted its implementation by “electing the meekest members for the brincas, sparing as much injuries as possible.” Subcomandante Sandra’s nuanced method of
best practice creation and implementation indicates a collectivist leadership approach that considers results and process. Completely discarding the inherently violent brinca practice would have resulted in a reduction of even more injuries but could have fomented dissent among members who value EMF traditions. Subcomandante Sandra balances best practices for the liberation movement with best practices that will be accepted by liberation movement members. This balancing act indicates a leadership capacity not previously exhibited by 2nd in command EMF member Comandante Froggy, the previous leader in charge of initiation—who promoted Subcomandante into the position.

Before her promotion, Subcomandante Sandra had been romantically involved with Comandante Froggy, but after her promotion she initiated changes in the relationship. Comandante Froggy describes the change by saying, “She discussed only battle strategy and logistics in my presence and refused to acknowledge anything I said unless I called her ‘Subcomandante Sandra (Plascencia 65).’” It is not difficult to imagine people engaged in liberation struggle becoming involved romantically, especially if they are in close proximity. Essentially, Comandante Froggy promotes his girlfriend. However, it is noteworthy that Subcomandante Sandra is committed to establishing respect through her effective leadership in the public realm of emancipatory labor (i.e. developing more effective initiation best practices) but also in the private domain of her relationship with her boyfriend/Comandante Froggy. By maintaining liberatory labor-oriented conversations and insisting on the use of her liberatory labor title, Subcomandante
Sandra changes the dynamic within her private relationship; as she is struggling for community emancipation, she is struggling for private emancipation as well.

Subcomandante Sandra's private emancipation struggle is a referent to the often invisible struggle women engage in within their home’s private domain: the struggle for physical safety, respect and right of self-determination.

The novel further illuminates this private struggle when it is reveals that Subcomandante Sandra's father had been so physically abusive throughout her childhood that she eventually moved into Froggy’s home. When Subcomandante Sandra’s Father’s comes to retrieve her from Froggy’s house, Froggy cuts her father’s neck with a carnation knife. Subcomandante Sandra’s response gives insight into the intersection of gendered, private emancipatory struggle and gendered, community emancipatory struggle:

[E]ven though my whole life I wanted to flee from my father I did not like seeing him wrapped in the shreds of my shawl and buried in the middle of a flower field. I remained subcomandante of EMF but moved out of Froggy’s. I could not sleep in the same room with the man who had killed my father. [I] moved into a stucco at the edge of El Monte. I slept alone, cushioned by rugs and pillows. I was a quiet sleeper and did not thrash about or even snore, but I began to wake with welts on my arms and my ribs sore and bruised. It was not until I looked in the mirror and noticed the black eye on my face that I knew I had been dreaming of my father (Plascencia 55).

Throughout the narrative the novel suggests that Subcomandante Sandra grew up in an El Monte agricultural labor family—the type of family she was helping to create best practices for to fight a sovereign committed to delimiting El Monte
agricultural laborers’ life courses and pushing them towards bare life. Her “whole life” Subcomandante Sandra wanted “to flee” and liberate herself from a father she was likely trying to liberate—despite the fact that he “beat her so much that she could no longer remember what it was like to properly knit” (Plascencia 54).

Subcomandante Sandra’s ironic and oppressive private context makes her public emancipatory effectiveness that much more impressive and instructive. The effectiveness is more impressive because Subcomandante Sandra has to first self-liberate just to engage in community liberation; her effectiveness is instructive because negotiating private-arena, gendered oppression equips her with an enhanced skill-set that translates into adroitly negotiating public arena community oppression—a specific skill-set enhancement that a male EMF leader is unlikely to possess given the specifically gendered way in which the skill-set is developed. Subcomandante Sandra’s experience operates as an argument for liberation movement leadership with gender diversity; her experience also operates as an example of why ankhing promotes gender diversity for strategic and ethical reasons.

Subcomandante Sandra’s EMF leadership role is a constructive space to examine another aspect of ankhing’s focus on creating a healthy, whole, ankhing process that can result in healthy, whole, ankhing practices and outcomes. “Whole” will be the central notion for the next part of this discussion. Considering a liberation laborer’s whole life (as opposed to just the parts that specifically relate to emancipatory thought and action) is essential to creating effective activism. When
an emancipatory worker’s whole life is considered by the emancipatory leadership, it can promote a style of activist engagement with the community that considers community members whole lives, which is to say, their material conditions, their children and aged parents, their emotional, psychological and physical health. When a whole life is considered, it signifies that both liberatory workers and community members in need of liberation are whole human beings with expansive subjectivity and not just activists with a job to do or oppressed folk who need to be organized.

Federico de la Fe is a single-father raising his pre-teen daughter Little Merced. As a result, Federico de la Fe’s resistance leader and father roles are coterminous. The novel highlights the practical ways in which the activists’ personal and political can overlap when Merced menstruates for the first time:

‘I ran out of my room into he kitchen, yelling for my father. He saw the blood and stood up, but not before covering his notes with a jagged slab of lead.’

‘It’s Saturn,’ I said.

He laughed and then wrung a wet towel over the kitchen sink and then handed it to me. He said not to worry, that everything would be okay, and then picked up the phone.

‘Subcomandante Sandra’ (Plascencia 85).

It is significant to note that the resistance leader’s daughter thinks her menstrual bleeding is being caused the sovereign force Saturn. Liberation workers with children are liberation workers who are exposing their children to the powerful forces seeking to delimit life courses. At times, the exposure to such forces have
unexpected consequences—like children attributing the most intimate functions of their bodies to an external hegemon.

Should activism begin at home? Should activist teach their preteen children emancipatory work, if they know that exposure to the work may inflict psychological and or physical damage? What is the cost of not teaching activism at home? These are the questions that liberation workers with children must confront—along with dilemmas relating to childcare, school transportation and menstruation; the effective handling of these private concerns is what allows activists to engage in public activist work: door-knocking, information distribution, fundraising and community meetings.

When Federico’s de la Fe’s daughter Little Merced begins to menstruate for the time, he calls one of the leaders in his resistance movement for assistance. Most likely, Federico de la Fe calls Subcomandante Sandra because there is a trust factor that comes with shared leadership. Also, one could argue that Federico de la Fe uses Little Merced’s first menstruation as an opportunity to intimately introduce his daughter to a potential liberatory role model. In the process, Subcomandante Sandra humanizes liberation labor and makes it more relatable by addressing a shared gendered need. Subcomandante Sandra says:

I showed Little Merced how to use the napkin and mix a vinegar wash. Because we lived within the ashen boundaries, Little Merced would start her cycle at the same time I and every other woman in El Monte did. In El Monte, sisterhood and solidarity were always marked by bloodshed. I pummeled girls on the mouth [during EMF initiations], their blood spilling out of their chins and onto
my knuckles. And then I nursed their broken skin, put arnica compounds on their bruises, and welcomed them into EMF. I hiked up my dress and pulled my underwear down, exposing the stained quilted pad. ‘See, I’m just like you,’ I said. Little Merced nodded. I hugged her and left Federico de la Fe’s house (Plascencia 85).

Subcomandante Sandra addresses Little Merced’s specific private need by showing her “how to use the napkin and mix a vinegar wash”; simultaneously, the resistance leader frames the interaction as an ushering of the pre-teen subject into El Monte “sisterhood.” It is a sisterhood and solidarity “marked by bloodshed.” Little Merced joins a women’s circle with coordinated bloodshed from uterine walls and ritualized bloodshed “spilling out of their chins.” Combined, both kinds of bloodshed signify a female subject who has matured enough to engage in battle against a sovereign force determined to delimit her life course—and the life courses of those who share her bloodline and community.

Similar to Federico del la Fe, Subcomandante Sandra is operating as an actant: “a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman . . . has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events.” As a leader among this community of women—and a leader of men—Subcomandante Sandra is able to articulate the power of community by saying to a young female community member, “See, I’m just like you.” Female resistance leader Subcomandante Sandra is also declaring, by extension, to Little Merced, “See, you are just like me.” Subcomandante Sandra’s declaration is a subtle and powerful move; through her own personal vulnerability, she is accessing the
vulnerable, private, space of a young female community member to help lay the foundation for Little Merced’s entrance into the public space of emancipatory labor. Subcomandante Sandra's strategic move aligns with ankhing’s dictum that a “whole” (private and public) approach is the most effective means to resist hegemonic forces; strategically, this whole approach can eventually inspire, motivate and move Little Merced towards taking the necessary actions to implement the specific best practices to resist hegemonic forces that are trying to push the women, men and youth in her community towards bare life.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JES GREW

Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* is a novel concerned with life and living—and the forces determined to delimit life and living. Similar to *The People of Paper’s* Brown subjects, *Mumbo Jumbo*’s narrative features fictionalized Black subjects resisting an aggressive push towards bare life. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, subjects are not only resisting being stripped from political significance and exposed to murderous violence, they are resisting being stripped from their very souls—and soul itself.

In *Spirituals and the Blues*, Cone argues that soulful Black artists are expressing an indwelling God-energy, an indwelling spiritual energy, which manifests as an iteration of “life” that can engage in emancipatory labor. The souls of Black folk can liberate Black folk. Black artists can animate life in disenfranchised communities to such an extent that community members can resist being pushed
towards bare life, and instead struggle towards what Agamben calls the “good life”—life tethered to “political agency and speech.”

In *Mumbo Jumbo*, there is a version of this art-tethered, Black soul energy that can move subjects away from bare life and towards the good life; it is called Jes Grew. “Jes Grew has no end and no beginning ... We will miss it for awhile but it will come back, and when it returns we will see that it never left. You see, life will never end; there is really no end to life, if anything goes it will be death. Jes Grew is life” (Reed 204). In *Mumbo Jumbo’s* narrative, the Atonists, a powerful collection of anti-blackness hegemons, including Masons, Knights Templar and Teutonic Knights are dedicated to suppressing and ultimately destroying the Black soul expression Jes Grew. Strategically, if the Atonists can destroy Jes Grew, destroy Black Spirit, destroy Black soul, there would be no force powerful enough to counteract the force moving Black subjects towards bare life. A complementary concern for the Atonists is that Black soul is “spreading” to some white subjects, creating a potentially powerful ally class for the Black community. In *The People of Paper*, a historically and socio-economically marginalized subpopulation (Latina/o gang members) serve as Latina/o community resistance fighters; in *Mumbo Jumbo*, a historically and socio-economically marginalized subpopulation (Black artists) serve as Jes Grew’s—and a Black community’s—resistance brigade. The narrative explains that anti-Black forces “will try to depress Jes Grew but it will only spring back and prosper. We will make our own future Text. A future generation of young artists will accomplish this” (Reed 204). The attempt to “depress Jes Grew” is a hegemonic attempt to depress
its functionality as an actant, its “sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events.”

Jes Grew, this corollary to the Black spirit, offers an opportunity to think critically about the power available to some soulful Black artists to help initiate change and alter the course of events—without “romanticizing” the artist in the process. This study argues that some soulful Black artists have the power to inspire and move disenfranchised subjects towards liberatory thought and action and away from bare life. Black artists relatively marginalized and alienated subject positions in their own communities, ironically, positions them as potential freedom fighters for their communities. Moten acknowledges the latent power of the alienated when he writes “[A]lienation and distance represent the critical possibility of freedom.”

Mumbu Jumbo suggests that Black soulful artists, operating as a liberatory vanguard, will create some Black community’s “own future Text.” This statement can be read as soulful Black artists “write the future Story” of some Black communities by living liberated lives and creating cultural products that engender liberation for their communities. Identifying soulful Blacks artists as a subpopulation who can alter the course of events is not romanticizing artists, it’s identifying soulful Black artists as a subpopulation who can access and employ the “spirit,” the Jes Grew, to powerfully enhance their own animacy in the service of animating their communities (through affect) towards liberatory thought and action.

To further distance the emancipatory power of soulful Black artists from the notion of the romantic artist, it may be helpful to explore how the power is
produced by the internal workings and architecture of the spirit. In the spirit qua emancipatory power context, Latour would be interested in what the spirit can “do,” or, in the Black vernacular, “how it do, what it do.” Improvisation is often one element present when the spirit do what it do. Addressing actants, Latour writes, “I never act; I am always slightly surprised by what I do . . . That which acts through me is also surprised by what I do, by the chance to mutate, to change.”

Improvisation is the art and the power of surprise; in this study, improvisation is the undetermined or indeterminacy made manifest in music or spirit or literature. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. frames *Mumbo Jumbo* as a text about indeterminacy. “It is indeterminacy, the sheer plurality of meaning, the very play of the signifier itself, which *Mumbo Jumbo* celebrates . . . It’s central character Jes Grew, cannot be reduced by the Atonists, as they complain: ‘It’s nothing we can bring into focus or categorize; once we call it 1 thing it forms into something else.’”

In the jazz improvisational moment, the indeterminacy moment, the trust that the right series of notes to play will reveal themselves at the appropriate moment requires a certain level of belief, faith. The indeterminacy moment requires a faith that the spirit will provide a salvific intercession so that the unplanned music will not falter; it requires the courage to embrace the reality that, at times, the music will falter—and embrace the reality that the failure will happen in front of an audience: in the public sphere.

This risk of failure is one of the reasons why jazz improvisation is exciting for the musician. It is a courting of danger. For the audience, improvisation is often
exciting for a similar reason. It is an opportunity to witness someone taking real risk in a public forum; it titillates in that way people gather to watch a human being walk across a high wire between two buildings. Public failure is a real possibility. When public faltering is realized, it becomes a public spectacle. Public failure as spectacle is a grotesque type of entertainment—and therefore its possibility is entertaining. The artist producing art in this high-risk context is articulating and embodying a type of freedom; it is a liberatory modality that melds the creative and the socio-political. This high-risk art functions as an interpreter for the artist: “I am free from form and expectations; I am free-form and create anticipation.” Poet Kamau Daáood’s ode to John Coltrane, “Liberator of the Spirit,” speaks of freedom and form: “John Coltrane was a freedom fighter/liberator of the spirit from the shackles of form/expanding beyond the boundaries/blow away decay.”

Given the traditionally disenfranchised subject position of Black artists, one can read the John Coltrane referent “John Coltrane was a freedom fighter/liberator of the spirit from the shackles of form” as a socio-political signifier: Black artists as resistance fighters are resisting objectification and resisting the push into the form known as bare life. In order for this resistance to be possible, the spirit must be liberated “from the shackles of form” because the spirit is the liberatory power source. A liberated spirit makes possible an expansive subjectivity. When there is expansive subjectivity, it is possible for the Black subject to “expand beyond the boundaries” defined by actants positioned higher on the animacy hierarchy. A
liberated spirit and expansive subjectivity allows Black subjects to resist being hailed as *homo sacer*.

**BLACK SPIRIT AND THE FREEDOM BOOGIE**

This project acknowledges the problematics involved in theorizing about spirit concepts like Jes Grew. How does one critically engage the esoteric without floating in the badlands of unverifiable, rootless conjecture? This problem is further complicated when race is introduced in the form of Black Spirit because it expands the aforementioned badlands into “unverifiable, *essentialist*, rootless conjecture.” Jane Bennett’s exploration of critical vitalism may provide a fire trail through this problematic terrain.

Critical vitalism was an early 20th Century philosopo-scientific movement that congealed around the work of Henri Bergson and Hans Driesch. Kantian-inspired, both thinkers wrestled with the “What is life” question by interrogating the nature of the “vital force” that animated matter. Following Kant, both theorists were careful to separate this vital force from a spiritual imperative; they “distinguished themselves from those ‘naïve’ vitalists who posited a spiritual force or soul that was immune to any scientific or experimental inquiry.” In this critical vitalism context, Bergson’s *élan vital* notion will be most productive for this discussion:

Bergson’s *[élan vital]* is also based on the distinction between Life and matter . . Life names a certain *propensity* for ‘the utmost possible’ activeness, a bias in favor of mobile and
morphing states. Likewise, matter must be understood as *leaning* toward passivity, a tendency in favor of stable formation . . . Life is not susceptible to quantification . . . Life ’splays’ itself out in new forms that are not even conceivable before they exist, says Bergson, and were they to be quantified and measured, it would already be too late, for life will have moved on.71

Like Jes Grew, Bergson’s free-moving, animating life force, *élan vital*, is defined by a “propensity for ‘the utmost possible’ activeness, a bias in favor of mobile and morphing states.” *Élan vital* is infinite possibilities of agency, movement and change; it is liberated. The indeterminate nature and infinite number of expressive options—the infinite freedom of expression—makes *élan vital* unquantifiable; these qualities make it that which cannot be known. However, *élan vital* can be seen and felt because of the effects and affect it produces. This understanding of *élan vital* is reminiscent of Cone’s understanding of the Black Spirit from the Introduction:

> [The Black Spiritual] is a faithful free response to the movement of the Black Spirit. It is the movement of the Black Spirit. It is the Black Spirit. It is the Black community accepting themselves as the people of the Black Spirit and knowing through the chains of his presence that no chains can hold the Spirit of Black humanity in bondage (Cone 5).

Both Black Spirit and *élan vital* center movement. The Black Spirit is tethered to “free responses” and the *élan vital* is connected to “infinite freedom of expression.” Both notions are deeply concerned with the relationship between liberation and “life.” However, unlike Black Spirit and its fictional counterpart Jes Grew, *élan vital’s* philosopho-scientific underpinnings are distinguished from “religious notions of the soul; [Bergson] also rejected the idea that the vital force
could have any existence apart from the bodies in which it operated.”\textsuperscript{72} Departing from Bergson and Bennett, this study argues that the vital force can have existence outside the body in which it operates—and can be spread from person to person—like the Jes Grew virus. In \textit{Spirituals & the Blues}, Cone describes the scene in the Macedonia A.M.E. church where the Spirit is “breaking into the lives of the people.” Cone alludes to the well known traditional Black church practice of a member “catching the Holy Spirit” and that Spirit breaking into person after person as it spreads throughout the congregation.

Like the “Holy Dance” that often is symptomatic of a church member who has caught the Holy Spirit, “dance mania” is a symptom of Jes Grew and a symbol for freedom:

\begin{quote}
Dance manias inundate the land. J. A. Rogers, writes, ‘It is just the epidemic contagiousness of jazz that makes it, like measles, sweep the block.’ People do the Charleston, the Texas Tommy, and other anonymously created symptoms of Jes Grew. The Wallflower Order remembers the 10\textsuperscript{th} Century \textit{tarantism} which nearly threatened the survival of the Church. Even Paracelus, a ‘radical’ who startled the academicians by lecturing in the vernacular, terms these manias a ‘disease’ (Reed 64).
\end{quote}

In order for the Spirit to travel from person to person, like an liberatory airborne virus, a deliverance disease, it has to be able to exist “outside the body in which it operates” during the journey from person to person. This Spirit that can travel through a congregation is the same Spirit that can travel through a jazz club audience when the soul-stirring jazz singer Dwight Trible is frenzying through “Mothership”; it is the same Spirit that can move through the audience at The World
Stage when poet Kamau Daáood is trancing through “Papa Lean Griot”; it is the same Spirit that moves through the House of Blues when soulful crooner Jill Scott is hitting low-down high-notes on “One”; it is the same Spirit that can make hundreds of heads bounce in unison as hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar chants through “The Blacker the Berry.” Soulful artists can be conduits of the Spirit.

When soulful artists are also engaged in social justice work, the Spirit moving through them is an actant in social justice movements; the Spirit operating in them, and as them, performs the critical work of fomenting group action. Socially-engaged artists facilitate the group-dynamic process whereby community members are moved significantly enough to “catch the Spirit” of heightened social justice commitment by witnessing community members around them being moved significantly enough to “catch the Spirit” of heightened social justice commitment. This initial Spirit-catching-process is not sufficient to maintain commitment but it functions as an affective foundation on which to build a sustainable future commitment to social justice. Socially-engaged artists are often positioned as inspiring “opening acts” or “conscious entertainment” in between emancipatory speakers on social justice programs, rallies and direct actions. However, this study argues that the Spirit that makes soulful, socially-engaged artists inspiring as “creative filler” is the same Spirit can makes them effective leaders in social justice movements. In the emancipatory labor context, this project seeks to move artists from margin to center.
LIBERATORY ART THEIVES

In *Mumbo Jumbo*, there is a liberatory organization that centers artists as leaders, strategists and intelligence agents. *Mu’tafikah* is an international force of specialized agents who liberate art and cultural artifacts produced by people of color but controlled by European and American interests. *Mu’tafikah*’s efforts are ancillary to Jes Grew—and *vis-a-versa*—because both are concerned with liberation. Jes Grew “is compounded by the *Mu’tafikah* who are responsible for art thefts now ravishing private collections of Europe and America. 1 of their number, an international *Mu’tafikah*, has lifted the sacred Papyri of Ani stored in the British Museum and returned it to ‘Brothers in Cairo’ (Reed 63). The *Mu’tafikah* members’ subject positions as artists of color contribute to their very specialized art-centric mission. Artists leading the organization likely plays a role in determining that art repatriation is a revolutionary act worth risking *Mu’tafikah* members’ liberty and possibly life. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, artist leaders value the liberatory power of art.

