UC Davis
UC Davis Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Nuclear Poetics: Energizing Social Forms in Cold War America

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0bt9d87k

Author

George Bagdanov, Kristin

Publication Date

2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org
Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Nuclear Poetics:
Energizing Social Forms in Cold War America

By

KRISTIN GEORGE BAGDANOV
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

English

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

Approved:

____
Margaret Ronda, Chair

____
Michael Ziser

____
Tobias Menely

____
Hsuan Hsu

Committee in Charge

2022

Abstract

"Nuclear Poetics: Energizing Social Forms in Cold War America" argues that Black, Indigenous, queer, feminist, and anti-capitalist poet-activists were instrumental in shaping the anti-nuclear movement in the U.S. during the 1970's and 80's. These poets demonstrate how nuclear power both extends and intensifies white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, and settler logics. In turn, these anti-nuclear ideologies and imaginaries shaped and sustained social movements during this period. "Demonstration" as a method of representation and a type of action names how poetry articulates the obscured and contradictory logics of the nuclear age to generate new socio-ecological relations. In demonstrating the nuclear complex's many forms—including weapons, waste, fallout, radiation, and uranium—these poets produce new social and aesthetic forms that reconfigure the nuclear complex's structures of oppression.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has evolved significantly over the past seven years. Ecological, political, health, and social crises have shaped how I approach questions of power, energy, and form, as have the many conversations, collaborations, and contributions of my professors, colleagues, and friends. My PhD cohort and graduate school colleagues offered me a diverse set of perspectives in coursework and beyond. I'm particularly grateful for the generative conversations with Rachael DeWitt, Tom Hintze, Ben Blackman, Ben Kossak, Sophia Bamert, and Bryan Yazell, who have helped shape my thinking and practices over the years. I'm also grateful for the many reading groups organized by colleagues and professors, which offered abundant opportunities to learn from others: the informal but always instructive English department ecocriticism reading group; the summer ecopoetics reading group organized by Angela Hume; and the Environments and Societies Colloquium. I am especially indebted to the professors who spent countless hours reading and responding to my work, discussing my nascent ideas in their office hours, writing recommendation letters for countless applications, and advising me on the many intricacies of the academic profession—all while being kind, thoughtful human beings. Matthew Cooperman first introduced me to ecopoetics at Colorado State University and continues to support my work as a poet and critic. Liz Miller, even though I have never taken a class with her, has supported my work in the environmental humanities and connected me to several helpful opportunities. I am beyond grateful for my dissertation committee and how they have made this project into what it is today. Hsuan Hsu continually challenges me to think beyond my preconceptions of how literature works, who it is for, and what effects it can have. Tobias Menely has taught me how to make the clarity of my prose match the clarity of my ideas and has supported my scholarly work in the broader field of the environmental humanities. Mike Ziser, who always balances kindness

with criticism, has enthusiastically collaborated with me on all manner of events and projects and is someone I hope to continue working with well into the future. Margaret Ronda, my advisor and mentor since my first year in the program, has helped me evolve from a poet who writes about poetry into a poetics scholar who thinks historically and formally. She has guided me through the many stages of graduate school with compassion and intelligence and I'm excited for the ways that our poetic and scholarly projects will find points of collaboration in the future. To all of you wonderful people: thank you. These past seven years would not have been possible without you. And finally, my love and gratitude for my family and friends who have supported me throughout this pivotal and often difficult period of life, especially Levi and Scully.

Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

Contents v

Introduction: Nuclear Formations 2

Forms of the Nuclear and the Nuclear Unconscious 16

Poetic Form and the Poetics of Demonstration 20

Chapter Overview 24

Chapter One: The Atomic Specter: Allen Ginsberg's Anti-Nuclear Imaginary 29

Atomic Address 32

An Atomized Howl 37

The Atomic Specter 43

The Afterlives of *Plutonian Ode* 54

Anti-Nuclear Naropa 63

Chapter Two: Decolonizing the Atomic Frontier: Indigenous Poets at the Black Hills, Test Sites, and Oak Ridge Nuclear Complex 75

Sites of Extractive Dispossession 78

Settling the Atomic Frontier: The Trail of Fire at the Oak Ridge Nuclear Complex 88

Unsettling the Atomic Frontier at the Trinity and Nevada Test Sites 104

The Disappeared and the Atomic Frontier: From Hiroshima to the Black Hills 115

Chapter Three: Nuclear Power & Anti-Nuclear Empowerment: The Power of Survival in Audre Lorde's and Adrienne Rich's Poetry 136

The New Nuclear Woman 142

"We Were Never Meant to Survive" 150

Circulating Survival 155

Extraction and Excavation 173

Chapter Four: Atomic Afrofuturism: June Jordan and Amiri Baraka's Anti-Apocalyptic Futures 198

America's Racial & Nuclear Unconscious 202

Black Power and Nuclear Power 205

"What Good Was It?": Inequality After "The Movement" 208

Nuclear Extinction & Black Survival 212

Amiri Baraka's Anti-Nuclear Criticism 221

June Jordan's Blueprint for Building Up Black Futures 233

Coda: Nuclear, Now? 257

Bibliography 262

End Notes 279

Hell no, we won’t glow!

—anti-nuclear protest chant

Introduction: Nuclear Formations

: the narrative of the city is decided : calculated angles : tamed : translatable : ghost neighborhood underneath the park : a memorial : what does not fit the narrative is buried underneath : eradicated

—"Hiroshima," Mariko Nagai[1]

Mariko Nagai's 2017 collection of prose poetry and photographs, *Irradiated Cities,* reconstructs the fractured histories of Nagasaki and Hiroshima just before and eternally after the United States deployed two atomic bombs on the cities' unsuspecting residents in the summer of 1945. Throughout the collection, Nagai addresses the overdetermined stories of these places as "'Hiroshima'" becomes a "synonym for tragedy" and "what does not fit the narrative is buried underneath."[2] The poem seeks to disrupt the overdetermined "narrative of the city," a pattern we see throughout the nuclear poetry explored in this project, as poetry reconfigures dominant imaginaries. Like Chernobyl, Fukushima, Three-Mile Island, Hanford, and more, these nuclear and post-nuclear cities have been flattened into symbols of the atomic age and its various casualties—some immediate and some seemingly everlasting. And while much of what is conjured by the term "nuclear" is spectacular, apocalyptic, and far-reaching violence, the buried aspects that do not "fit the narrative" of the nuclear are equally potent and important to consider if we are to understand the extent to which the "nuclear age" continues to shape social, ecological, political, and aesthetic conditions. While the use of atomic bombs in warfare does indeed mark a new era of geopolitics and conflict in the 20th century, the testing, mining, and (lack of) disposal of various forms of the nuclear preceding and following these pivotal events also produces lasting effects, even as they remain underacknowledged by history writ large.

Instead, specific communities affected by the wastes, radiation, and afterlives of what Joseph Masco calls "America's radioactive nation-building project" carry these enduring effects of the nuclear on their own.[3]

"Nuclear" is the silent modifier of America's military-industrial complex. As energy, waste, weapon, fallout, radiation, and signifier, its many forms persist in structuring geopolitical, social, and ecological relations. And yet these forms of the nuclear are often shrouded in secrecy, banalized by bureaucracy, or purposefully obfuscated to