*Mu’tafikah*’s international, multi-racial profile also speaks to their desire to support “Third World” liberation struggles. In their underground headquarters:

*Mu’tafikah* are carefully packing items. They are to be sent to a contact ‘Frank’ somewhere in the Pacific Islands who will in turn ship them to their rightful owners in Asia. ‘Tam’ a Nigerian musician and writer will return 5000 masks and wood sculpture to Africa. He had begun by lifting a Benin bronze plaque with leopard from the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart, Germany . . . [Tam] repatriated masks and figures—carried to Europe as booty from Nigeria Gold Coast, Upper Volta and the Ivory Coast . . . Another [agent], a South African trumpeter, ‘Hugh,’ is in L.A.
transmitting Black American sounds on home. He realizes that the essential Pan-Africanism is artists relating across continents their craft, drumbeats from the aeons, sounds that are still with us (Reed 82).

The nomenclature “repatriated” is significant. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a well-known wave of African students who studied at European and American universities and repatriated back to their home countries; many repatriated students employed their broadened skill-sets in homeland liberation struggles.74 “[Tam] repatriated masks and figures” suggests more than a simple return of “booty” that had been “carried to Europe.” Given the Third World Liberation context, repatriated signifies a liberation-aligned role for the masks and figures.

The West’s systematic pillaging of African resources (including African peoples) during and after the Atlantic Slave Trade depressed Africans’ relative animacy, decimated local and national economies, and devalued African cultural production. The fact that Mu’tafikah countrymen and allies are willing to risk liberty and life to repatriate art enhances the perceived value of African cultural production; it suggests that art is “worth” death and that art is “valuable” as life, which is to say, defying death and living life for African art enhances the value of African art, while enhancing individual African animacy and African diasporic animacy.75

Through South African Mu’tafikah “Hugh’s” cultural labor, Reed argues that “essential Pan-Africanism is artists relating across continents their craft.” Here, Reed reframes Pan-Africanism (a political philosophy that supports African
disporic political and economic unity) as a political philosophy promoting artistic cultural exchange that centers art. The relatively privileged positioning of Western art vis-à-vis non-Western art speaks to the relatively privileged positioning of Western subjects vis-à-vis non-Western subjects. Generally, the dialectics between cultural product and cultural producer allows a relatively higher valuation for Western art because Western subjects are its creators. In a neoliberal context, where bodies and life itself are commodities with racially influenced value, the relatively higher animacy of Western subjects is undergirded by their alignment with art which is more highly valued. By extension, enhancing the relative value of non-Western art, African art in particular, is a political technology that enhances the value and animacy of African subjects. When African subjects possess more animacy, more life, it is more difficult to demonize African life. With less demonization, it is easier to resist the push into bare life. In this context, *Mu’tafikah’s* risking of liberty and life to repatriate African art becomes a revolutionary imperative. Repatriating Black art revolutionizes how the African Diaspora views itself through the prism of African diasporic art and has the potential to revolutionize how the West views African subjects through the prism African subject-created art.

The *Mu’tafikah* headquarters operates as a counterpublic: an artistic heterotopia of resistance. From the Introduction, Fraser avers that counterpublics help “subordinated peoples formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.” *Mu’tafikah’s* oppositional interpretation is an
interpretation of political philosophy that privileges art as a revolutionary technology. Furthermore, Kohn argues that heterotopias of resistance are "sites for political emancipation; their function is social transformation . . . [Heterotopias of resistance] are sites that foster oppositional practices by sheltering counterhegemonic ideas and identities." In the basement of a three-story building on the edge of Chinatown, the Mu’tafikah headquarters is a site where alternative ideas about art’s emancipatory role drives the group’s goal of social transformation. Mu’tafikah is playing a role in transforming the political landscape by transforming how African subjects and their art are perceived; they are an organization rooted in the belief that undergirding the value of African art, undergirds the value of African subjects. This art-based strategic choice is not meant replace traditional forms of socio-economic and political resistance work available to historically oppressed peoples; it is designed to serve as a complement to traditional resistance work.

As the Introduction argues about artistic heterotopias of resistance, artistic can refer to a previously “nonartistic site” that has been transformed into an artistic site. A basement in a three-story on the edge of Chinatown has been repurposed as an art redistribution center. Mu’tafikah headquarters is not a site where international art is visited by the Westerners, but a Western weigh station where Prodigal Art stops on its way back to its country of origin; it is the anti-museum: art comes to the people, as opposed to the people coming to the art.
The Mu’tafikah anti-museum construct is both an explicit and implicit attack on traditional Western museums. The anti-museum construct’s explicit element is defined by the physical attack, the breeching of the museum’s borders in the process of forcibly removing museum holdings. This attack can be read as a counter-attack, a counter offensive in the battle to define the role of art in communities. This art counter-attack suggests art should not be “held” as a series of holdings, primarily accessible to a privileged few but art should be free to move amongst the communities responsible for its production.

THE DOMINO AFFECT

Similar to Mumbo Jumbo, The People of Paper features an artistic heterotopia of resistance. Federico de la Fe’s living room, especially around the dominoes table, is transformed into a liberatory site.76 As the daughter of the insurgent leader, Little Merced frequently sees her domestic space, specifically, her family dominoes table, become the center for resistance organizing and strategizing. “My father sat bent over the dominoes table sketching plans and chewing the leaves of his tea. Once the fungus receded back into flower fields, the daily games of dominoes resumed. Froggy made Sandra subcomandante of EMF and as subcomandante, Sandra sat next to Froggy . . . They would sit and study the charts that my father had drawn . . . ‘Here is where we attack,’ my father said.”77

Throughout The People of Paper, Federico de la Fe’s living room dominoes table is a nexus between organizing and culture. In many Latin American and
Caribbean countries, and by extension, many Latino/a and Caribbean communities in the United States, playing dominoes is a significant form of cultural expression. The dominoes table is an affective cultural site for community building and for the intra-family exchange of folkways and mores. Stories and feelings are shared over dominoes. In Latin American and Caribbean communities, dominoes is often referred to as an art form or a sport (in Cuba, after baseball, it is referred to as the “2nd National Pastime”). Skilled practitioners of the art form, in some communities, are known as “dominologists.” Federico de la Fe uses dominoes art as a cultural technology to gain the trust of EMF gang members (and put them at ease) as he lays out insurgency plans. Dominoes have cultural currency. Using the dominoes table as strategizing site subtly but powerfully creates a shared comfort level, a feeling of comfort for the community liberatory work at-hand because EMF community members share a familiarity with the art form and its cultural relevancy.

The dominoes table use is an affective and effective leadership move by Federico de la Fe since he is not originally from El Monte; his use of the game communicates the same message that Subcomandante Sandra communicated to Federico de la Fe’s daughter Little Merced during her first menstruation: “See, I’m just like you.” This leadership strategy can be an affective and effective organizing model off the page as well. When activists and organizers can root liberatory work in affective culturally-relevant activities and sites, it can do a kind of emancipatory work that even the most sophisticated organizing technologies cannot match. Strategy sessions in neighborhood barber shops and beauty salons, information
sharing meetings before Friday night bingo, and recruitment outreach before soccer and basketball league play would all align with Federico de le Fe’s use of the dominoes table as culturally-relevant liberatory technologies. Community organizers introducing emancipatory ideas to the community in the aforementioned ways are also sending an underlying message: “See, I’m just like you.”
Chapter Two

EMBODIED HIEROGLYPHICS

Chapter One argues that ankhing's privileging of community folkways, spirit and art contribute to the elevation of Latina/o and African American animacy. Chapter Two examines how sovereign representatives focus on attacking Brown and Black bodies, especially Brown and Black activist bodies, as a way to systematically subvert the collective animacy of Brown and Black communities. In this chapter, the imbricated relationship between ankhing and counterpublics is explored as a generative way to resist attacks on Brown and Black communities by engendering environments where animacy can be nurtured.

Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters* begins with an interrogative rooted in flesh and soul: “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?” Local healer Minnie Ransom poses this wellness question at the radical Southwest Community Infirmary to activist Velma Henry who has recently tried to destroy her flesh by sticking her head in an oven. Distinguishing between “body” and “flesh,” Hortense Spillers defines the flesh as “concentrated ethnicity” that has “zero degree of social conceptualization.”81 Pushed towards the “frontiers of survival,”82 bare life, the African female subject is “a target of rape—in one sense, an interiorized violation of body and mind—but also the topic of specifically externalized acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality and torture
inflicted by other males.” Velma Henry’s head in the oven is a disturbing signifier of an interiorized violation of body and mind, a manifest sign of internalized micro and macro aggressions. These aggressions leave Velma Henry’s flesh wounded, marked with “hieroglyphs of the flesh.” Fleshly hieroglyphs, racialized disjunctures, are not always visible to the naked eye; they are often hidden by skin and history. Hieroglyphs of the flesh travel stealthily beneath the color line, a bloodletting Underground Railroad connecting African female bodies past and present. Spillers avers that:

These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually ‘transfers’ from one generation to another, finding its various symbolic substitutions in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments.

Velma Henry’s self-harming move towards the oven can be read as a symbolic substitution for hand-me-down ancestral pain: an outward articulation of transferable internalized oppression. Alexander Weheliye addresses and complicates oppression’s transferability (in the context of the putatively liberated subject) by arguing, “‘hieroglyphics of the flesh’ . . . [are] transmitted to the succeeding generations of black subjects who have by been ‘liberated’ and granted body in the aftermath of de jure enslavement. The hieroglyphics of the flesh do not vanish once affixed to proper personhood (the body); rather they endure as a pesky potential vital to the maneuverings of ‘cultural seeing by skin color.’”
Hieroglyphics of the flesh’s dangerous resilience in Black and Brown communities creates a need for spatial resistance: counterpublics dedicated to resisting external and interiorized oppression. Fraser opines “[M]embers of subordinated social groups—women, workers, people of color, gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics . . . where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.”

As a complement to Fraser’s counterpublic rationale, it may be helpful to reiterate Squires’ counterpublic goals: “foster resistance; test arguments and strategies in wider publics; create alliances; persuade outsiders to change views; perform public resistance to oppressive laws and social codes; gain allies.” Building on Fraser, Squires and Foucault, Kohn’s heterotopia of resistance notion argues for counterpublics as “sites for political emancipation; their function is social transformation.” In The Salt Eaters, Clybourne’s Black residents need to create an emancipatory “alternative public” because of the external and interiorized threat of hieroglyphs of the flesh. Resisting the flesh is revolutionary: it demands a transformation of society. Choosing life is choosing bios.

RESISTING GRAPES OF WRATH

In Cherie Moraga’s play Heroes and Saints, McLaughlin residents choose bios by choosing to create a heterotopia of resistance. Fictional McLaughlin intersects
with the tragic nonfiction elements of McFarland, a San Joaquin Valley farming community near California Highway 99. In the text, pesticide is dropped from crop duster planes late night and chemicals wafts down upon rows and rows of grape groves. Early morning, rows and rows of farm workers pick grapes in the freshly sprayed grape fields. Pregnant women labor in these pesticide fields too. New mothers’ newborn children begin to bear witness to the ravages of the “profit-over-people” neoliberal imperative underlying “Big Ag,” the American corporate agriculture business. Bodies are born flesh. Babies are born with no arms and legs. The babies who emerge intact die too soon of cancers and other ailments that should not befall children. Mothers of McLaughlin, a grassroots activist group, hold a politically and economically dangerous news conference to demand humane and honorable dealings between farm owners and farm workers. At the rally, the mothers risk losing jobs their families cannot afford to lose; they stand up for their children. Mothers hold signs with succinct stories on them and read aloud their loss narratives:

The mothers’ public resistance to their children’s bodies turned flesh, to their children pushed beyond the borders of bare life unto death, is a turning point in McLaughlin’s socio-political trajectory. The fall of their children moves the mothers to collectively rise up and push back against communal hieroglyphics of the flesh. The mothers are seeking transformation of their lives and transformation of society itself. The transformation is rooted in the fields. In Heroes and Saints, the fields where the farm laborers live and work are transformed into an alternative public, a counterpublic where counterdiscourses are circulated and counterhegemonic ideas are developed: a heterotopia of resistance.

In addition to functioning as sites for political emancipation and societal transformation, Kohn argues that heterotopias of resistance are sites that foster “oppositional practices by sheltering counterhegemonic ideas and identities.” In the fields, McLaughlin farm workers begin to develop the counterhegemonic idea that they deserve to be treated with dignity, respect and concern for their health, despite their relative powerlessness vis-à-vis farm owners. Consistent with Ong’s understanding of American neoliberalism, profiteering farm owners drop death-dealing pesticides on the grape fields; this is behavior that calls into question the agriculture capitalists value for Latina/o life.
The primarily Latina/o McLaughlin community's cancer rates and birth defects (which seem linked to farm owners' discriminatory attitudes and policies) drive concerned neighbor Doña Amparo into action. Amparo is a factory worker and inhabitant of the federally-subsidized housing that abuts the grape fields. Like The People of Paper's farming community member Federico de la Fe, Amparo decides to foster resistance among her neighbors; she hopes they will assist her in challenging a sovereign who is trying to delimit farm workers' lives.

Amparo's strategy involves getting her neighbors to see the environmental racism as a direct attack on the community's children. Despite signs that the local drinking water is unsafe, the school board refuses an offer from the water company, Arrowhead, to provide free drinking water for the local elementary school that services the children of McLaughlin's farm workers. Amparo organizes a press conference at the elementary school. The TV news reporter, Ana Perez, sets the scene and summarizes the environmental racism claims:

ANA PEREZ: A crowd is beginning to form out here in front of McLaughlin's elementary school. Mostly mothers and other neighbors have shown up this morning. There is no sign of school officials as of yet. Local residents are outraged by the school board's decision to refuse Arrowhead's offer of free drinking water for the school children. They believe the local tap water, contaminated by pesticides, to be the chief cause of the high incidence of cancer among the children in the area. They claim that the extensive spraying, especially aerial spraying, causes the toxic chemicals to seep into the public water system. The majority of residents are from a nearby housing tract of federally-subsidized housing. It has been alleged that the housing was built on what was once a dump site for pesticides with the
full knowledge of contractors.\textsuperscript{92}

Aamparo procures a “cancer map” and begins to share the map with neighbors to inspire a resistance movement against the environmental racism plaguing their community:

\begin{verbatim}
AMPARO: I’m sorry hija. (beat.) Vente. Quiero enseñarles algo
YOLANDA: Que?
AMPARO: Hice un mapa. (She unrolls the chart onto the table.)
    A chart of all the houses in la vecindad que tiene gente con health problems.
YOLANDA: Let me see.
AMPARO: Miren, the red dots mean those houses got someone with cancer. Estos puntos azules donden tienen tumors. Los green ones son para birth defects y los amarillos, the miscarriages.
YOLANDA: What are all these orange dots?
AMPARO: Bueno, smaller problems como problemas del estómago, las ronchas, cosas así.
YOLANDA: Cheezus, it’s the whole damn neighborhood.
CEREZITA: Where’s our house?
AMPARO: Aquí donde están the orange dot and the green dot.
CEREZITA: That’s me, the green dot.\textsuperscript{93}
\end{verbatim}

It is significant that Amparo chooses the State-owned, State-controlled and State-administered elementary school as a site to foster resistance. Like the federally-subsidized housing in which most of the farmer workers live, the text suggests that the elementary school abuts the fields as well. There is no significant boundary between the fields where Brown farm workers labor, the housing where Brown farm workers live, and the schools where farm workers’ Brown children are educated. The fluidity between these fields-centered sites indicates that the farm owners, supported by the State, circumscribe Brown farm workers’ identities,
hailing them as objects in the service of farm owner profits. Objectified, farm
workers’ dignity, health and agency are subverted. This quality of life subversion is
made manifest in the McLaughlin School Board’s refusal to accept clean drinking
water for the farm workers’ children; it is a State-endorsed refusal to fully value the
lives of farm worker children and a State-sanctioned policy that makes tangible the
belief that Brown children do not matter, that Brown matter does not matter.

The strategic press conference, featuring farm worker mothers narrating
their loss narrates, is an attempt to do what Squires argues counterpublics must do:
persuade outsiders to change their views and gain allies. The process of persuading
outsiders to change their views begins with the insiders. Subjects organized inside
the counterpublic who are resisting the hegemonic gaze, also must resist the
hegemon’s power to influence self-perception. The counterpublic insiders have to
sufficiently resist the internal workings of the hieroglyphics of the flesh to persuade
themselves that their lives are worth the risk-taking that liberatory labor demands;
they must persuade themselves to resist with urgency. Now. The counterpublic qua
heterotopia of resistance allows the oppressed to resist in the delimited now; the
nowness of bare life can create an urgency where subjects can resist in the now as
an investment towards future freedoms. Similarly, in Weheliye’s discussion about
the intersection of law and flesh, he contends that “habeas viscus unearths the
freedom that exists within hieroglyphics of the flesh. For the oppressed the future
will have been now, since Man tucks away this group’s present” (Weheliye 158).
The counterpublic-inspired press conference also coheres with Squires’ counterpublic goal of performing public resistance. Public resistance is an evolutionary stage in counterpublic liberatory labor. After emancipatory strategies and theoretical frameworks have been adjudicated and decided upon in the subaltern counterpublic safe haven, the public expression of these decisions (i.e. public resistance) is what transforms liberatory activism from theory to praxis.

**SOVEREIGN SILENCE: SILENT BUT DEADLY**

Public resistance is a freedom response to the disciplining nature of silence, a silence tethered to the sovereign’s hegemonic gaze. As Derrida argues, sovereign power is “silent as it is unavowable. Silent and unavowable like Sovereignty itself. Unavowable silence, denegation: that is the always the unapparent essence of sovereignty.”94 In *Heroes and Saints*, when the McLaughlin School Board qua sovereign decides to reject Arrowhead’s offer of clean drinking for the elementary school children, the sovereign is disavowing the apparent reality that the area’s well water is contaminated, negating that the birth defects are related to dangerous pesticide use. When the Mothers of McLaughlin break their silence and publicly speak out during the press conference, they are attacking the very “essence of sovereignty.” This public resistance in response to bare life and death is a power move that imbricates with Lorde’s contention about the intersection of silence and death:

> To question or to speak as I believed could
have meant pain, or death. But all the hurt in so many ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death on the other hand is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else’s words. And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge... I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.”

Motivated by the death of their children, the Mothers of McLaughlin resist disciplinary silence and name the death-dealing silent sovereign in the process. The children’s analogous causes of death speak to the strong possibility of a common cause of death. By breaking their silence to narrate and name their loss narratives, the mothers make apparent the previously unapparent essence of sovereignty. In testifying to the deadly nature of the sovereign (along with its silent nature), the mothers are uttering the forbidden, engaging in discursive indiscretion. Foucault contends that “Silence itself—the thing one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said.”

In McLaughlin, much like the boundary between work sites and domestic sites, the boundary is porous between what is said and what is forbidden to say. It is forbidden for farm workers to say that their employers’ neoliberal practices are killing their children, but their children’s bare life bodies speak through their
mother’s lips: hieroglyphics of the flesh turn grieving mothers into ventriloquists of the flesh.

It is dangerous to name sovereign death-dealers and to articulate the ways in which they distribute death. In the corporate agriculture neoliberal context, making the sovereign visible can cost a person their livelihood or their life. Speaking out against Big Business is risky business. Throughout *Heroes and Saints*, the specter of sovereign violence is represented by the farm owners’ armed men patrolling the grape fields in low-flying helicopters. The porous boundaries between the fields, farm workers’ homes and the sovereign’s sky makes the domestic sphere a place of anxiety. The aforementioned anxiety is illustrated during a protest rally in the fields outside of subsidized-housing resident Dolores’ window:

CEREZITA: Mira ‘amá. They’re all going house to house, giving out pamphlets. Father Juanito’s there and Don Gilberto. They even got the news cameras.

DOLORES: Get your face out of the window.

CEREZITA: Nobody’s looking over here.

DOLORES: Quitate de allí, te digo.

DOLORES disengages CEREZITA’S raité and moves her away from the window.

CEREZITA: Ah, ‘amá!

DOLORES: Pues, you don’t know who could be out there. All this protesta is bringing the guns down from the sky.97

Throughout the play, Dolores’ reticence to engage the sovereign (due to concerns regarding her family’s physical and economic well-being) operates as a counterbalance to resident-turned-activist Amparo’s engagement with the sovereign. The juxtaposition of these two residents de-romanticizes liberation
work, while highlighting the very real dangers involved when relatively less powerful subjects participate in liberatory labor. The nuanced differences between these Latina McClaughlin residents humanizes their individual struggle and dismantles simplistic characterizations of the working poor.

OF WOMEN AND HEROES

From the safe distance of time, space or more resourced subject position, it is not difficult to criticize some disenfranchised subjects for not standing up for their rights—especially when disenfranchised subjects around them are engaging in courageous emancipatory work. Dolores’ children often praise Amparo for her activist work and wonder why their mother doesn’t exhibit the same passion for engaging the sovereign. Dolores’ retort speaks to the intersection of domestic composition and economic realities.

DOLORES (entering): Es una metiche, Amparo.
YOLANDA: They shot through her windows last night.
CEREZITA: Who?
YOLANDA: Who knows? The guys in helicopters . . .
DOLORES: Por eso, te diga [AMPARO] better learn to keep her damn mouth shut. Ella siempre gottu be putting la cuchara en la olla. I saw her talk to the TV peepo last week right in front of the house.
YOLANDA: What are you scared of?
DOLORES: They come to talk to Amparo on the job yesterday.
MARIO: Who?
DOLORES: The patrones.
MARIO: The owners?
DOLORES: Not the owners, pero their peepo. They give her a warning that they don’ like her talking about the
Dolores’ perspective is informed by a problematic heteronormative understanding of family construction. Yet, beneath this problematic construction lies the economic insecurity tethered to working-poor households relying on one income. Losing a job can be catastrophic when there is no partner to fill the gap. This economic reality is heightened when dependent children are factored into the equation. The aforementioned scene signifies the irony throughout *Heroes and Saints*: when the dispossessed defend their children against the sovereign, they risk endangering their children’s welfare at the hands of the sovereign. The confluence of injustice, economic conditions, child welfare and activism necessitates a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes a hero. Amparo can be considered liberatory figure given the ways she risks (and eventually loses) her job to protest her community’s mistreatment. Identifying Dolores’ choices as emancipatory requires closer examination, especially when juxtaposed against Amparo’s actions.

Dolores frames Amparo’s activism as a process of constantly placing “la cuchara en la olla,” putting her “spoon in the pot.” Dolores use of this idiom suggests that she believes Amparo is creating problems for the community by “stirring up trouble.” Amparo is alarmed that Dolores spoke with the “TV peepo last week right in front of [her] house.” Dolores is concerned that her
house, and her familial inhabitants, will be tethered to Amparo’s attempts to avow the unavowable actions of the silent sovereign through the media. Dolores wants to silence Amparo; she wants Amparo to “learn to keep her damn mouth shut.” “Learn,” the education verb’s use is significant. According to Dolores, Amparo hasn’t embraced the sovereign’s educational dictates, which entails embracing a bare life subject position. Amparo hasn’t accepted the sovereign’s lesson about McLaughlin’s Latina/o community’s relative powerlessness, which makes engaging the relatively powerful sovereign a futile exercise. How can Amparo’s actions be liberatory, especially when they represent a direct affront to Dolores’ more readily apparent liberatory actions?

In the passage above, Dolores enters the room and learns that someone has shot bullets through the window into Amparo’s family home. Certainly, a terrifying, violent act given the narrative’s repeated references to death-dealing armed men in helicopters who patrol and fire at the sovereign’s behest. The play’s short opening scene (which features no dialogue) ends with the “sound of a low-flying helicopter invad[ing] the silence. It’s shadow passes over the field.” It seems apparent that Dolores is well aware of McLaughlin’s clear and present dangers. Yet, when Yolanda asks Dolores (in the passage above), “What are you scared of?” Dolores’ answer doesn’t mention helicopters, guns, bullets, or shattered windows. Instead, Dolores answers with: “They come to talk to AMPARO on the job yesterday.” Dolores’ job concerns are trumped by her violence concerns. This duty-bound decision to protect her job is rooted in her children’s welfare. Dolores’ husband deserted the
family narrowing her capacity for risk-taking as the sole familial economic supporter. Dolores is defending her family’s long-term prospects by securing her job’s long-term prospects; this motivation is illuminated by the interrogative that ends the passage: “Who’s gointu support Cere if I stop working?” For Dolores, safeguarding her child’s survival with agricultural labor is liberatory labor.

In the passage above, Dolores juxtaposes her understanding of liberatory labor with Amparo’s understanding of liberatory labor. Unlike her children, Dolores does not think that her approach emancipatory labor is less valid than Amparo’s approach. In fact, Dolores is critical of Amparo’s emancipatory labor because she feels Amparo is a metiche, or “busy body,” whose stirring of the pot may create problems (due to affiliation) for Dolores at work—or through her windows. After Amparo shows Dolores the cancer map, chronicling the carcinogeic impact of Big Agriculture’s neoliberal policies, Dolores snatches the map from Amparo and says, “This is the las’ time I’m gointu say it, I don’ wan’ this biznis in my house.” Activist Amparo’s response to Dolores is noteworthy; it gives insight to Amparo’s approach to organizing and also ends Scene One: “DOLORES throws the chart out the door and goes back to feeding CEREZITA, shoving the food into her mouth. AMPARO leaves in silence. Fade out.”

Amparo’s silent response tacitly acknowledges the validity of Dolores’ liberatory labor strategy. Amparo silence operates as a discourse strategy; she doesn’t have to agree with Dolores’ approach nor does she have to demonize Dolores for not engaging the sovereign with direct action, for not avowing the
unavowable. Amparo understands that there are many silences and many strategies for engaging silence. Similarly, Foucault argues, “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.” Amparo’s silent response to Dolores also functions as an embrace of alterity.

Creating a heterotopia of resistance in the fields, with its porous borders between work and domestic spaces, necessitates valuing alterity. Amparo understands that difference is a resource. Kohn suggests that heterotopias of resistance are “safe havens” for ideas that privilege democratic-styles of information-sharing, while functioning as safe havens for subjects (and their ideas), who may represent difference within heterotopias of resistance; alterity is not only acknowledged, but seen as a source of epistemological value and a resource for the effective implementation of collectively-derived strategies. In the McLaughlin fields qua heterotopias of resistance, Amparo and Dolores’ different strategic emancipatory approaches enhance the epistemological possibilities within the fields; their alterity is a resource that engenders liberatory best practices. Amparo’s strategic silence to Dolores coheres with the second element in the ankhing process in that it supports efforts to collectively think through the most effective means to resist hegemonic forces—and through this idea-exchange, inspire, motivate and move each other towards best practices to resist hegemonic forces seeking to delimit their subjectivity, social, political and economic agency, and delimit their power to determine their own life courses.
Amparo’s silent response doesn’t alienate Dolores; it doesn’t judge her. Instead, Amparo’s strategic silence empowers Dolores to stand strong in her own child-centered, “immediate material needs” approach to liberatory labor. Also, this nonjudgment strategy creates the space for Dolores to eventually self-interrogate and potentially transition to a position where she can honor her family’s immediate material needs and engage the sovereign with direct action. Self-interrogation and intra-counterpublic evolution need to be critical elements in heterotopias of resistance. Effective emancipatory counterpublics must have deeply-embedded, inward-focused interrogation concerning the ways in which the group creates, develops, and adjudicates epistemological approaches and liberatory practices; dynamically evolving and strategically changing is essential in responding to the State’s hegemonic forces. This type of intra-counterpublic evolution is required because emancipatory internal structures and emancipatory internal systems are not static—especially under the totalizing, atomizing gaze of a neoliberal force.

The nonstatic nature of the McLaughlin fields is what eventually provides Dolores with the impetus to self-interrogate her liberatory approach and evolve. The increasing numbers of putatively pesticide-related deaths begins to radicalize McLaughlin’s Latina/o community members, including people close to Dolores. As a powerful protest act, unnamed community members begin to disinter Latino/a children’s corpses and hang them from wooden crucifixes in the grape fields.104 Following the pesticide-related death of Evalina Valle, Dolores’ infant granddaughter, the Latina/o community is outraged. Community members walk
towards grape fields in Evalina’s public funeral procession carrying photos of their dead and disabled children. Dolores’ armless and legless daughter Cerezita (who in the preceding scene has a transfiguration-like experience where she is transformed into a manifestation of la Virgen de Guadalupe) addresses the funeral procession:

Put your hand inside my wound... You are the miracle people because today, this day, that red memory will spill out from inside you and flood this valley con coraje. And you will be free. Free to name this land Madre. Madre Tierra. Madre Sagrada. Madre... Libertad.107

Above, Cerezita is evolving from a victim of neoliberal-driven environmental racism to a community activist fighting against neoliberal-driven environmental racism. She gives voice to bare life by speaking from bare life—and in the process moving away from margins of life. The speaking (and self-defining) subject moves in the direction away from objecthood. Objectified subjects shape-shift when they center themselves.

In their response to environmental racism, the mothers function as ventriloquists of the flesh as they speak for their bare life children. When Cerezita says, “Put your hand inside my wound,” she is not only speaking for herself, but also connecting her own suffering to her community’s suffering. However, Cerezita does not dwell in victimhood. Instead, she hails her fellow community members as “miracle people,” who have the agency to turn their hardship history (“red memory”) into courage (“coraje”). Cerezita calls for the McLaughlin community members to evolve into new subject positions defined by the courage to seek and
speak emancipation from the sovereign’s delimiting silent yoke, to seek and speak “libertad.”

Dolores is present for Cerezita’s speech. Witnessing her daughter’s public step into community activism opens Dolores to a more direct engagement with the sovereign. Father Juan and Cerezita want Yolanda to offer her dead infant’s body (Evalina) as ritual crucifixion in the grape fields:

_They both turn to YOLANDA. YOLANDA now understands that she is to offer up her dead infant._
_She goes to the coffin, takes it from the altar boys, kisses it, then hands it over to Juan._

Throughout the play, Dolores had aggressively dissuaded her children from any form of anti-sovereign activism; however, Dolores does not intervene when Yolanda hands over Evalina (Dolores’ granddaughter) for crucifixion as a protest against the death-dealing sovereign. Furthermore, Dolores does not intervene when her god-child Bonnie brings to Father Juan the wooden cross that is to be used for the crucifixion. Even when it becomes clear that Cerezita will be accompanying Father Juan to the grape fields for the protest crucifixion, Dolores does not intercede. Instead, when Cerezita is about to pass Dolores on her way to the grape fields with Father Juan, Dolores makes a gesture that signifies her evolving political consciousness:

_CEREZITA pauses briefly as she passes her mother._
_CEREZITA: Mamá._
_DOLORES blesses her. CEREZITA and JUAN proceed offstage into the vineyards._

97
In the above passage, Dolores gives her “blessing” to Cerezita’s desire to engage in direct action to protest the neoliberal farm owners’ death-dealing practices. This verbal gesture aligns Dolores with the McLaughlin Mothers who avowed the unavowable on behalf of their bare life children; through utterance, she is making the transition into direct action against the neoliberal farm owners.

Sovereign-sponsored violence engenders Dolores’ evolution into full and direct engagement with the sovereign. Just after Juan and Cerezita reach the grape fields for the ritual crucifixion, “the shadow and sound of a helicopter pass overhead . . . Then there is the sudden sound of machine gun fire.” Throughout the play, Dolores is concerned that appearing affiliated with the resistance movement would make her children targets of sovereign violence. In particular, Dolores worries about the armed men in helicopters who patrol the borderless fields; she is distressed enough by the possibility of violence that she prevents her children from standing next to her house’s windows. Cerezita is with Father Juan in the grape fields, so the machine gun fire is representative of Dolores’ worst fears. Initially, Dolores (and the other Latina/o community members) scream in terror, drop to the ground and cover their heads. Suddenly, Dolores’ son Mario rises, raises his fist and shouts, “Burn the fields”! Dolores (and the other community members) rise with Mario and begin to shout, “enciendan los files!” Dolores and the McLaughlin residents rush out to the vineyards screaming, “Asesinos!” or “murderers” (Moraga 149)!

It is significant that “asesinos” is the play’s last piece of dialogue (it’s repeated three times) and significant that Dolores (among other Latina/o
community members) is chanting “murderers.” Dolores is verbally identifying the farm owners qua sovereign as death-dealers. She is avowing the unavowable about the death-dealer who operates in silence and whose power is undergirded by intimidating people into silence. By the play’s end, Dolores has evolved from using a liberatory strategy that uses silence to support her children to a liberatory strategy that breaks silence to support her children. Dolores’ evolution to direct action against the sovereign does not invalidate her prior strategy in protecting her job to care for her children. In heterotopias of resistance, strategic best practices are not based on either/or paradigms. Since emancipatory internal structures and emancipatory internal systems are not static, strategic best practices are not static. In the McLaughlin fields, with its socio-economic and physical dangers, and its porous borders between domestic and work spaces, a heterotopia of resistance situated in this fluid context must be fluid. Dolores strategic evolution is indicative of this fluidity.

Amparo’s nondemonizing response to Dolores’ initial “silent strategy” aligns with the ankhing approach, which privileges alterity, diverse ideas and democratic decision-making. By not attacking Dolores’ initial nonengagement with the sovereign, Amparo avails Dolores to opportunity to evolve at her own pace, dictated by her own material conditions, and the specific circumstances within her own family unit. Dolores’ family conditions have changed in radical ways, inclusive of: her grandchild Evalina’s pesticide-related death—and Cerezita’s direct sovereign engagement and apparent murder in the grape fields. These contextual changes
necessitate a radical change in strategy that is more closely aligned with Amparo’s more easily recognizable community activism. As the ankhing process suggests, Amparo’s embrace of alterity and diverse ideas, versus an autocratic, top-down leadership style, proves to be a more efficacious way to encourage community members to engage in direct action against the sovereign.

**FROM PAGE TO PAVEMENT TO POLITICS OF THE SPIRIT**

Amparo’s approach with Dolores can be a model for real-world community activists. There is a problematic community organizer tradition whereby activists’ relate as the experts on community problems (as opposed to community members being the experts about their own communities). This tradition can be exacerbated if the organizers have putatively more “sophisticated” theoretical and ideological underpinnings than the folk they are attempting to organize.

However, this study is not arguing against organizers having a command of progressive theoretical and ideological epistemologies to frame their motivations and approaches to community activism. Generally, progressive theoretical and ideological epistemologies can be productive technologies in community activism when they are employed in ways that are not condescending and totalizing, which is to say, when they are employed in ways that do not disrespect site-specific and culturally specific epistemologies of the communities that are being organized. Amparo’s engagement with Dolores is rooted in respect—which is why it proves productive. In community activism, respect is an extremely useful technology; the
Heroes and Saints narrative is a repository of possibilities for examining how respect functions in effective community activism. The play's fictive narrative can function as a resource for real-world activists who are interested in developing best practices to organize communities challenged by sovereign agents pushing community members towards bare life.

Spirituality is another technology found in fictive Heroes and Saints that can serve as a repository for real-world effective activism. Earlier in this study, Kohn argues that heterotopias of resistance employ the spirit as a technology to encourage liberatory subjects’ emotions because emotion is a source of power. Like Kohn, Cone believed resistance sites need to be spaces where people could "feel the spirit." Both theorists suggest that subjects need to feel a passion for their cause. Since the spirit-fueled sensorium plays a critical role in emancipatory labor, spirituality or religion doesn't have to function as the "opiate of the masses.” Instead, the “dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is also false,” as Lorde argues.113 If there is a false dichotomy between the spiritual and the political, is there a possibility that there can be a productive relationship between the spiritual and the political?

In Heroes and Saints, the relationship between the spiritual and the political is both productive and contradictory. Throughout the text, Dolores is represented as a religious woman who places her liberatory hopes in God, while Amparo is represented, primarily, as a woman who places her hopes in activism. These
designations are seen when the women are repairing Dolores’ crumbling house in the early morning:

DOLORES: This house is falling apart. Ayúdanos, Dios!
AMPARO: You think God is going to take care of it?
Working is what changes things, not oraciones.
DOLORES: Ye te dije, I’m not going to your protesta.

AMPARO: Sí, do the work, do the work. DOLORES goes over to the side of the house and starts applying plaster to it.
AMPARO: Sabes que? I don’t even go to church no more, ni recibir communion . . . coz I’m tire of swallowing what they want to shove down my throat. Body of Christ . . . pedo.
DOLORES: I hate when you talk like this. It makes me sick to my stomach.

Dolores’ use of the phrase “Ayúdanos, Dios!” or “God help us” is representative of her problem-solving approach. Through “oraciones” or “prayers,” Dolores seeks God’s help to deal with the negative externalities associated with living under the sovereign’s hegemonic gaze. Dolores’ prayers operate, in her cosmology, as direct action to engage her Sovereign who has dominion over the sovereign. Dolores’ access to her Sovereign provides her access to an emancipatory technology more powerful than Amparo’s brand of community activism. Dolores’ social justice technology is powered by her faith and prayer; it allows her to declare with conviction, “I’m not going to your protesta.” For Dolores, a community protest against the sovereign not only places her family at risk, it places her family at risk, while lacking her Sovereign’s liberatory power to respond to the risk.

For Amparo, the Sovereign resides inside the people and inside the labor the people produce. “Labor” and “inside” are the significant terms. Amparo’s actions
suggest a belief that McLaughlin community members must explore inside themselves until they come into communion with the part of the self that is sacred, the part of the self that is worth the risk inherent in directly engaging the neoliberal sovereign. In Amparo’s cosmology, community activism labor is an expression of spirituality. Digging for truth about the hegemon’s death-dealing practices is Amparo’s way to defend and praise the indwelling spirit of community members. While Dolores is plastering the outside of the house, Amparo is digging in the yard. Amparo digs up a rubber hose, unearthing the remains of a toxic waste dump their homes were built upon. Despite excavating the truth, Dolores says, “No es Nada.” However, Amparo challenges her religious friend’s disbelief: “You don’ believe me, but they bury all of their poisons under our houses.” Dolores’ faith is strong in the things unseen but she struggles to believe in what can be seen—especially when what is seen is the death-dealing apparatus that confirms how little the neoliberal sovereign values her life—and the lives of her children.

As a bare life survival strategy, Dolores chooses to plaster over the sovereign-produced familial fissures: making the seen the unseen for survival’s sake. Amparo questions this survival strategy by framing it as an appeasement strategy:

What you think that crack comes from? An earthquake? The house is sinking, te digo como quicksand . . . They lied to us, Lola. They thought we was too stupid to know the difference. They throw some dirt over a dump, put some casas de cartón on top of it y dicen que it’s the “American Dream.” Pues, this dream has
Amparo encourages Dolores to confront the reality before her eyes and beneath her feet. The sovereign is sinking McLaughlin community residents into a death-dealing heap of toxic waste. With the assertion, "They thought we was too stupid," Amparo appeals to Dolores’ intelligence and dignity by framing the sovereign’s actions as attacks on the community’s intelligence and dignity. In the neoliberal context, the sovereign is selling a cleverly wrapped “American Dream,” but the concealed contents include a poverty-wage job, unclean drinking water and a rickety house built on cancer-causing toxic waste site. The sovereign assumes the immigrant Latina/o workers will pay the grotesque price mark-up because the mythic American Dream advertising campaign has been so effective. Without demonzing her, Amparo indirectly urges Dolores to reconsider her appeasement approach since the sovereign lied and sold them a crumbling pesadilla or nightmare wrapped in a shiny package.

The American Nightmare with the crumbling foundation Dolores is plastering can be read as a signifier for the family dwelling inside its unstable walls. Dolores’ relationship with her son, Mario, is increasingly strained because she can’t accept the open secret that he is gay. When she finally confronts Mario, Dolores frames his sexual orientation as a crumbling of his “manhood” and an affront to her Sovereign:

DOLORES: God made you a man and you throw it away. You lower yourself into half a man.
MARIO: I don’t want to fight ‘amá. I’m leaving in
the morning. Give me your blessing. Send me on my way with the sign of the cross and a mother’s love.

DOLORES: No puedo.

MARIO: You don’t have to approve of it, ‘amá.

DOLORES: No puedo. Peepo like you are dying. They got thá sickness. How can I give mi bendición para una vida que te va a matar. God makes this sickness to show peepo it’s wrong what they do. Díme que te vas a cambiar y te doy mi benediction. Tu eres el único macho. I want you to live.

MARIO: I want to live too. I can’t make you see that. Your god’s doing all the seeing for you.\textsuperscript{117}

Informed by her understanding of God, Dolores asserts that same-gendered-loving men devolve down the human animacy hierarchy to the “lower” stratum inhabited by “half-men.” However, for Dolores, these half-men aren’t “half as alive” as heterosexual men; they slide so far down the human animacy scale towards bare life that embracing same-gendered-love calls into question their very desire to “want to live.” Dolores avers that a same-gendered-love life is a life that “va a matar,” a “life that is going to kill.” More troubling, Dolores’ sovereign God is the death-dealer; her sovereign God created a death-dealing disease, AIDS, to show same-gendered-lovers that same-gendered-love is wrong. Dolores’ God kills in the name of love—while it kills because of love.

The hegemonic reach of Dolores killer Sovereign is so totalizing that it has the power to pre-empt a mother’s love for her son. When Mario asks Dolores to send him on his journey with “the sign of the cross and a mother’s love,” she answers “no puedo,” or “I can’t.” It’s important to note that Dolores doesn’t say, “I
don’t want to.” The decision to love her son is removed from Dolores’ purview; it is not an issue of choice: she can’t. Dolores can’t love her gay son because only her Sovereign God can decide for her. Dolores’ Sovereign God speaks for her and decides which words cannot be uttered. As with the silent sovereign farm owners, Dolores is silenced by her own Sovereign. As with the silent sovereign farm owners, Dolores’ Sovereign restricts her ability to undergird and protect her family; it delimits her agency. Dolores can’t make the “sign of the cross,” can’t confer a blessing in the name of love. Like Dolores’ voice, her body is controlled. This bodily control is inclusive of Dolores’ eyes—and the ways in which they view the world.

Dolores’ Sovereign disallows her from seeing her son as fully human. Not only does Dolores see Mario as a partial man, she seems him as partially alive. Dolores tells Mario, “I want you to live,” because her Sovereign-controlled vision sees him inhabiting a subjectivity near the border of life due to his sexual orientation. Dolores’ Sovereign and the farm owner sovereign align in their perspectives on Mario. Both sovereigns push him down the human animacy scale and towards bare life. The neoliberal sovereign’s downward thrust is primarily propelled by a toxic cocktail of class, race and profiteering. Farm owners target the economically distressed, migrant Latina/o workers because they are socially and politically vulnerable. In Heroes and Saints, politically and socio-economically vulnerable subjects are easier to exploit as they typically have fewer political and socio-economic resources to defend themselves against neoliberal farm owners committed to policies and concomitant practices which maximize profits while
harming workers in the process. Mario’s life course is delimited by the farm owners’
death-dealing neoliberalism to such an extent that he is forced to seek liberation
outside the borders of the hometown farming community. The distance he seeks
from his family stands in opposition to Latina/o family-oriented folkways and
mores demonstrated in *Heroes and Saints*, which promote intra-family physical and
emotional proximity. Mario’s desire to step outside these philosophical and physical
boundaries, to choose life, requires a blessing from his mother—the giver of his life.
Ultimately, Dolores cannot confer the blessing for life because she’s accepted the
dictates of her Sovereign God and the neoliberal sovereign who have both chosen
death for the life that came through her.

Similar to the relationship between Amparo and Dolores, the relationship
between Father Juan and Cerezita highlights the contradictory and productive
relationship between the spiritual and the political. Father Juan is a proponent of
liberation theology but not always an adherent to the theo-political philosophy that
centers social justice for the dispossessed—and calls religious leaders to lead the
charge. As a Jesuit, Father Juan is forced to confront the dangers of liberation
when news comes that six Salvadoran Jesuit priests (and their housekeeper and her
daughter) have been murdered for defending the rights of the poor against the
neoliberal sovereign. Fear for his own life makes Father Juan struggle to place his
liberation theology philosophy into practice. In the narrative, Father Juan flees when
the threat of sovereign violence emerges during direct actions being waged by
McLaughlin residents against the neoliberal sovereign farm owners. Witnessing this pattern, Cerezita begins to engage Father Juan about his motivations and intentions:

**CEREZITA:** Why did you become a priest, Father Juan?

**JUAN:** Too many years as an altar boy... and because of the fabric.

**CEREZITA:** The fabric?

**JUAN:** Yes. Literally, the cloth itself drew me to be a “man of the cloth.” The vestment, the priest’s body asleep underneath that cloth, the heavy weight of it tranquilizing him.

**CEREZITA:** Will you always be a priest, Father Juan?

**JUAN:** There’s no choice in the matter. Once ordained, you’re given up volition in that sense. The priesthood is an indelible mark. You are bruised by it, not violently, but its presence is always felt. A slow dull ache, a slight discoloration in the skin...

***

**CEREZITA:** But that’s your job, isn’t it. Father, to make people see? The ‘theology of liberation.’ The spiritual practice of freedom. On earth. Do you practice what you preach, Father? 119

In the above passage, Cerezita challenges the contention that Father Juan can be both a liberation theology practitioner and a Sovereign representative. Responding to Cerezita’s interrogatives, Father Juan confesses that the weight of the vestments is “tranquilizing” his body. A tranquilized body is unable to forcefully move into liberatory action when “the liberatory moment” calls for liberatory action.

Throughout *Heroes and Saints*, Father Juan is defined by his inability to act on his purported liberation theology philosophy—especially in the liberatory moments when the McLaughlin community members need him most.
Father Juan explains to Cerezita that operating as an ordained Sovereign representative, “there’s no choice in the matter.” Father Juan has “given up volition.” The priest’s will is not his own; Father Juan’s will is owned by the Sovereign. Although his liberation theology philosophy dictates a moral, political and philosophical imperative to help Cerezita and the other McLaughlin youth who she has helped to organize against the sovereign farm owners, Father Juan’s will falls short when it come to standing tall by their side. Similar to Dolores’ Sovereign-dictated refusal to bless Mario, Father Juan is the second adult “caregiver” to sacrifice children on the altar of “abdicated volition.”

Whether religious or neoliberal, the sovereign impact on the McLaughlin youth is marked by violence. The neoliberal farm owners’ death-dealing policies etch indelible violence seen in badly deformed bodies and bodies that never form into adults. In *Heroes and Saints*, religious Sovereign violence is less legible but not necessarily less violent. In the play, religious Sovereign violence has a way of working inside out; it does damage by encouraging the host subject to do damage to him/herself—and to those in their care. Dolores allows the Sovereign working within her to stop the flow of maternal love towards her gay son because of who he chooses to love. The love she denies Mario hurts him but the harm to Dolores is palpable as well. Earlier in the play, before Dolores refuses to confer her blessings on Mario, she says about her children, “[Y]ou walk around full of holes from all the places they take from you. All the times you worry for them . . . all the times you see them suffer on their faces and your hands are tied down from helping them.” It is
the religious Sovereign who ties down Dolores’ hands from making the sign of the cross to bless her gay son. Consequently, it is the Sovereign who helps generate the invisible, nonlegible “holes” that Dolores carries inside. However, these indwelling holes are not empty; they are occupied by a Sovereign who works inside/out. The Sovereign works from inside Dolores’ consciousness by functioning as her subjectivity; the Sovereign convinces Dolores to convince herself that she must deny love to her son.

Father Juan claims that life as a religious Sovereign representative leaves an “indelible mark” that bruises, causes “a slight discoloration in the skin,” but that it is not violent. Yet, Father Juan’s inability to practice his liberation theology co-signs the continuation of neoliberal sovereign profiteering policies that mark brown bodies as less valuable on the human animacy scale. Father Juan’s sovereign appeasement policy, despite his claims, operates as violence against his own brown body and the brown bodies he is charged with shepherding towards life in McLaughlin. Co-signing death-dealing neoliberal policies manifests as an abdication of his spiritual father duties: Father Juan is not shepherding his flock towards life; he is allowing the neoliberal sovereign to push his flock to the edge of bare life. Similar to the way the religious Sovereign and the neoliberal sovereign align to control Dolores’ actions, Father Juan’s religious Sovereign and neoliberal sovereign collaborate to put his “body asleep underneath that cloth, the heavy weight of it tranquilizing him.”
In the context of Father Juan abdicating his religious and political duties (as a proponent of liberation theology), activist Amparo functions as both hero and saint in Heroes and Saints. Amparo’s elevation into a “saintly” figure is one of the play’s most interesting intersections of the spiritual and the political. Throughout the play, Amparo is skeptical of religion (and its representatives) as a liberatory technology. Amparo’s skepticism emerges in her response to Dolores’ “Help us God,” comment, while they are repairing Dolores’ home (which can be read as a signifier in for the Latina/o McLaughlin community): “You think God is going to take care of it? Working is what changes things, not oraciones.” The work-that-changes is the community activism that Amparo engages in throughout the narrative; the work is the cancer education campaign, organizing via private conversations, publicly resisting corporate sovereign death-dealing practices and speaking at protest rallies. Amparo’s community organizing operates as salvific emancipatory labor. The activist promotes and models access to community salvation via organizing community members to save themselves. Amparo allows her body to suffer to mitigate the suffering of community members.

Amparo’s activist-related suffering echoes the suffering of Jesus during the Passion. In Christian narratives, the Passion chronicles Jesus’ suffering at the hands of the Roman State apparatus during his final days. The Passion starts with Jesus leading a peaceful procession-like rally on his way towards Jerusalem and concludes with the Roman State apparatus breaking his body in the presence of his followers. While speaking at a peaceful rally against the neoliberal sovereign, a
policeman, “Knocks Amparo down with his nightstick” (Moraga 133), and proceeds to methodically beat her until her body is broken.

Following the beating:

DON GILBERTO brings AMPARO out in a wheelchair
She has a black eye and wears a hospital
gown and carries a small purse in her lap...
AMPARO: They cut out my spleen. Father it was completely smash.
DON GILBERTO: ... [The doctor] says that the spleen is the part of the body that ‘stá conectado con el coraje.
JUAN: It’s the place of emotion, of human passions.
AMPARO: Pues, that policia got another thing coming if he think he could take away mi passion.122

In the crises moment, when community children’s bodies are suffering under the yoke of neoliberal profit-maximization, Amparo offers up her body to suffer on the front line of resistance. Amparo’s black eye and broken spleen signify the community activist’s stigmata. Bearing witness to children suffering in the name of profits changes the way Amparo views the world; it changes her vision. Amparo’s black eye, this mark of shame and violence, is also a passion mark of honor. The passion mark signifies transformational figures’ ability to transform dishonor (suffered in an act of service) into honor. In the Roman Catholic passion narrative, Jesus’ Passion marks on his hands, feet and side are physical signifiers of his suffering for the community he is serving. In the Passion narrative, they are wounds of love.

Similar to Jesus’ narrative, Amparo’s black eye and crushed spleen tell a community love story. Amparo’s passion for her community moved her to the front
lines of liberatory action. The activist engages in her own Passion Play by leading a community procession to challenge the neoliberal sovereign’s death-dealing policies. Amparo’s public humiliation, including her body being broken, inspires numerous community members to commit to embracing Amparo’s activist lifestyle; her liberatory-tethered sacrifice and suffering inspires community members to sacrifice and suffer in the name of liberation. Amparo helps to create a spiritual movement, rooted in activating the inner spirit towards outward liberatory labor. Doña Amparo’s edifying actions elevates her and (by their association) elevates activists into a salvific role in the McLaughlin community: it inspires the faithful to reject bare life even if means risking death.

Inspired by Amparo’s courage, Father Juan, Cerezita and Mario risk death to confront neoliberal death-dealers. Throughout the text, Father Juan consistently fails to align his liberation theology philosophy with his liberation theology lifestyle. However, after witnessing Amparo’s body being broken for justice (and failing to intervene), Father Juan has a “come-to-Amparo” moment—which engenders courage in the face of oppression. Despite a warning that the farm owner neoliberal representatives will open fire on anyone who enters the vineyards to engage in ritual protest, Father Juan decides to defy death to resist bare life.

BONNIE: Now, is the time Father?
JUAN nods then takes the cross from her. Another child brings JUAN some rope. He goes to CEREZITA, touches her cheek and releases the locks on the raite . . . YOLANDA now understands that she is to offer up her dead infant. . . . JUAN and CEREZITA head out to the vineyard.123
Earlier in the text, when it was “time” for Father Juan to take a liberatory stand, he ran. In the passage above (which occurs after Amparo’s body is broken for taking a liberatory stand), Father Juan, “nods and takes the cross” when the time for emancipatory action arrives. As in the Jesus narrative, Father Juan accepts and “takes up his cross.”

The cross is both a signifier of Father Juan’s liberatory responsibility to the McLaughlin community and a symbol for the ultimate price that he may have to pay for accepting the cross. Crucifying dead children in the vineyard (as ritual protest against neoliberal farm owners’ deal-dealing policies) has been strictly forbidden. Protesters violating the ban have been threatened with death-dealing bullets. Yet, Father Juan and Cerezita “head out the vineyard.” It’s significant that Father Juan makes this salvific move towards the vineyard with Cerezita because in the same scene, “A brilliant beam of light has entered the room and washed over CEREZITA. She is draped in the blue-starred veil of La Virgen de Guadalupe . . . The cross rests at the base of the raite. The light, brighter now, completely illuminates CERE’S saint-like expression and the small cross.”

Similarly inspired by Amparo’s activism, Cerezita transforms into a liberatory iteration of a Virgin Mary-Jesus hybrid (just before they go to the vineyard Cerezita echoes Jesus’ narrative and says to the community, “Put your hand inside my wound”). When the reader/audience is introduced to Cerezita, her body is already broken. Cerezita’s broken body haunts the text as an embodiment of neoliberalism’s impact on McLaughlin’s youth, McLaughlin’s future. Cerezita tells
individual community members to “Put your hand inside my wound” because neoliberal farm owners’ dealing-policies have wounded the children, the future of McLaughlin—and the adults hold some responsibility for this turn of events. Cerezita is both indicting adults for past inaction and seeking to inspire adults toward future liberatory action. Cerezita is transforming her open wound into a liberatory portal. The child’s open sore functions as an open mouth calling neighbors to enter and pick up their cross. The open wound speaks the unavowable; it breaks the silence that the neoliberal sovereign employs to stealthily deal death. Cerezita’s embodied suffering names the perpetrator and provides the salvific pathway to resist the perpetrator and reject bare life. “Put your hand inside my wound” is the liberatory password: the password to the resistance fields.

Just before Cerezita and Father Juan enter the resistance fields to perform the protest ritual crucifixion, “Dolores blesses [Cerezita].” Dolores’ ritual act to affirm her daughter’s activist agency shows evolution from her inability to confer a blessings on her son’s activist agency. Dolores was unable to bless Mario’s agentic decision to escape bare life because she couldn’t resist her Sovereign God’s influence. However, after Amparo’s salvific suffering, Dolores is able to resist the neoliberal sovereign and her own Sovereign’s influence and bless Cerezita’s direct action against the purveyors of bare life—even though the death-dealers have threatened death to those entering the fields. Dolores makes a transition to an ideological position that asserts that resisting bare life is worth risking life. This ideological shift is a critical step in agentic liberatory evolution because it
presupposes a higher position on the animacy scale than the disenfranchised subject’s socio-political standing would indicate: Brown life matters enough to die in its defense.

Moments after Father Juan and Cerezita enter the resistance fields, with Dolores’ blessing, “the shadow and sound of a helicopter pass over head . . . then there is a sudden sound of machine gun fire . . . Mario suddenly rises, raises his fist into the air.” Following Amparo, Father Juan and Cerezita’s salvific moves, Mario makes a strategic shift. Mario marks this strategic shift with an embodied ritualized movement which has gestural echoes to Dolores’ “sign of the cross” blessing motion. Mario moves his fist skyward, heavenward, to bless collective resistance against neoliberal farm owner’s death-dealing policies. Mario’s signifying fist-as-blessing is a liberatory evolutionary step from his prior need to seek a blessing from his mother. Mario transitions from one beseeching a blessing from his mother to one conferring a blessing to his community—an extraordinary agentic liberatory evolution.

Strategically, Mario shifts from rejecting bare life by escaping the neoliberal sovereign to rejecting bare life by confronting the neoliberal sovereign. The evidence of this strategic shift is found in the words that accompany his raised fist blessing: “Burn the fields!” During the play’s climax, in a powerful reversal, Mario switches from a subject seeking liberation by running from the McLaughlin fields to a subjection seeking liberation by running into the McLaughlin fields—to burn them. Mario directly engages the neoliberal sovereign by dealing death to the cash
crops that motivated the neoliberal’s death-dealing policies. Like *The Salt Eaters’* Velma Henry’s embodied answer to “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?” Mario’s moving body answers “yes” to wellness by answering “no” to bare life.
Chapter Three

We have got to know each other better
and teach each other our ways, our views,
if we’re to remove the scales.
—Toni Cade Bambara126

DIFFERENT SISTERS

In Chapter Two, the imbricated relationship between ankhing and counterpublics is
explored as a generative way to resist attacks on Brown and Black communities by
engendering environments where animacy can be nurtured. Chapter Three argues
for an expansive understanding of the counterpublic notion by averring that radical
anthologies can exist as counterpublics. The chapter explores how ankhing’s
embrace of an egalitarian ethos and alterity can assist culturally-tethered, activist
writers who gather in anthologies to reimagine possibilities that elevate the
animacy of Brown and Black folk.

Writing about the intersection of race and anthologies, Brent Hayes Edwards
opines, "[An anthology] necessarily ‘presumes some idea of difference’ . . . and aims
to present the specific contours of that difference, in a way that both articulates it—
makes it speak—and marks it off."127 The racialized anthology can frame difference
as a generative entity. The anthology has the power to speak and mark difference as
a thing of value. The contributors to the critical anthologies Poetry for the People
and This Bridge Called My Back give voice to difference and mark difference as beautiful.

In the preface of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa’s foundational This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, Moraga recounts touchstones in her political evolution. Moraga mentions travelling to African American writer/activist Barbara Smith’s home to discuss the yet-to-be-completed This Bridge anthology and the lesbian-led, anti-racism organizing in Boston. Moraga writes:

Barbara comes into the front room where she has made a bed for me. She kisses me. Then grabbing my shoulders, she says, very solid-like, ‘We’re sisters’. I nod, put myself into bed, and roll around with this word, sisters, for two hours before sleep takes on. I earned this with Barbara. It is not a given between us—Chicana and Black—to come to see each other as sisters. This is not a given. I keep wanting to repeat over and over and over again, the pain and shock of difference, the shock of commonness, the exhilaration of meeting through incredible odds against it.¹²⁸

The above passage suggests that even as Moraga luxuriates in the burgeoning intercultural sisterhood rooted in emancipatory labor, “the shock of difference” reminds her of the challenges and opportunities that alterity brings. “Shocking” is a significant nomenclature choice as a descriptor of difference. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the root word “shock” as “A sudden or disturbing impression on the mind or feeling; usually, one produced by some unwelcome occurrence or perception, by pain, grief, or violent emotion.”¹²⁹ In her meeting with a fellow queer
writer and activist, who is African American, the word sisters leaves a disturbing impression (powerful enough to keep her tossing and turning in bed for two hours) because Moraga is shocked by the tangible differences that race represents.

Moraga has much in common with Smith, a sisterly-like parallelism, so confronting their racial differences triggers the violent emotions and sleeplessness. During her tossing and turning, Moraga wants to keep repeating sisters over and over because she has to convince herself that sisterhood born of liberatory theory and praxis can trump difference born of social construction and subject position. Race is real. Race’s definition includes social construction but difference’s impact on racialized subjects’ life courses is so tangibly specific that it concretizes difference.

Although Moraga is challenged by the differences between Smith and herself, alterity is not demonized. Racial difference operates as a different type of opportunity: a difficult opportunity. Kohn avers that difference is a valued quality in heterotopias of resistance because alterity creates opportunities for new epistemologies, which can lead to new liberatory best practices. In contradistinction, the dubious “color-blind” discourse popularized by conservative critic Shelby Steele’s The Content of Our Character argues that race has an unnecessarily outsized role in society. Steele argues that racial animus will dissipate by ignoring racial difference, focusing on “character content” and by embracing a color-blind approach during socio-political interactions. The color-blind approach is built on a denial of historic American white supremacy and a denial of American structural racism’s continuing impact on people of color.
Cohering with Kohn’s embrace of alterity and rejecting Steele’s imaginary erasure of difference, Moraga wrestles with difference because she believes the emancipatory payoff will be profitable. Moraga frames her precarious sisterhood with Smith in the language of labor and payoff: “I earned this with Barbara.” Moraga’s earned sisterhood (inclusive of the shock of difference) is emblematic of what heterotopias of resistance demand for effective emancipatory labor. However, the precarious nature of interracial liberatory labor should not completely overshadow the excitement of the work at-hand. In the immediate aftermath of difference’s disturbing impression, Moraga addresses the exultation of interracial liberatory labor: “the exhilaration of meeting through incredible odds against it.”

Interestingly, the odds against effective multiracial, socio-political and economic organizing enhances the excitement around this liberatory enterprise. The American neoliberal context often involves the most vulnerable competing for the fewest resources. As a result, creating Black and Brown environments that can be utilized to organize and strategize against hegemony functions as an inspiring victory over neoliberalism’s atomizing concerns. Moraga’s struggle with and embrace of shocking difference are important stages in the ankhng process. In socio-political organizing driven by strategy and inspiration, the ankhng process privileges alterity, diverse ideas, democratic decision-making, and concomitant communal labor to implement democratically agreed upon courses of action. The ankhng process works well within heterotopias of resistance; both share a similar alterity-friendly, democratic ethos. As a multiracial liberation-oriented anthology,
This Bridge Called My Back functions as a heterotopia of resistance (with elements of the ankhing process) because it’s an alterity-friendly, democratic space.

BRIDGE TO RESISTANCE

This Bridge Called My Back is a counterpublic space qua heterotopia of resistance: it is “a real countersite that inverts and contests existing economic or social hierarchies. Its function is social transformation rather than escapism, containment, or denial. By challenging conventions of the dominant society, it can be an important locus of struggle against normalization.”131 The liberatory anthology is a space inhabited by self-identified radical women of color who are interested in (like Kohn) “sites that foster oppositional practices by sheltering counterhegemonic ideas and identities.”132

This Bridge Called My Back’s forty-five writings include a manifesto, poems, essays, commentary, letters and interviews by Black, Latina, Asian and Native American writers who, Angela Y. Davis argues, dispel “all doubt about the power of a single text to radically transform the terrain of our theory and practice… This Bridge has allowed us to define the promise of research on race, gender, class and sexuality as profoundly linked to collaboration and coalition-building. And perhaps most important, it has offered us strategies for transformative political practice.”133 The first half of Davis’ note hints at the pragmatically productive anthology’s role as an actant: a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce
effects, alter the course of events. Davis writes that what This Bridge “can do” is “transform the terrain of our theory and practice.” The second half of Davis’ note about This Bridge offering “strategies for transformative political practice” suggests that this single text is engaging in the transformative labor that is a hallmark of heterotopias of resistance. This Bridge is anthology as counterpublic. This Bridge is counterpublic as heterotopia of resistance.

Using Kohn’s nomenclature, This Bridge Called My Back’s origin is rooted in a need for American feminist women of color to create “safe havens.” In the volume’s introduction, Moraga and Anzaldúa recount Anzaldúa’s mistreatment by white feminists at a San Francisco-area women’s retreat in February 1979 and the duo’s experience with the elitism and racism during a two-year-stint working as the only two Chicanas for a national feminist writers organization. Frustrated with the resistance to change, Moraga and Anzaldúa endeavor to create a safe haven for radical feminists of color. Their safe haven isn’t another organization or an edifice. The editors explain that after the national feminist organization “repeatedly refused to address itself to its elitist and racist practices, we left the organization and began work on this book.” The writers-activists seek safety in a book. Structurally, This Bridge is an alternative public that consists of enough space to give each writer a “room of her own.” The radical anthology structure is built on identity and difference.

In the original call for submission that would eventually lead to work accepted into This Bridge, Moraga and Anzaldúa write, “we want to examine the
incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement. We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions. We want to create a definition that expands what ‘feminist’ means to us.” As a heterotopia of resistance, This Bridge does double-duty in sheltering counterhegemonic ideas and identities. The anthology provides a sheltered space for radical feminists of color to think and work through their own understandings of a feminist identities. The book rejects the notion of a top-down epistemological approach that would have nationally-recognized European-American feminists and European-American-led national feminist organizations develop and dictate the scope and definition of feminist identity. In order to effectively reject a denial of difference (and embrace the benefits of alterity that it suggests), This Bridge seeks to provide a safe haven where radical women of color can speak freely about intolerance and prejudice within a putatively liberatory feminist movement. This Bridge engages in intra-feminist struggle and simultaneously engages in macro-level liberatory labor, while supporting equal rights, equitable treatment and mutual respect for women in a national and international context often hostile towards women.

This intra-feminist and macro-level liberatory labor imbricates with the ankhing process because in This Bridge radical feminists of color collectively think through the most effective means to resist hegemonic forces, and through this idea-exchange, inspire, motivate and move each other towards best practices to resist hegemonic forces seeking to delimit their subjectivity, social, political and economic
agency, and delimit their power to determine their own life courses. The process of examining incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences includes rigorous self-interrogation and group interrogation towards creating a healthy, whole, emancipatory process that can result in healthy, whole, emancipatory practices and outcomes. Following Nancy Fraser, *This Bridge coheres with the ankhing process by functioning as a subaltern counterpublic “where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs.”*\(^{139}\)

**OF POETRY AND PRAXIS**

Similar to *This Bridge, June Jordan’s Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint* serves as a space where counterdiscourses are circulated to formulate oppositional interpretations of identities, interests and needs. In a pragmatic and powerful introduction, June Jordan speaks about the alienation she experienced as a result of an American educational system that did not reflect her experiences or value her culturally-tethered epistemologies:

> When I was going to school, too much of the time I found myself an alien body force-fed stories and facts about people entirely unrelated to me, or my family . . . history or future. I was made to learn about ‘the powerful’: those who won wars or who conquered territory or whose odd ideas about poetry and love prevailed inside some distant country where neither of my parents nor myself would find welcome.\(^{140}\)
The alien discourses foisted upon Jordan alienate her because they are not rooted in her cultural or experiential narratives. Instead, these “force-fed” stories are tied to sovereign narratives chronicling the use of sovereign power to win wars and conquer peoples. Jordan’s educational experiences inspire her to create a heterotopia of resistance in the classroom. Jordan seeks to turn the university classroom into a real countersite that inverts and contests existing social hierarchies.

Since Jordan views the imposition of a “dead white men” literature curriculum as a damaging hegemony, her initial resistance act is to radically reimagine what constitutes literature worthy to be taught at an elite educational institution like the University of California at Berkeley. By aligning with heterotopias of resistance and decentering dead white men literature, June Jordan imagines a pedagogical space that challenges conventions of the dominant society and transforms the university classroom into a counterpublic that functions as an important locus of struggle against normalization. Decentering dead white men literature is a significant step against normalization; it necessitates centering diverse literatures and embracing difference itself. Decentering dead white men literature necessitates “rescuing the canon” by animating the canon: privileging aliveness over the dead.141

As an artistic counterpublic, June Jordan’s Poetry for the People is vested in a collectivist approach to interrogating and reimagining the canon. However, before exploring this collectivist canon approach, it may be helpful to discuss the
collectivist design of the book. *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People* is a hyper-hybrid text. The book is an anthology in that it includes a collection of poems and essays about poetry from (then) emergent student poets like Ruth Forman and Samiya Bashir and established literary figures like Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Joy Harjo and Ntozake Shange. The established and emerging poets are presented side-by-side; this nonhierarchal presentation privileges ideas and artistic merit over perceived status and name-recognition, while tacitly validating the work of the student poets.

Also, *Poetry for the People* is a pragmatic “blueprint” for how to develop a pedagogical and artistic counterpublic, including liberatory best practices that lead to the highest quality epistemological and artistic production. The book features specific writing techniques about how to speak individualized “truth” to sovereign power, approaches to workshop-oriented critique, sample syllabi and sample reading lists from Asian American, Latina/o American, Caribbean, African American, Children’s Literature, Women’s Literature and Queer Literature. Aligning with the ankhing process and Kohn’s argument regarding heterotopias of resistance, this embrace of alterity communicates a high valuation for difference as an effective technology for emancipatory cultural labor.

*Poetry for the People* highlights the importance of publishing and disseminating liberatory cultural labor in the form of poetry chapbooks and public readings at anti-war protests, political rallies and State-controlled spaces like public
Like Squires, *Poetry for the People* focuses on the public presentation of liberatory cultural labor as a form of public protest rhetoric against sovereign power that seeks to foster resistance, persuade outsiders to change views, reclaim public space, create alliances and gain allies. With great specificity, *Poetry for the People* lays out a pragmatic blueprint for strategic ways to select work for publication, raise money, seek sponsorship, work with printers, organize public readings, effectively engage the media and how to solicit critical feedback during these processes so that as best practices are identified they can consistently evolve and improve.

*Poetry for the People*’s authorship signals its embrace of a democratic, nonhierarchal ethos. Although the class Poetry for the People’s pedagogical approach is June Jordan’s concept and is included in *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, she is not the author of the text—nor an editor. The editors of record are Lauren Muller and the Blueprint Collective. At the time of publication, Muller was a graduate student in the University of California Berkeley’s English department who had taught with Jordan for four years. The Blueprint Collective consisted of Poetry
for the People student poets Shanti Bright, Gary Chandler, Ananda Esteva, Sean Lewis, Stephanie Rose, Shelly Smith, Shelly Teves, Rubén Antonio Villalobos and Pamela Wilson. The book was co-written in Muller’s house, where “Four poets wrote quietly and intently in the bedroom; in the study and in the kitchen, there were five computers and facing each screen were two or three poets negotiating word choice, examples to prove a point, and paragraph placement.” June Jordan’s communal approach to teaching the Poetry for the People class inspired the communal approach to writing *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*. Both of these communal processes imbricate with the communal labor ethos ankhing champions. In the case of *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, collective work leads to collective acknowledgment. This acknowledgment is connected to the respect and benefits that accompany published editors of record—even when they are students.

*June Jordan’s Poetry for the People’s* communal ethos informs how this heterotopia of resistance addresses rescuing the canon—and from whom the canon needs to be rescued—and why there needs to be a rescue. The book includes analysis from established literary figures and student poets about the canon and its impact on their own lives and American society in general. As Jordan suggests, when American subjects study canonized literature that does reflect their experience, their experience is delegitimized. This delegitimization can result in feelings of soul-crushing alienation from the homeland, from the national public. As one consequence of the phenomena, subjects develop heterotopias of resistance to counter this death-dealing alienation.
FIRING THE CANON

In the counterpublic June Jordan’s *Poetry for the People*, Adrienne Rich comments on encountering canonical poetry while writing poetry from the subject position of a relatively privileged young white woman (she was a student at Harvard during the period in question). This insightful passage is significant enough to quote at length:

> When the ideas or forms we need are banished we seek their residues wherever we can trace them. But there was one major problem with this. I had been born a woman and I was trying to think and act as if poetry—and the possibility of making poetry—were a universal—a gender neutral. In the universe of masculine paradigm, I naturally absorbed ideas about women, sexuality, power from the subjectivity of male poets—Yeats not the least among them. The dissonance between these images and the daily events of my own life demanded a constant footwork of imagination, a kind of perpetual translation, and an unconscious fragmentation of identity: woman from poet. Every group that lives under the naming and image-making power of a dominant culture is at risk from this mental fragmentation and needs an art which can resist it.\(^\text{144}\)

In discussing the “canonical voice” and its gendered representative, Rich conflates “universal” and “universe of the masculine” to construct a literary sovereign. This masculine-gendered sovereign power has the power to communicate the sovereign experience as experience itself: the white male literary voice is the universal voice, the human experience. In its hyper-universality, the white male canonical voice doesn’t have to proclaim its universality; instead, as an embodiment of white male
socio-political sovereign power, the canonical voice is universal because the
sovereign power insists that it is so. This insistence is produced in silence because
silence is the nature of sovereign power: sovereign power is.

When the “is-ness” of sovereign power is tethered to white male subjects, the
“naturalness” of this sovereign power is extended to white male subjects. In the
canon, the writings of talented white male writers become naturally universal.
These writings are not seen as the specific expressions of white male subjectivity;
they are seen as universal expressions of the human experience: universal
expressions of aliveness. This state of affairs sets the stage for sovereign creative
death-dealing through a canonical prism. As Rich experienced, in a masculine
paradigm, nonwhite, nonmale poets “naturally absor[b] ideas about women,
sexuality, power from the subjectivity of male poets.” Absorbing a powerful
sovereign into a subject can have the effect of alienating the subject from herself or,
as Rich describes the process, result in a “fragmentation of identity.” The canon has
the power to separate the self from the self. Fragmentation of identity is death-
dealing by another name.

The canon’s adverse impact on relatively privileged white female subject
suggests that the impact could be more adverse when class and race are introduced.
The multiplier effect of interlocking oppressions (i.e. gender, class, race, sexuality
oppressions) is difficult to quantify, but it is important to interrogate the ways in
which these multiple oppressions impact women of color in relation to the canon.
Poet Marilyn Chin writes “It’s a fixed endgame: There will always be an imperialist,
Eurocentric bias. The powers-that-be who lord over the selection process are and forevermore will be privileged white male critics...What I learned from my youth as a marginalized and isolated west coast Asian American poet is this: it’s no fun to be ‘excluded’...as a matter of fact, it feels like hell.”

It is important to note that that Chin uses the idiomatic expression “feels like hell” to articulate her experience of canonical exclusion. In the American imaginary, hell functions as a teleological destination tethered to death and repetitive dying (see: the related idiomatic expression “a living hell”). Chin is tying canonical exclusion to bare life for embodied racialized female subjects. Talented and deserving female writers of color become a kind of “walking dead/writing dead” vis-à-vis the canon. These writers produce exceptional and acclaimed work but the work itself exists on the outer boundaries of the living word.

Female writer of color survival in the literary after-life is at-risk because of exclusion from legacy-making anthologies that validate writers. Chin argues that this literary bare life for female writer’s of color is exacerbated by overwhelmingly white male critics who “will decide who will be validated along with Shakespeare and Milton and latter-day saints of the like of Keats, Yeats and Eliot. They will guard the ‘canon’ jealously with their elaborate ‘critical’ apparatus; and driven by their own Darwinian instinct to ‘survive,’ they will do the best they can to ‘exclude’ us.” Chin avers that white male critics have set up a zero-sum game of literary survival where the imbricated critical, scholarly and publishing infrastructures favor white male writers. This favorable terrain for white male writers contributes to a literary
environment where the white male’s specific concerns, interests, desires, aspirations, fears, cosmologies and aesthetic sensibilities become “universal” concerns, interests, desires, aspirations, fears, cosmologies and aesthetic sensibilities. As a result, talented and ambitious female writers of color find themselves in a deadly trick-bag: in order to write transcendent “universal” literature (and avoid literary hell), they must die to themselves and be reborn as white men.

Since many talented and ambitious female writers of color first get on the literary road to hell by learning about the canon through their educational process, let us return to June Jordan’s educational experience. Jordan confesses that she hated school because the literature she was exposed to did not reflect her experience. Jordan was caught up in pedagogical and epistemological phenomena that could be entitled “Reading Dead White Men While Black.” Jordan frames these dead white men as educational and artistic death-dealers: dead white male authors were killing Jordan. Jordan tethers dead white men literature to present historical moment oppression; she avers that this oppression can be overcome by educational and artistic alterity. Jordan argues that resisting death-dealing by the dead is emancipatory labor that has the power to liberate the self and subaltern communities from educational and artistic alienation. Commenting on the process of transforming the university space into a counterpublic, Jordan writes about overcoming the dead. “As a teacher I was learning how not to hate school: how to
overcome the fixed, predetermined, graveyard nature of so much formal education: come and be buried here among these other (allegedly) honorable dead.”

In many ways, heterotopias of resistance function as alternative educational spaces; they are democratic-oriented pedagogical institutions where subjects teach each other to interrogate and acquire new epistemologies. *June Jordan's Poetry for the People* falls within this counterpublic sphere. The hybrid anthology is framed (and subtitled) as a “revolutionary blueprint.” An architectural blueprint lays out the course of action to build a structure. This revolutionary blueprint lays out the course of action to build an art-based, pedagogical heterotopia of resistance.

**LIBERATION PEDAGOGY**

Brazilian pedagogical theorist Paulo Freire argues that education can be transformative for subaltern subjects when they are encouraged to transform themselves and their environments. Freire roots this transformative pedagogical process in his *conscientização* notion. *Conscientização* refers to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.” Talented American female writers of color face the contradiction inherent in a canon that purports to represent the best literature in the English language, while seemingly basing its selection criteria on the best literature written by white males—and those who can effectively imitate white males' specific concerns, interests, desires, aspirations, fears, cosmologies and aesthetic sensibilities.
Female writers of color are often first exposed to the aforementioned contradictions in pedagogical institutions. In response, *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, as an artistic counterpublic, takes a pedagogical approach to resistance. The blueprint is designed to teach interested parties how to create and develop artistic counterpublics in their respective communities. However, the anthology’s pedagogical approach to this revolutionary labor is not top-down. Instead, *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People* embraces a democratic model featuring shared leadership, fluidity of teacher/student roles, the humanizing power of self-knowledge and the import of liberatory praxis.

Jordan defines poetry as “A medium for telling the truth.” Jordan seems to embrace a “nommo-like” role for the word whereby words qua poetry have the power to affect and effect phenomena: the word can influence the body by moving it into action and influence the body politic by calling it into self-reflection. For Jordan, the word is a freedom agent: agency is its calling card. Freire’s understanding of the word is imbricated with Jordan’s understanding. Freire writes, “Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction, that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus to speak a true word is to transform the word.” Freire sees a dialectical relationship between word by-products (reflection and action) whereby reflection and action are informed and changed by each other. For interlocutors of the “true word,” reflection and praxis alternatively teach and learn from one another as if they were subjects themselves. The two
notions are engaged in a dialectical radical interaction that animates both sufficiently enough to bring a more expansive life to the interlocutor.

For Jordan, the interlocutor is the poet who speaks the true word and poetry is a medium for telling the truth. When this truth is spoken to manifestations of power, true word has the power to galvanize people in the direction of liberation. The galvanizing element is driven by poetry’s ability to connect people to one another as they name sovereign silence. This naming can engender courage in the dispossessed and encourage them to name their individual and collective worlds.

_June Jordan’s Poetry for the People’s_ editors assert that “Poetry names what has been silenced and allows us to understand and articulate connections to one another and to the world we inhabit.” ¹⁵² Freire approaches this intersection of true word, naming and liberatory praxis in the following way:

> Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only with true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to _name_ the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to namers as a problem and requires of them a new _naming_. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. ¹⁵³

As a pedagogical technology, _June Jordan’s Poetry for the People_ is a revolutionary blueprint for creating artistic counterpublics where subjects can name themselves and their respective communities.

Naming the self and the “collective we” is a subaltern power move. In Mel Y. Chen’s understanding of the animacy hierarchy, those at the top of the hierarchy have the power to define and name those below them. In the United States context,
socio-economically and politically well-resourced white males (as top-dwellers) have the power to define and name (often with damaging names) people of color. Chen argues that, “Insults, shaming language, slurs and injurious speech can be thought of as tools of objectification, but these also, in crucial ways, paradoxically rely on animacy as they objectify, thereby providing possibilities for reanimation.” Objectification de-animates human subjects, effectively sliding them down the animacy hierarchy. This slippery slide is a death slide for racialized matter. Given the intersectionality inclusive of race and class oppression, these dual forces push people of color down into the nether regions of the human animacy scale where bare life is a way of life. However, when subaltern subjects use true word to name the self, the process operates as a reanimating form of resistance. *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, using poetry qua true word, teaches subjects to build artistic counterpublics that can foment resistance against a neoliberal sovereign’s atomizing gaze.

The aforementioned teaching aspect is critical to artistic counterpublic viability. In heterotopias of resistance, learning is often accompanied by unlearning. Subaltern subjects may need to unlearn the names (and their negative externalities) that were handed down from subjects higher the animacy scale. This unlearning, this releasing of counterproductive epistemologies, makes room for new emancipatory knowledges to take root. Jordan and Freire argue that democratically-oriented, critical modes of dialogue are especially effective in the liberatory pedagogical process. Freire writes that “Dialogue is the encounter
between [men and women], mediated by the world, in order to name the world . . .

If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings.” In a pedagogical context, dialogue suggests respect between the interlocutors; it connotes mutuality in the learning process whereby teacher and student are learning together, while creating new epistemologies from their dialectical engagement. This process stands in direct opposition to what Freire defines as the “banking” pedagogical approach.

The banking pedagogical approach is a top/down, unidirectional educational model wherein the teacher “deposits” information into a docile student. Freire writes:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing deposits . . . it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human.156

Like Freire, Jordan is advocating for an educational model that rejects the student as a passive object; instead her model is rooted in creativity and encourages the student to expand their subjectivity by critically exploring their human experience and the human experience of others. Within explorations of the human condition,
“creative” students situate their own personal experience. In this broad human context, the student is able to connect her life to the expressions of life around her, thereby, connecting her life to human expressions of beauty, value and power on the planet. Equally important, the creative student is more inclined to recognize humanity's diverse articulations of beauty, value and power and, as a result, the student is more inclined to appreciate her own unique human expression as an essential contribution to humanity’s diverse articulations of beauty, value and power. This embrace of the human is not only tantamount to resisting objectification, it is tantamount to resisting the push towards animality.

**SHAMING-NAMING**

In *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect*, Chen close-reads an encounter where a sovereign representative uses insults and slurs (“shaming-naming”) to push a subaltern subject towards animality in public. The public aspect of shaming-naming creates a spectacle that validates and concretizes the dehumanization by allowing witnesses to “co-sign” the injurious behavior through their inability or unwillingness to stop the behavior. At a public campaign rally related to his reelection in Virginia, United States republican senator George Allen was being video recorded by a volunteer from the opposing democratic campaign of James Webb. The videographer was a Virginian of South Asian heritage named Shekar Ramanuja Sidarth who was the only nonwhite person at the event. Allen points to Sidarth and publicly proclaims to the all-white crowd:
This fellow here, over here with the yellow shirt, macaca, or whatever his name is. He’s with my opponent. He’s following us around everywhere and it’s just great… Let’s give a welcome to macaca, here. Welcome to America and the real world of Virginia.159

Macaca is Tunisian slang for monkey and the term is used as a racial pejorative towards darker-skinned Tunisians who are referred to as “Blacks.”160 Although Chen concurs with journalists who raised concerns about the socio-political problematics of a white sovereign representative comparing a dark-skinned subaltern subject to a monkey, she troubles the notion of the a priori hierarchal relationship between humans and simians.161

The horizontal relationship elements that may exist between human beings and monkeys not withstanding, Allen’s public comparison between dark-skinned Sidarth and a simian was meant as a public slur. Allen was attempting to dehumanize the only person of color at a political gathering by not only hailing him as a simian but suggesting that his arrival at the all-white United States senatorial event was Sidarth’s introduction “to America and the real world of Virginia.” Allen insinuates that Virginian resident and American citizen Sidarth is legitimately neither because his dark-skin drops him down the animacy hierarchy (from Allen’s perspective) to the “no-man’s land” between animality and bare life.

The illegitimating aspect of Allen’s shaming-naming encounter with Sidarth, aligns with the troubling American tradition of top animacy scale dwellers calling into question the legitimate citizenship of relatively lower animacy scale dwellers. An argument can be made that African Americans, for example, should not embrace
their American citizenship because of the State-propelled violent and virulent anti-Blackness that has defined so much of the African American sojourn since Black folks involuntary entry into North America. While acknowledging historical and contemporary anti-Blackness (and its effects and affects), this study argues that African Americans, in particular, should claim the benefits that purportedly accrue to American citizens because a substantial amount of socio-political and economic prosperity has been built on the exploitation of Black labor and Black cultural production. It is possible to embrace these citizen-tethered benefits and offer cogent critiques of State-sponsored violence, the prison-industrial-complex, environmental racism and other forms of institutionalized violence.

In the present historical moment of heightened xenophobia, American citizens who are not European-American are increasingly vulnerable to shaming-naming and other State-endorsed socio-political technologies that deem their citizenship illegitimate. It may be helpful here to explore Lisa Lowe’s understanding of how the State and its representatives engage darker citizens. In Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics, Lowe propels her study by arguing that Asian American culture is an arena of contestation, a forum where Americans of Asian descent, and by extension, other ethnic Americans, can articulate a complex American subjectivity (versus the “homogenous” abstract citizen expression) that does not require them to forget a history of exclusion, racism, racialized violence and gendered oppression.162
Lowe’s position differs from Marx’s assertion that capitalism most effectively creates profit through abstract labor and via the work of abstract citizens, which is to say, that by “homogenizing” citizens and separating them from the products they produce, the capitalist State can more efficiently exploit abstract citizens and therefore maximize profits.

In contradistinction, Lowe argues that it is through differentiation of the racialized subject that capitalism maximizes profits. Through juridical moves which seek to interpellate nonwhite citizens as other (and therefore less), the State’s imposed alterity allows it to pay “the other” less, provide less service, and generally treat racialized subjects “less than” in an effort to protect profits in legally and culturally sanctioned ways. And as an outgrowth of this hegemonic process, many racialized subjects accept this treatment even though they are nominally American citizens. Lowe avers that her exploration of the Asian American interaction with the State can inform an analysis of other marginalized peoples in relation to the State.

For Lowe, racialized bodies are marked as excess, and not “naturally” available for citizenship. When Senator Allen tells East Asian Virginian citizen Sidarth “Welcome to America and the real world of Virginia,” Allen uses Sidarth’s East Asian racialized body to exclude him from the political gathering of citizens. Lowe argues that through legal, juridical, and cultural means, racialized bodies are excluded from citizenship through a series of exclusion acts based on their body’s racialized forms. However, there is a way for the racialized subject to become a “naturalized” citizen. If they are willing forget their past and let go of memory, a
deal can be struck. Racialized subjects can be liberated from their racialized skin by embracing a fiction that doesn’t necessarily live on a page. Lowe argues:

[F]or Asians within the history of the United States—as for African Americans, Native Americans or Chicanos—‘political emancipation’ through citizenship is never an operation confined to the negation of individual ‘private’ particular. . . . [Accepting abstract citizenship] requires acceding to a political fiction of equal rights that is generated through the denial of history, a denial that reproduces the omission of history as the ontology of the nation.164

Sidarth is unwilling to accede to the political fiction of equal rights, evidenced by his volunteer work documenting the racist and xenophobia attitudes of a sitting member of the United State Senate. Furthermore, Sidarth’s fiction refusal is seen in his written response to the perceived animacy scale positioning of South Asian citizens in America: “I am macaca.”165

On June 16, 2015 in New York City’s Trump Towers, Donald Trump announced his candidacy for President of the United States. Trump’s announcement speech was defined by what Chen would call “insults, shaming language, slurs and injurious speech.” While discussing Mexican nationals who are interested in coming to the United States, Trump said, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs, they’re bringing crime, they’re rapists, and some, I assume, are good people.”166

The association that Trump draws between Mexican immigrants and base
criminality is made the more troubling because these words were uttered during a 
presidential candidacy announcement speech. A man vying for a multi-ethnic 
country's highest office starts his campaign by shaming-naming an entire ethnic 
group. One can argue Trump’s slur-strategy was propelled by his belief that 
verbally pushing Mexican nationals (and many Latina/os by association) towards 
bare life was good politics. Like Allen, Trump seemed to be staking his campaign on 
exciting a critical mass of primarily European-American voters and organizing them 
around the idea that they were the “real Americans.” In Trumpian political logic, as 
real Americans these European-American citizens would be able to elevate 
themselves socio-politically by defining themselves as higher on the human animacy 
scale vis-à-vis racialized subjects. The message to racialized Mexican-citizens seems 
to be “you are not like real Americans; you are like those rapists and murders across 
the border.”

The irony of Trump’s troubling message is that parts of present-day border-
states New Mexico, California and Texas were forcibly taken April 1846 to February 
1848 during what the Mexican government refers to as the Invasión estadounidense 
a México (United States’ Invasion of Mexico); Article IX of the resultant Treaty of 
Guadalupe Hidalgo granted American citizenship with full civil rights to Mexican 
nationals who chose to stay within the new treaty-defining United States borders. 167 
As Richard Griswold del Castillo makes clear and Lisa Lowe echoes, in order for the 
treaty-minted Mexican-American citizens to believe in the civil rights guarantees
inherent in American citizenship, their belief required them to accede “to a political fiction of equal rights.”

AGAINST THE HISTORY OF FORGETTING

Soon after the Treaty Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, the issue of equal rights guarantees was on the mind of newly-designated Mexican-American powerbrokers. In 1849, during California’s constitutional convention, six of the delegates were native Californians (former Mexican citizens). These Mexican-American delegates were concerned that new Mexican-Americans whose phenotypes resembled Native Americans would face discrimination, including not being able to exercise the franchise. The perceived animacy scale positioning of the indigenous Native Indian population (the Mexican progenitors) and the new Mexican-Americans whose phenotypes favored these progenitors would influence a critical delegate decision regarding the intersection of race and rights. Griswold del Castillo suggests that although the Mexican-American delegates were aware of the racism driving the decision-making logic of the Anglo delegates, the Brown delegates ultimately argued:

for the protection of their class even if it meant endorsing the racist views of their Anglo colleagues towards Indians and Blacks. Mexico had granted citizenship to ‘civilized’ Indians and to Blacks, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo clearly stated that former Mexican citizens would be given the opportunity to become citizens of the United States. Following the biases of their age, the framers of the state constitution sought wording that would exclude Blacks and Indians while including Mexicans . . . It extended the vote to ‘every white,
male citizen of Mexico who shall have elected to become a citizen of the United States.’

Presidential candidate Trump’s aggressive xenophobic demonization of Mexican immigrants and Mexican-American citizens is further entrenched in irony because some of the people he is demonizing come from families whose citizenship predates Trump’s German immigrant grandfather Friederich Trump who became a citizen in 1892. The “insults, shaming language, slurs and injurious speech” allows sovereign power representatives like Trump to usher Brown bodies towards bare life—a move which helps create a socio-political environment whereby injurious speech can lead to injured Brown bodies. Words matter.

Following Freire and Lowe, “true words” matter because they are a resistance strategy against (Trumpian) forgetting and omission; they are a technology to name the “political fiction of equal rights that is generated through the denial of history, a denial that reproduces the omission of history as the ontology of the nation.” This Bridge Called My Back and June Jordan’s Poetry for the People are true word anthologies against forgetting. Referencing the American tradition of wearing ribbons to remember and support and American military troops, Moraga counters with “If we must wear ribbons, let us tie them around our finger to remind us of the daily practice of countering US collective amnesia . . . We must insist on what we remember to be true.” True word is often tied to memory so culturally-tethered memories can be a resistance resource. In This Bridge Called My Back, Max Wolf Valerio taps into her Native American (and Mexican ancestral) cultural history
as a liberatory technology. In the context of battling both external material oppression against the Indian Nation and fighting a legacy of internalized hieroglyphs of the flesh, Valerio’s resistance strategy is the following: “I remember the place where the sun does not malign the seasons flutes of penitents & headdresses for the Okan we rub our offerings of dried meat into the earth and the holy woman comes out and dances she is wearing the sacred headdress.”

Together Moraga and Valerio are suggesting a salvific role for memory; they make sacred the process of knowing the self by remembering the past. As an inversion of socio-religious hegemony, both writers are arguing that their community members may be healed by immersing themselves in the baptismal of cultural memory.

Moraga’s Barbara Smith-related “we’re sisters” quote that starts this chapter is also a revisioning of socio-religious doctrine. Both This Bridge Called My Back and June Jordan’s Poetry for the People represent new forms of sacred texts. These are texts calling for a belief in liberatory bridges across race, class and sexual orientation in the name of justice. These two revolutionary anthologies encourage faith in activists and their salvific sacrificial labor. Moraga ends the aforementioned preface by affirming her faith in sacred activist work: “[Faith] helped me continue the labor of this book. I am not talking about some lazy faith . . . I am talking about believing that we have the power to actually transform our experience, change our lives, save our lives. Otherwise, why this book? It is the faith of activists I am talking about.”
Chapter Four

Uniting the scars to make something beautiful
the healer speaks.¹⁷⁴
—Kamau Daáood

LOVE AND THE GOSPEL OF HATE

Chapter Three argues for an expansive understanding of the counterpublic notion, while averring that radical anthologies can exist as counterpublics themselves. The chapter also explores how ankhhing’s embrace of an egalitarian ethos and alterity can assist culturally-tethered, activist writers who gather in anthologies to reimagine possibilities that elevate the animacy of Brown and Black folk. Chapter Four argues that the surreal nature of Black life in America, which pushes Black folk toward bare life, calls for a surrealist approach to art that is rooted in creative freedom. The chapter argues that ankhhing’s liberatory embrace of art and spirit engenders artistic freedom; this artistic freedom directly enhances the animacy of the producers of Black surrealist art and the Black consumers of Black surrealist art.

It was a Wednesday night so the regulars had come to hear a “true word.” This Black vernacular phrase for biblical narrative pre-dates Freire’s “true word” but it is unknown whether it inspired Freire’s term. However, both concepts are rooted in the conflation of word and deed. The Bible study story that night was
specifically about the word and included verses 4:16-17 from the Gospel of Mark. In this pedagogical passage, Jesus is presented as a master teacher who has gathered his closest students to share with them wisdom narratives called parables about a farmer who sows words:

       Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.175

At the end of Bible study, the regulars closed their eyes in preparation for the traditional Black benediction “May the Lord watch between me and thee when we are absent one from another.”176 The regulars never uttered this prayer because persecution had come and spoken first from the lone visitor’s 45-caliber muzzle. Bible study regular Felecia Sanders later recalled that behind her shut eyelids, the first shot “sounded like a transformer blew . . . he caught us with our eyes closed.”177

Sanders opened her eyes to see 21-year-old Dylann Roof shoot her 26-year-old son Tywanza Sanders and her 87-year-old aunt Susie Jackson. During the elongated shooting and screaming and reloading and running and hiding and praying and reloading and confusion and blood and Bibles and chasing and reloading and reloading and reloading, Felecia Sanders was able to effectively play dead. This stealth strategy couldn’t shield her ears: “And I just heard—I heard every shot. I heard every single shot.”178 Although wounded several times and reduced to crawling, Tywanza Sanders tried to shield others with his Black body, including Aunt Susie. Felecia Sanders heard her son cry out, “Where’s Aunt Susie? I’ve got to
get to Aunt Susie.” Felecia Sanders, momentarily, opened her eyes and started watching her son crawl towards his great-aunt, “And he didn’t stop until he got to get to Aunt Susie . . . He got there. He got there. I said ‘I love you, Tywanza.’ He said, ‘Mama, I love you. I love you.’ And I watched him take his last breath.” Then, Felecia Sanders closed her eyes too: she had to play dead to live.

Tywanza Sanders, Susie Jackson and seven others died during The Charleston Massacre at historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal on June 17, 2015 in Charleston, South Carolina. Hours before the murders, the shooter Dylann Roof posted a racist manifesto on a white supremacist website lastrhodesian.com which included:

Niggers are stupid and violent. At the same time, they have the capacity to be very slick . . . We have no skinheads, no real KKK [in Charleston], no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.

Roof’s unimaginable and unspeakable actions and manifesto bring to mind scholar Jerod Sexton’s efforts to make sense of this present moment’s anti-Blackness. Responding as a citizen, an African American and a scholar, Sexton struggles to find the proper voice to express his concerns. First person may be too personal, while third person may be too removed for such personally violating violence, so he settles on second person:

You think also, in this moment, about the unspeakable, perhaps unimaginable ways that black lives have been devalued, and you have trouble determining when to start the story—or history or mythology or fable—or how far afield to draw
Roof’s hate-filled, racist narrative stood in stark contrast to the story that victims’ family members told Roof, and the nation, at the killer’s televised bond hearing two days after the massacre. Amidst extraordinary grief, the mourners told Roof that they forgave him and that love would win, not hate. After Felecia Sanders said, “We welcomed you Wednesday night in our Bible study with open arms,” Daniel Simmons, Sr.’s granddaughter, Alana Simmons somehow found a sliver of beauty in this latest blues chapter of the story Black people in America: “Although my grandfather and the other victims died at the hands of hate, this is proof, everyone’s plea for your soul is proof, that they—they lived in love and their legacies will live in love. So hate won't win.” As Daáood suggest in the epigraph that starts this chapter, the massacre’s mourners’ stitched together “the scars to make something beautiful.”

**ARMY OF HEALERS**

Los Angeles-based poet Kamau Daáood’s work interrogates the intersection of beauty and blues in the Black community. Given the virulent anti-Blackness which has defined Black folks’ sojourn in the United States, Daáood seems interested in understanding, documenting and interpreting African Americans’ capacity to create sublimity in the context of bare life. Along with fellow Los Angeles-based poet Wanda Coleman, Kamau Daáood functions as a blues poet qua community
healer. Similar to *The Salt Eaters* community healer Minnie Ransom, Daáood draws from culturally-tethered, African-related traditions to engage in his urban curandero work. Whereas Minnie Ransom used music as a liberatory healing modality, Daáood *centers* Black music as a liberatory healing technology. Daáood aligns with Cone when he argues, “Black music is unity music. It unites the joy and the sorrow, the love and the hate, the hope and the despair of Black people; and it moves the people toward the direction of total liberation.” Daáood juxtaposes joy and sorrow, hope and despair, in ways that are often surprising and surreal. The poet’s surrealist oeuvre has been informed by Los Angeles’ surreal juxtaposition of ethnic diversity and ethnic segregation, extreme wealth and crushing poverty, and progressive racial politics and virulent anti-Blackness. For Daáood, spatial and racial concerns shape poetic cultural production.

The poem “Army of Healers” is emblematic of Daáood’s concerns and his approach to cultural labor. The six-part poem is a surreal urban elegy: an elegy with an agenda. In part one, “Army of Healers” starts broadly and lays out the crux of its multitudinous argument in the concise opening line: “Art is life.” In contradistinction to the aforementioned emancipatory labor tradition of art being relegated to liberatory fringe, this opening line repositions art. Daáood’s initial move not only centers art, it equates art with life itself. Consequently, Daáood animates art. In emancipatory movements, liberatory artists have an ironic (and uncomfortable) parallel to racialized subjects who have been pushed away from
human being status towards bare life by the State. By arguing that art is life, Daáood resists bare life for liberatory artists.

For Daáood, liberatory artists are human being producers of life, of heightened human animacy, so they must be central to human life— and, as a result, liberatory artists may have a heightened sense of knowledge about what it means to be human beings. This bold assertion (which teeters on romanticizing artists) echoes writer James Baldwin’s position about artists:

[The artist’s struggle] must be considered as a metaphor for the struggle that is universal and daily for all human beings on the face of this terrifying globe to get to become human beings . . . the poets, by which I mean all artists, are the only people who know the truth about us.188

Aligning with Baldwin, Daáood double-downs on his “art is life” opening line by averring in lines two through five: “the raw material to sculpt joy/and meaning/religion and science in a mix.”189 Here, Daáood builds upon his claim that art is life, by also suggesting that art is a “meaning-making” technology which helps human beings make sense of art qua life on this “terrifying globe.” Art is a “raw material,” so art is matter: matter whose level of animacy is fluid according to Daáood. Daáood and Baldwin suggest that when art is placed in the service of meaning-making and epistemological acquisition, art can function as a mix of religion and science (both meaning-making technologies) that may elevate a subject’s position on the human animacy scale.

Following Daáood, the religio-scientific aspect of art is reminiscent of Matthew Arnold’s perspective on art’s religio-scientific potentialities:
We should conceive of [poetry] as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which, in general, men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it.190

By identifying poetry’s “higher destinies,” Arnold is carving out a salvific role for poetry. Conflating Daáood’s, Baldwin’s and Arnold’s imbricated perspectives, the triumvirate collectively suggest that art is life and art can save a subject’s life by resurrecting a subject’s animacy from bare life. Specifically, in the “Army of Healer’s first section, Daáood suggests that the poet, as healer, can heal herself. Daáood concludes the poem’s first section with “this is an army of healers,/physician heal thyself/and radiate, radiate.”191 By demonstrating, sharing and radiating this “auto-salvific” energy, Daáood argues that poets can inspire other subjects to heal themselves as well.

THE SURREAL STRESS BLUES

In the “Army of Healers’” third section, Daáood begins to highlight the intersection of surrealist and music aesthetics. The section opens with “the flowers have eyes/if they had mouths/their song with slay us.” Daáood’s personification of flowers (by ascribing to them the power of sight) is a move that has a series of interrelated effects. As objects of beauty, flowers are often objectified. In the transnational context, roses are cut from their native environment and are often
exchanged between subjects as symbols of love, appreciation and condolence (at funerals). The United State’s six billion dollar floral industry is a testament to the aggressive, profit-driven objectification of nature. Daáood’s flowers with eyes become witnesses. Following Carolyn Forché’s “poetry of witness” notion (poems that document societal “situations of extremity”) “Army of Healers” evolves into a poem of witness.

For Daáood, flowers omnipresence in nature, uniquely, allows them to serve witness to the decimation of nature (including their own profit-based uprooting) at the hands of human beings. Ironically, these “domesticated” flowers become more powerful witnesses once they enter the living spaces of human beings. In particular, Daáood, poetically asserts that flowers are witnesses to societal “situations of extremity” involving the Black community. The floral observers are positioned to watch the travails of Black bare life. These flowers see and “know the chains on [Black folk’s] tongues are rusty and blue/slow suicide that stretches over a life span.” A chained tongue is a slavery image referencing constricted verbal agency. Black subjects are not able to speak to the horrors of Black bare life because of the sovereign’s power to demand silent suffering from the oppressed. When the oppressed do “speak the unspeakable,” when they do speak a true word to power, their experience (and their pain) is often delegitimized by the sovereign. This state of affairs gives insight into why the chains on the tongue are rusty and blue. Daáood suggests that being denied the ability to speak one’s story is emotionally and physically painful; literally, it has the power to give one the emotional and physical
blues. The poet argues that enforced silence damages the souls of Black folk and enforced silence contributes to the physical oppression that results from circumscribed agency. The chains are rusty because they are a legacy of slavery: these blues chains have caused the blues for a time long enough for rust to form on the chains.

Black bare life's unspeakable horrors can be so debilitating ("slow suicide that stretches over a life span") that if the flower witnesses “had mouths/their song would slay us.” Slay, here, is a reference to the performance-related vernacular term “kill,” (as in, “she killed it”), which signifies powerfully affecting an audience. If these flower witnesses had mouths to testify in song about Black bare life, they could move the court of public opinion; they could “kill it” when singing about life that resembles slow suicide. Daáood does not gift flowers with mouths to sing a moving ode for those who suffer. However, the sufferers can sing their own song. For Daáood, Black speaking voices have been delimited by rusty chains, but Black music has found a way to break a link on the sovereign's strangling chain of silence. Daáood avers that when speech fails to articulate the Black experience, blues people turn towards music to tell their bare life blues: they turn to art for their healing.

In section four, “Army of Healers” qua poem of witness testifies about a specific Black musician's life. The poet writes, “Arthur learned to finger the saxophone/by picking cotton with bloody fingers at the age of five.” Daáood’s “picking cotton” image is instructive. As a cash crop in the early 19th century American agrarian South, the cotton industry was the financial engine of the
Southern economy—and, by extension, the engine of the American economy as the nation’s largest export in a web of global capitalism. Discussing the cotton-rich Mississippi Valley, the engine of the engine, historian Walter Johnson writes:

[T]he daily standard of measure to which slaves in the Mississippi Valley were held marked the conceptual reach of the global economy in the first half of the nineteenth century: lashes into labor into bales into dollars into pounds sterling. Cotton planters, moreover, were not simply concerned with their slave-generated profits (although they surely were); they were concerned about their slaves’ productivity . . . Between 1820 and 1860, the productivity of the average slave on the average cotton plantation in Mississippi increased sixfold.196

Daáood tethers the cotton-picking, saxophone playing subject, Arthur, to the building of American productivity, the building of American wealth. This is a wealth that cannot be separated from the peculiar calculus of “lashes into labor into bales into dollars into pounds sterling.” Johnson argues that Black bodies were pushed towards higher efficiency for immediate profits and as an insidious savings and loan entity: “Slaveholders stored their savings in slaves.”197 This financial arrangement is significant because it guaranteed that slaveholders were able to exploit Black present moments and exploit Black futures by monetizing the oppression saved “inside Black bodies.” In this process, Black bodies became repositories for slaveholders’ dreams. The cruel irony is that the slaveholder’s deposited dream into the Black body squeezes out the slave’s own dream. This is the type of bare life existence that can silence the tongue with rusty chains. Can the subaltern speak—when the squeezed dream is silenced?

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As Daáood’s representative subaltern subject, Arthur breaks the silence with art. Arthur’s saxophone articulates the precarious balancing act of Dreaming While Black. Arthur “moistens his [saxophone] reeds with dreams he collected/as he sang spirituals by his grandmother’s knees.”198 The saxophone mouthpiece’s vibrating reed (which produces the saxophone’s sound) is usually made from giant cane (*arundo donax*), a plant used in some folk cultures for healing purposes (as a diuretic, as a treatment for malaria, etc.) and a plant which has religio-ritual functionality.199 In ancient Egypt, *arundo donax* leaves were used in the ritualized wrapping of the dead; the ceremonial cane preserved Black bodies so they could tell their spiritual stories in the afterlife.200 The ceremonial cane in Arthur’s saxophone mouthpiece allows him to musically reinterpret the spirituals he sang “by his grandmother’s knees.” Arthur’s grandmother is the conduit for the hieroglyphs of the flesh; she passed down her musical strategy for surviving oppression’s ceremonial markings of the flesh and soul. Arthur’s spirituals first must make the middle passage across moist vibrating cane before his bare life song can exit the saxophone.

Following Fred Moten, Arthur’s “shriek turns speech turns song”201 as the song is exiting and, “his soul spills out from the bell of his horn/sometimes he vomits flowers sometimes barbwire/it depends on what his heart had to stomach/the night before.”202 Daáood’s nomenclature is significant here. Arthur’s bare life blues “spills out” the saxophone. “Spills (as opposed to “blows” or “blasts”) suggest the spilling of blood. Blood is the haunting complement to hieroglyphs of
the flesh. Blood’s haunting presence just below the marked racialized skin is the vehicle that, as Hortense Spillers suggests, allows for the generational handing down of oppression from Black body to Black body: blood carries the phenotype of oppression’s marker and memory. In the American historical context of virulent anti-Blackness, the blood coursing just beneath Black skin has consistently surfaced as a result of virulent anti-Blackness. In America, Black bodies bleed. This soulful song of bloodletting is what spills out of Arthur’s saxophone.

In “Army of Healers,” there is a quick shift from blood that is forced from the body to another substance that is forced from the body:

sometimes he vomits flowers
sometimes barbwire
it depends on what his heart had to stomach
the night before.203

Arthur’s response to Black bare life is physical illness. This physical reaction to hieroglyphs of the flesh signifies the relationship between psycho-social oppression and the body. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the hypertension rates of African Americans are significantly higher than European-American rates and Black male hypertension-related mortality rates (often caused by heart attacks) are approximately double than European-American male mortality rates. Furthermore, “Several studies found an association between racism and higher blood pressure levels in African American men. Perceived racism contributes to stress and low self-esteem, which can ultimately negatively affect blood pressure levels.”204 Arthur’s experience of psycho-social oppression makes him vomit flowers or barbwire depending “on what his heart had to stomach.” Through verse,
Daáood echoes the CDC’s findings regarding oppression’s impact on the heart: racism breaks Black hearts—possibly, unto death.

It is significant that Arthur’s broken heart makes him vomit barbwire. Barbwire is a ubiquitous presence in the carceral industries. Jails, prisons and other forms of punitive detention centers use barbwire to keep subjects from escaping their bare life. Also, barbwire is a not-so-distant relative to slave chains which kept subjects from escaping their bare lives. This generational link between slave chains and barbwire is a signifier for the generational link between Black bare life during slavery and Black bare life in this present historical moment. The “chains on [Black] tongues are rusty” because they have been passed down from prior eras and these generational chains contribute to the present moment propensity for Black bodies to be detained behind barbed wire. Black bodies (marked with hieroglyphs of the flesh) are the literal connective tissue between slave chains and barbwire. Spillers avers that this generational substitution of slave chains for barbwire is what keeps Black subjects captive:

These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually ‘transfers’ from one generation to another, finding its various symbolic substitutions in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments.205

This generational transfer of bare life captivity is made possible because Black subjects have internalized chains and barbwire to such an extent that traces of
chains and barbwire dwell in the blood. For many African Africans, oppression has set up residence beneath the epidermis. Black bodies are occupied territory. The barbwire-walls, with undecipherable markings, may be hidden inside but the psycho-social illness they engender is powerful enough to make Arthur vomit barbwire.

It is important to note that Arthur vomits flowers from his saxophone as well. This bare life representative has the agency to transform internalized oppression into flowers, pain into beauty: he is bluesman. Arthur does what the blues requires: turn hardship into art. The flowers that emerge from Arthur’s saxophone are liberatory. This musical beauty frees Arthur from being defined by oppression. As a bluesman, he is more than the sum of his hardships; he is more than a victim. Arthur is a blues curandero. In transforming his pain into beauty, the bluesman exhales his story across the vibrating healing reed as part of the self-healing process.

Arthur vomits barbwire, too, so flowers don’t eliminate oppression, beauty doesn’t make pain disappear. Yet, art can serve as a curative response to the illness that racism produces. For Daáood, Arthur is in an army of healers along with bare life Black artists who heal themselves. Daaáood asserts, “This is an Army of Healers,/physician heal thyself/and radiate, radiate.” Daáood encourages healers to “radiate, radiate,” because sharing medicinal energy can have a curative impact on the Black community. Arthur’s self-healing process involving, breath, medicinal arundo donax and a saxophone that has the power to radiate through an audience
and play a curative role for those bare life listeners living with rusty chains on the tongues and barbwire in their stomachs.

**AMERICA SCARS ITS YOUNG**

“Arthur was born in America” is how Daáood starts the fourth section’s penultimate stanza.207 “Army of Healers” is an American poem. The poem’s title is an ironic nod to America’s consistently militarized approach to disciplining racialized bodies within the State and outside the State. America’s policing apparatus has a troubling, well-documented, history of delimiting the freedom of racialized subjects—often engaging in this circumscription in the name of American freedom. Daáood’s “Army of Healers” functions as an embodied reminder about the false narrative regarding America as “the Land of the Free.” The narrative history of America’s Black racialized subjects is a story of chains and barbwire. The Black narrative includes a litany of blues songs in the language of saxophones. These minor key shrieks and screams are not found in “The Star Spangled Banner.” These Black shrieks and screams are the healing response to the bare life experience of African Americans living under the American flag.

In the “Army of Healer’s” fifth and last section, Daáood turns to the future by turning towards Black youth. Initially, the fourth section situated Arthur at his grandmother’s knees learning bare life survival strategies. The fifth section departs from Arthur’s specific embodiment as a bare life representative and broadens to a macro discussion of unnamed Black youth. These children are unnamed but not
unmarked. Daáood writes, “urban tribal scars/decorate the cheeks of young scholars/endangered as those in tar pits.” These “urban tribal scars” are hieroglyphs of the flesh. These generational markings are already present on young Black bodies. Daáood suggest that Black youth are haunted by the hand-me-down pain of their “impotent parents bleeding in the shadows.” These parents are impotent because they can’t protect their children from sovereign representatives who seek to push them down the animacy scale towards the same shadows where so many Black parents dwell: the shadows of bare life.

As marked candidates for the shadows of bare life, the margins of the American Dream, Black youth are “endangered as those in tar pits.” Like dinosaurs trapped in Los Angeles’ La Brea Tar Pits, Black children face a death-dealing future. Not only are Black youth dealing with the same external and internal chains and barbwire that their parents are struggling against, numerous Black children are facing additional existential impediments. Daáood argues that African Americans are stuck in tar pits constitutive of “savage red streets,” poorly performing school systems, food deserts, and an American policing apparatus that aggressively operates as if Black lives don’t matter.

In response to an American context where Black lives don’t matter, Black children marked by hieroglyphs of the flesh, respond with “hieroglyphs sprayed on walls.” Daáood’s suggests that, like their parents, the Black youth turn to art to tell their stories. Young Black graffiti artists tell their bare life stories on the structures of the neoliberal State. This urban visual arts complement to hip hop narratives
provides marked youth an opportunity to mark the physical embodiments of the capitalist State. In America corporations have legal protection as “people” (in some regards); “Army of Healers” suggests that corporate properties are protected more effectively than Black children. In this context, young Black graffiti artists draw blues stories on American walls. Daáood avers that graffiti qua liberatory art signifies that Black youth are not defined by the oppressive walls around them—inclusive of walls with barbwire. The Kamau Daáood ends “Army of Healers” with a poetic charge for Black children to look beyond a barbwire future—and inside themselves for healing: “This is an army of healers/physician heal thyself/and radiate, radiate.”

THE MARKING OF IDENTITY

Wanda Coleman, like Daáood, uses blues motifs to explore hieroglyphs of the flesh marking Black folk. In Coleman’s dynamic and incisive poetry collection Heavy Daughter Blues, these oppressive inscriptions are resultant from State-affiliated hegemons, a national culture of anti-Blackness and a national culture of misogyny. The collection suggests that these urban tribal scars have an especially insidious way of burrowing beneath gendered Black skin. The poem “Identifying Marks” is a self-inventory of Coleman’s bodily markings; its subtle but striking power lies in a tone that is reminiscent of coroner intake notes. Coleman begins her hieroglyphic inventory with:

raised/black mole 1/4 inch in diameter on nape of left

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cocoa breast/birthmark/callus on first joint of second finger, right hand/continual rubbings of pencils & pens held too firmly/assorted dark splotches/and patches on hands, neck, arms and backs of legs/stasis dermatitis since birth erupting under acute and chronic stress.”

Coleman opens the poem by identifying a raised mole marking her body. Moles are created by skin cells growing in clusters. These melanocyte cells produce melanin, the substance that gives skin its pigmentation. Coleman starts this “identity poem” with a melanin-rich mole because skin has profoundly marked her life course. Like melanocyte cells, Coleman suggest that many significant experiences have clustered around her racialized body.

The nature of Coleman’s signifying mole is seen in its “raised” quality. When a skin legion (skin that is unlike the skin around it) is raised it is often accompanied by irritation (i.e. an itchy rash) and extreme discomfort. It is noteworthy that Coleman uses “raised” as a one-word, stand-alone, opening line. The word functions as an introductory adjective to describe the irritation and discomfort Coleman experiences resultant from having gendered Black skin in an anti-Blackness American context. Throughout Heavy Daughter Blues, many of Coleman’s putatively autobiographical poems explore the discomfiting impact of racism and misogyny on her gendered and racialized body and the gendered and racialized bodies of other Black folk. Also, “raise” is a homonym for “raze.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines “raze” in the following way: “To scrape (a writing) so as to erase something; to alter by erasure.” As a one-word, stand-alone, opening line homonym, Coleman employs “raise” to identify the ways in which virulent anti-Blackness seeks to make
Black bodies illegible—and illegitimate. Anti-Blackness inscribes hieroglyphics of the flesh to erase Black subjectivity. Anti-Blackness alters racialized subjects so that the remaining traces of Black subjectivity cluster, like raised melanocyte cells, into barely recognizable Black bare life.

Coleman’s description of the mole and its position are noteworthy. Using language reminiscent of a forensic pathologist, the poet describes the black mole as, “1/4 inch in diameter on nape of left cocoa breast.” Coleman’s nomenclature makes the mole sound like a bullet entry wound. The would-be wound is hidden on the nape, the underside, of “left cocoa breast.” This positioning aligns with the human heart’s bodily position. Coleman connects the external, marked mammary gland and the internal, marked endocrine gland; both glands are capable of sustaining life even when inscribed with hieroglyphs of the flesh. These glands are blues glands. In Coleman's work, the heavy heart and the heavy breast continue to function in the face of adversity; the racialized Black body continues to make a way out of no way. This process is the “birthmark” of the blues.

In response to anti-Blackness' attempt to raze her subjectivity, Coleman raises writing instruments in an attempt re-inscribe that which is in continuous danger of erasure. The poet identifies a specific callus on her writing hand as resistant marking. It is a resistant marking caused by the “continual rubbings of pencils & pens held too firmly.” Coleman meets the continuous danger of erasure with continuous writing. The callus created by this literary response to oppression signifies the labor required to survive. Survival work, liberatory labor, is the kind of
work that will make a subject hold pencils and pens too firmly. Coleman’s callus suggest that it is the type of work that will make one firmly hold on for dear life—especially when a subject is being pushed towards bare life.

**READING THE BODY UNDER STRESS**

Survival work is stressful work. Along with internal manifestations, in the form of high blood pressure rates and heavy-heart attack rates, survival stress manifests externally in the form of skin conditions. Stress is a killer that forewarns its intentions by marking the body. The speaker in Coleman’s putatively autobiographical poem “Identifying Marks” has had, “stasis dermatitis since birth erupting under acute and chronic stress.” According to Dr. Scott Flugman, stasis dermatitis is an inflammatory skin disease related to venous hypertension that “typically affects middle-aged and elderly patients, rarely occurring before the fifth decade of life.” It’s striking that the speaker in “Identifying Marks” has suffered “since birth” from a stress-related skin condition that typically marks the elderly. Poetic license may be providing this early stasis dermatitis onset, but the image and implications are startling. The image of a Black infant emerging from the womb, marked by a stress-related skin condition, suggest that the condition was passed from mother to child, that oppression-tethered stress is in the blood. Stasis dermatitis at birth suggests that hieroglyphs of the flesh are passed down via platelets.
The second half of “Identifying Marks” highlights the impact of intimate violence on gendered Black bodies. Coleman employs the same forensic pathologist approach as the first half of the poem, which gives the second half of the poem an even more disturbing tone since the adversary in question is not only within the speaker's community, but also in her bed. Coleman writes:

oval indention two cm in diameter on right eye
residual from black eye received in fight with first husband
over which late night television program to watch
slightly puffy right lip with scar on inner tissue
busted following duke-out with drunk Louisianan boyfriend
who stole ten dollars from purse
triangular indention on right pinky, healed scars
from cuts received when jumping thru a
plate glass window following lover’s quarrel
beige scar where skin was torn off dorsum of left foot
remainder of fist fight which ensued after
discovering lover in bed with best friend girl.221

The compendium of scars listed above are in the context of intimate relationships. The poem’s page layout includes a space between each “violent episode” described. However, removing the spaces (as has been done above) allows the episodes to bleed into each other, echoing bloodletting that the speaker has experienced. Building on Coleman’s forensic tone, enumerating individual violence-tethered words in the above excerpt will further elucidate the impact of intimate violence on the marked Black body. In this brief 12-line passage there are: three scars, two bodily indentions, one busted lip, one cut hand, one skin tear on a foot and one black eye. Coupling the above violent hieroglyphs with the aforementioned State-
sponsored hieroglyphs of the flesh suggest that the push towards bare life for Black women is aggressive, comprehensive and intersectional.

THE INTERSECTION OF BLUES AND ABSTRACTION

Legal scholar and Black feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw notes that American courts often refused to acknowledge the overlapping racial and gender-based claims that Black female plaintiffs raised during discrimination cases. In DeGraffenreid v. General Motors (where five black women claimed the car company discriminated against Black women in hiring, promotion and retention), Crenshaw writes:

The courts refusal in DeGraffenreid to acknowledge that Black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women’s and Black men’s experiences . . . Where their experiences are distinct Black women can expect little protection as long as approaches such as that in DeGraffenreid, which completely obscure problems of intersectionality, prevail.

Above, Crenshaw writes about the “double-oppression” that Black women often experience. A double-oppression that courts’ implicitly and, at times, explicitly refuse to redress. The juridical message to Black women: choose your gendered self or your racialized self because we will not adequately address the complex, intersecting, discriminatory socio-political forces that impinge upon your life course. However, this “choose-gender-or race” message is not confined to the sovereign-sanctioned spatial realm. At times, Black communities and feminists
promote a similar message, especially (and ironically) in the libertory labor contexts. Crenshaw avers:

Unable to grasp the importance of Black women’s intersectional experiences, not only courts, but, feminists and civil rights thinkers as well have treated Black women in ways that deny both the unique compoundedness of their situation and the centrality of their experiences to the larger classes of women and Blacks . . . Black women’s Blackness or femaleness sometimes has placed their needs and perspectives at the margin of the feminist and Black liberationist agendas.²²⁴

Existing at the margins of a marginalized community, Black women are asked to subvert their own immediate concerns and needs to privilege the concerns and needs of “the community”—which, in practical terms, often manifests as the concerns and needs of Black men. Specifically, Black women writers have, at times, been encouraged not to address intra-community domestic and sexual violence in their creative work because this creative representation might underlines the “image” of Black men.

In post-Black Power Movement America, a well-known example (and one that moved beyond the academic/activist realm into African American hush harbors) of Black women being asked to subvert their concerns and needs in favor of the concerns and needs of Black men centered around the publication of Alice Walker’s The Color People. Walker’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel centers around Celie, a domestic and sexual violence survivor (at the hands of Black men, including her father), who goes on a painful, contradiction-filled, but, ultimately emancipatory journey of self-discovery and self-healing.²²⁵ A number of Black male writers and
critics took Walker to task for the ways in which the Black male characters were portrayed in the novel. Cultural critic Earl Ofari Hutchinson wrote, “Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* finally drove some black men to revolt. Alice named her black man simply ‘Mister.’ ‘Mister’ was anyman. He was a misogynist, tyrant, abuser, child beater, and wife beater.” Hutchinson lumped Walker (and other African American female writers including Terry McMillan and Ntozake Shange who broke silences about intra-Black community domestic and sexual abuse) with European-American men who seemed to have an interest in disparaging Black men and the Black male image. Hutchinson continues, “From slavery to the present, black men listened to white men savage, twist, malign, libel, batter, and mug them in conversation, books and the press . . . But now black women were bad-mouthing them too . . . The things they said about them sounded suspiciously like the same things many white men said about them.” For Hutchinson, when Black women named intra-community oppression suffered by Black women, they took the form of oppressors. In Hutchinsonian logic, when Coleman identifies the marks on the Black woman’s body, she is victimizing the marker of the Black woman’s body.

Following Hutchinson’s skewed logic, when Black female subject Wanda Coleman identifies her embodied intimate violence makers, she is victimizing Black men. In Hutchinsonian logic, Coleman’s articulation of domestic violence-tethered hieroglyphics of the flesh is an assassination attempt on the Black male image. However, although the speaker in “Identifying Marks” is a Black woman, there are no racial identifiers of the men who marked her body. In the putatively
autobiographical poem, racial and literary abstraction meet in the form of the “black eye received in fight with first husband.” Coleman’s first husband Charlie Swanson’s was a European-American, a Southerner and a civil rights organizer whose “complexion wasallow, and his natural curly hair was frizzy on top”—and he often passed for Black. In *Abstractionist Aesthetics*, which argues for the efficacy of abstract-informed Black cultural production and criticism, Phillip Brian Harper avers that Hutchinson’s literalist take on Walker’s depiction of Black male characters (Hutchinson is also critical of Gloria Naylor’s depictions of Black men) is the propelling force behind Hutchinson’s critique. Harper writes:

quote: Hutchinson … clearly maintains that what he sees as Shange’s Naylor’s, and Walker’s unitarily ‘negative’ black male depictions imply that the real world itself holds just one, equally unsympathetic type of black man. It is in this sense that, as I have already intimated, he understands these authors’ portrayals of black men as not simply mimetic, or convincingly reflective of real-life black men in their varied individuality, but emblematic—that is representative of the general collectivity of black men per se.

quote-end

Although Coleman’s work is rooted in the African American experience, in Coleman’s putatively autobiographical poem “Identifying Marks,” the speaker doesn’t identify the races of the men who appear in the poem, so the men who appear in the poem are not “representative of the general collectivity of black men per se.” Instead, Coleman is identifying the specific men (one or more who may happen to be Black) who marked her body: she is self-witnessing the story of a gendered Black body reinscribed by male hands who sought to change her story and diminish her towards erasure. Following Forché, this poem functions as a
poem of witness. “Identifying Marks,” as a poem of witness, is a “poem that calls us from the other side of a situation of extremity [so it] cannot be judged by simplistic notions of ‘accuracy’ or ‘truth to life.’” In contradistinction to a Hutchinsonian reading, the poem does not represent the general collectivity of Black men. However, what the speaker does identify as Black (in the poem’s closing line) is the color of battered “shadows circling eyes.” Naming and surviving these hieroglyphs of the flesh that haunt and shadow gendered Black life is the process whereby Coleman creates the poetic sublime. Coleman transforms blues scars into beautiful poetry. Like Daáood’s epigraph that begins this chapter, Wanda Coleman and Kamau Daáood are “uniting the scars to make something beautiful.”
CODA

On Saturday, February 27, 2016, The World Stage relocated. The announcement of Los Angeles’ incoming Crenshaw Rail Line and Leimert Park Station had engendered a buying frenzy in the area’s Black culture-themed, Degnan Boulevard-centered, merchant district, forcing out many long-time merchants. The iconic literary and jazz performance and arts educational center was not offered a lease by the new property owners, so after 27 years at 4344 Degnan Boulevard, they decided to move—across the street. As opposed to hiring a moving company, Executive Director Dwight Trible decided to organize a moving party in the primarily Latina/o and African American area. Over 50 people showed up. Dozens of primarily Brown and Brown people carried congas, computers, microphones, desks, chairs, speakers, paintings, amplifiers, snares, basses, kick drums and a safe across Degnan Boulevard; the sight caused curious motorists to slow and stare.

The World Stage moving party turnout bespeaks to its status as a grassroots artistic counterpublic in the African American and Latina/o area. In the context of diminished civic and school arts funding, the nonprofit organization’s high-quality, low-priced music and literature training brings the community together seven days-a-week. Offerings include a youth jazz orchestra, all-woman’s African drumming workshop and ensemble, rigorous writing workshop, jazz vocal workshop, jazz jam session, poetry small press, live jazz concerts and a children’s drumming
The multi-ethnic participants are primarily African American and Latina/o.

The World Stage is a gathering space to address the socio-political and economic challenges facing Black and Brown communities. Although the organization has hosted formal community discussions around police brutality gentrification, the frequent intra-community discussions occur informally during workshops. These informal discussions are most frequent during the venue’s weekly Anansi Writer’s Workshop. Participants bring works-in-progress to the poetry-centric workshop, which often addresses issues confronting the Black and Brown communities, like racism, the prison industrial complex, mental health and violence. The issues embedded in the poetry often arise during the feedback process, leading to intense community discussions.

The structure of the workshop contributes to the frequency and intensity of these art-initiated, broad-ranging discussions. Participants who want to workshop a new poem, pass out copies to the 30-40 people present then approach the stage to read their poem aloud at the stage’s microphone. Following the reading, audience members engage in a lively discussion about the poem’s merits and—with very tough love as the guiding principle—its demerits. Audience members are encouraged to disagree with feedback coming from other audience members with whom they disagree (giving the author more options to choose from, in terms of making her poem stronger). This privileging of frank, assertive, democratic discussion, leads to intra-group interrogation where new ideas are welcomed—and
challenged—which leads not only to poetic best practices, but often lays the foundation for best practices for resisting hegemonic forces (given the poems frequent liberatory subject matter). The World Stage Anansi Writer’s Workshop members engage in the ankhing process as they collectively think through the most effective means to resist hegemonic forces—and through this idea-exchange, inspire, motivate and move each other towards best practices to resist hegemonic forces seeking to delimit their subjectivity, social, political and economic agency, and delimit their power to determine their own life courses.

As a writing workshop frequented by labor organizers, published authors community activists, educators and neighbors, it’s important to note the role literature plays in The World Stage’s emancipatory labor. Activists and organizers who attend the workshop are writing and presenting poems about their lives as activists and organizers. These liberatory laborers’ participation in the workshop signals their understanding of the emancipatory possibilities inherent in literature. Via a democratic workshop process, they hope to strengthen their cultural labor that it may possibly inspire community members to engage in more emancipatory labor. By writing their own alternative literature in the face of hegemonic forces, these labor organizers, published authors community activists, educators and neighbors cohere with Edwards to remind us that “Literature is a repository for counter stories and alternative visions . . . narrative is a dialogic site for reimagining possibilities.”
NOTES

1 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco:  

2 Cedric J. Robinson, Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical  


4 “School-to-prison” pipeline is a phrase used to describe the phenomena whereby poorly resourced schools in urban communities increasingly rely on criminalizing methods, such as locker checks, body frisking, handcuffing and other disciplining actions at the hands of on-campus law enforcement officials. Students at these educational institutions often have negative interactions with the state security apparatus at ages that are extremely problematic. These types of interactions can have the impact of normalizing the criminalization of children.  

5 To view video of the rally and McSpadden’s response can be see:  
http://gawker.com/mike-browns-moms-painful-address-to-rally-they-still-

6 For a complete list see the report by thinkprogress.org:  
http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2014/12/12/3601771/people-police-killed-in-


12 For an engaging discussion of these impacts, tethered to creative narrative, see Sharon Patricia Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Print.

13 The author acknowledges the very subjective nature of good as concept and telos. For this study, to do good can be understood as engaging in behavior that helps historically disposed peoples access heightened agency, more expansive subjectivity and an improvement in their material conditions whereby they can more effectively engage in liberatory action.


16 Ong, 9.


19 Ankhing is the author’s coinage.


asserts, “[T]o live in Maat is to live in the living Word, the ankh mdw. It becomes the only path to ankh nehen, that is life eternal.”

22 Asante, The Afrocentric Idea: Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) 17. Similarly, Janheinz Jahn argues that “Nommo, the life force, is . . . a unity of spiritual-physical fluidity, giving life to everything, penetrating everything, causing everything. . . . And since man has power over the word, it is he who directs the life force. Through the word he receives it, shares it with other beings, and so fulfills the meaning of life.” Janheinz Jahn, Muntu: African Culture and the Western World (New York: Grove Press, 1990) 124.


27 Michel Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended,” Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76, Eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003) 247. Print. Michel Foucault defines biopower. As understood in opposition to sovereign power, the power to “take life”, Foucault describes biopower as “this technology of the power over “the” population as such, over men insofar as they are living beings. It is continuous, scientific, and is the power to make live. And now we have the emergence of a power I would call the power of regularization, and it, in contrast, consists of making live and letting die.”

28 Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 5. Print. In writing about slave’s material and, concomitant, social condition, Patterson asserts, “He was truly a genealogical isolate. Formally isolated in his social relations with those who lived, he
also was culturally isolated from the social heritage of his ancestors.” Cone suggests that the Spirit has the power to reject this social death, and use this rejection to create a more vibrant mode of living.


33 In Edwards’ devastating critique of African American historic and contemporary deification of the charismatic male leader as a salvific instrument of black communities, she theorizes that, “as a structuring fiction for liberatory politics, charisma is founded in three forms of violence: the historical or historiographical violence of reducing a heterogeneous black freedom struggle to a top-down narrative of Great Man leadership; the social violence of performing social change in the form of a fundamentally antidemocratic form of authority; and the epistemological violence of structuring knowledge of black political subjectivity and movement within a gendered hierarchy of political value that grants uninterrogated power to normative masculinity.”


36 Smith, 179-180.


38 For more reading on the topic see: Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, Eds. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press at City University


40 Moraga, 100.

41 See Edwards, 3-33.


According to Kohn, in her research investigating European heterotopias of resistance dedicated to supporting workers, socialists and communists in the 18th and early 19th century, houses of the people were “simultaneously pragmatic solutions to police harassment and surveillance, attempts to embody solidarity, and intervention in the symbolic space of the city. They challenged political and economic structures because they functioned as material and symbolic nodal points for aggregating dispersed people and ideas” (88).


Duchess Harris, “From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective: Black Feminist Organizing, 1960-1980,” Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement. Eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: NYU Press, 2001) 282-288. Print. Harris argues that there is a throughline from Fourth Consultation of President John F. Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) to those of the women in the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) and the Combahee River Collective (CRC). She theorises that “The first group was composed of financially and educationally privileged black women chosen by officials of the federal government to serve on a national commission on women, while the other two included middle and working-class black women who had been active in civil rights and grassroots black organizations.

This study examines the political activities of these black women and their organizations, and reveals that despite differences in education and social class background, they were aware of three overlapping realities: (1) there were inextricable links between gender and racial identify; (2) their socioeconomic status was overdetermined by gender and racial identity; and (3) there was a need to organize collectively on the basis of these realizations.

This research reveals that each group’s ideological perspectives were more inclusive than those of their predecessors. The black women on the Kennedy Commission articulated more conservative notions about gender than the women of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) who, in turn, articulated more conservative notions about female sexuality and the disadvantages of the capitalist system than the women of the Combahee River Collective. Unlike the women of the Kennedy Commission and the NBFO, those members of the Combahee River
Collective recognized that one's sexual orientation was distinctive and separate from gender and racial identity and they organized around that realization.

The black feminist movement can be seen as moving from relatively liberal and univocal focus on gender of the Presidential Commission to the more radical and polyvocal focus on gender, race, class, and sexual orientation of the Combahee River Collective. This study makes it clear that the later groups existed as a result of the efforts of the earlier ones, and that there was significant overlap in membership. Moreover, the ideological development among black feminists coincided with the growth of the Civil Rights-Black Power and Women's Liberation movements, to which they made important contributions.”

51 Conversation with Tiffany A. López. 17 December 2013.


54 Ibid.


60 Ibid.

Plascencia 84.

Moten 239.


Moten 256.


Bennett 63-65.

Bennett 63

Bennett 77.

Bennett 66.


Two representative examples of this phenomena are Ghanaian independence leader Kwame Nkrumah, who was educated at the University of Pennsylvania and Lincoln University and Nigerian activist-playwright Wole Soyinka who did graduate study at the University of Leeds in Britain.

For the sake of argument, this study refers to Africa and African, however, it acknowledges the folkways, mores and specific cultures of individual African countries, tribes and the people therein.

Plascencia 55.


Ibid.

Dominologists are not only skilled in the art of playing the game, they are also skilled in the artful word-play exchanged among players during games. See Nathan Holsey, *The Dominologist: Learn to Become the Best at Dominoes* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008). Print.


Ibid.

Spillers 68.

Spillers uses this term to describe the ways in which black flesh is seared, divided and ripped apart.

Spillers 67.


Fraser 67.

Squires 460

Kohn 129.

Moraga 89.

Moraga 133.

Moraga 110.

Moraga 129.
The especially ardent embrace by Mexican migrants of La Virgen de Guadalupe seems to tethered to the anxieties inherent in process of leaving the homeland to pursue economic survival. For an intriguing treatment of how la Virgen de Guadalupe functions as central religious figure of worship for Mexican migrants, including the intensity of the embrace, see Elaine A. Pena, Performing Piety: Making Space Sacred with the Virgin of Guadalupe (Berkeley: University of California, 2011). Print.

For an incisive critical history of community organizing, including case studies which illustrate the import of engaging community members as the experts

113 Lorde 56.

114 Moraga 102.

115 Ibid.

116 Moraga 102-103.

117 Moraga 124.


119 Moraga 115.

120 Moraga 130.


122 Moraga 135.

123 Moraga 149.

124 Moraga 144.

125 Moraga 149.


Kohn 129. Kohn's use of the term is part of a larger class analysis, which argues that workers need safe havens to provide cover from an atomizing, capitalist sovereign's gaze, which seeks to delimit their identity to cogs in profit-maximization machinery. The, generally, imbricated nature of American class and race makes Kohn's safe haven notion productive when discussing Black and Brown folk's need for cover from the atomizing gaze of American neoliberal sovereigns who are primarily European-American.

This Bridge Called My Back, lii.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Jordan, 69. Jordan writes about rescuing the canon in terms of reinventing it and making it relevant for the living by honoring the diverse work of the living as well as the dead. The text has a chapter entitled “Rescuing the Canon.”

143 Lauren Muller, *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, 228.


146 Chin’s critically-acclaimed poetry and outspoken advocacy for the “survival” of her work has began to make inroads. Chin’s poem’s are now included in the canon-influencing anthologies: *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, The Norton Introduction to Poetry and The Oxford Anthology of Modern American Poetry*.

147 Chin, *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, 83.


150 *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, 36. Also, this definition includes: “The achievement of maximum impart with minimal number of words” and “The utmost precision in the use of language, hence, density and intensity of expression.”

151 Freire 68.

152 *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People*, 17.

153 Freire 69.


155 Freire 69.

156 Freire 53.

157 This is the author of this study’s coinage which refers to the process involving the relatively powerful hailing the relatively less powerful with pejoratives meant to denigrate and delimit subjectivity.

158 Chen 31.
Ibid. Sidarth’s video of Allen’s comment was uploaded to YouTube and soon went viral. A link follows: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r90z0PMnKwI

Chen 32.

Chen 34-5. Chen argues that the media coverage of the Allen/Sidarth encounter doesn’t sufficiently challenge the underlying assumptions that there is not a horizontal relationship between simians. The following quote, and the present and placement of quotations marks, offers a glimpse into Chen’s position: [A] simian imputation for a human being readily invokes theories of evolution that place monkeys and apes a earlier, “primitive,” stages of evolution or development than the, “higher,” humans being compare to them.”


Lowe 27. Lowe argues that naturalization involves a false promise of socio-political emancipation and equality: “While the nation proposes immigrant ‘naturalization’ as a narrative of political emancipation that is meant to resolve in American liberal democracy as a terrain to which all citizens have equal access and in which all are equally represented, it is a narrative that denies the establishment of citizenship out of unequal relationships between dominant white citizens and subordinated racialized noncitizens and women.”

Lowe 26-27.

Chen 35.


Further entrenching the conflict and document in irony, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was officially entitled the “Treaty of Peace, Friendship, Limits and Settlement between the United States of America and the Mexican Republic.” Richard Griswold del Castillo argues that as soon as 1849 the ambiguous, interpretative and fluid nature of race began to play a role in how the treaty was enforced, especially as the framers of California’s constitution began to wrestle with the intersection of race, rights of citizenship and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. For more on this discussion see Richard Griswold del Castillo, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990) 62-86.

Griswold del Castillo 66.

Ibid.

171 Moraga xxiv.


173 Moraga xxxxx.


175 *New International Version,* Mark 4:16-17.

176 This traditional Black benediction is drawn from the biblical narrative which details a truce between Laban and Jacob. “May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. *New International Version,* Genesis 31:49.


178 Ibid.

179 Ibid.

180 Ibid.

181 Ibid. The seven other victims were South Carolina state senator and Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church senior pastor Rev. Clementa Pinckney, Rev. Sharonda Singleton, Rev. Daniel Simmons, Rev. DePayne Middleton-Doctor, Myra Thompson, Ethel Lance and Cynthia Hurd.


As a founding member of the surrealist movement, André Breton’s argued that one of the movement’s defining ideals was that “two distant realities” can unite to form a new reality. Jesús Benito Sánchez, Ana M. Manzanas and Begoña Simal aver that this defining element of surrealism aligns with the experience avers the experience of colonized Latina/os and African Americans. As a result, they suggest that Black and Brown lives, themselves, can be surreal: “André Breton’s narrative juxtaposition of ‘two more or less distant realities’ in the Paris of the 1920s aptly epitomizes the unwanted by inevitable state of mind of postcolonial communities in Africa and Asia after the demise of colonial empires. The straddling of two remote cultures, with their concomitant cross-pollination, is generally recognized as a distinctive mark of many postcolonial societies. The mestizo nature of most postcolonial cultures results in the frequent presentation of dualities and juxtapositions, the ‘double consciousness’ that Du Bois explored in the African American experience.” See: Jesús Benito Sánchez, Ana M. Manzanas and Begoña Simal. *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2009) 110. In this context, Daáood’s poetry, which features odd juxtapositions of images and realities, places him squarely in the surrealist tradition.


Carolyn Forché argues that “By situating poetry in this social space, we can avoid some of our residual prejudices. A poem that calls us from the other side of a situation of extremity cannot be judged by simplistic notions of ‘accuracy’ or ‘truth to life.’ It will have to be judged, as Ludwig Wittgenstein said of confession, by its consequences, not by our ability to verify its truth. In fact, the poem might be our
only evidence that an event has occurred: it exists for us as the sole trace of an occurrence. As such, there is nothing for us to base the poem on, no independent account that will tell us whether or not we can see a given text as being "objectively" true. Poem as trace, poem as evidence.” Carolyn Forché, “Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness.” *American Poetry Review* 22:2 (March-April 1993) 17.

194 Daáood 58.

195 Daáood 59.

196 Walter Johnson, River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013) 244.

197 Johnson 279.

198 Daáood 59.


202 Daáood 59.

203 Ibid.


Although the interpretation that the 14th Amendment’s use of “person” includes corporations (in some regards) is generally accepted within the legal community, there is still resistance to the idea among some legal scholars. For a compelling argument against the “corporations as persons” interpretation see: Carl Meyer, “Personalizing the Impersonal: Corporations and the Bill of Rights.” Hastings Law Journal 41:3 (March 1990).


Crenshaw 143.
The controversy around the novel’s publication played out amidst a national discourse in the 1980s around the idea of Black men as an “endangered species,” given their incarceration rates and consistently disturbing socio-economic and health indicator numbers.


Wanda Coleman, *The Riot Inside Me: More Trials & Tremors* (Jaffrey: Black Sparrow Books, 2005) 30—39. Print. A mix of memoir and new journalism, the Coleman’s nonfiction collection includes a recounting of here intriguing life with European American Southerner Charles Coleman. The relationship offers a glimpse into how difficult it is to place Coleman, her work and her relationships, especially with European Americans, into neat categories defined by race. A complicated man, self-identified as a “redneck” and “peckerwood” but was a committed civil rights activist who had been jailed and beaten for his activism. They married when Wanda and Charlie were 18 and 22 respectively. Wanda Coleman writes about her first husband, who passed for Black—and putatively gave her a Black eye in “Identifying Marks: “[Charlie] enjoyed being a black man. What had begun as a simple ploy soon began an elaborate deception. On the Black-hand-side of life, we frequented the paranoiac gatherings of political and cultural activists, and even donned dress clothes to attend the mosques—Orthodox and Black Muslim. Whenever his authenticity was questioned, Charlie revealed in proving he had forgotten more about being Black than his challengers had ever known. During one nasty showdown, he mollified the majority of the skeptics, but the atmosphere remained threatening. Someone put James Brown on the stereo as the ultimate test. Charlie could not bop, camel walk and Madison, he could do the dog, the funky butt, and the alligator crawl. His dance performance dispelled all remaining doubts. Whenever challenged to unzip his fly, he did so with pride. Once three hardcore bruthas escorted him to the john. They returned in consternation, embarrassed. Quick to drop his drawers, Charlie would never remove his shirt, mindful to keep cuffed sleeves just about the elbow, hiding that Johnny Reb tattoo. I never betrayed him. No one ever demanded I do so” (38).


Coleman 199.
Within a 5-mile radius of The World Stage, the population is 33.1% and Latina/o, 32.8% Black. See: The Urban Land Institute: Leimert Park Village. Ridley-ThomasLACounty.gov. Web. 15 April 2016.

232 Interview with Dwight Trible 2 March 2016.

233 See programs at theworldstage.org.

234 Interview with Dwight Trible. 2 March 2016.

235 Ibid.
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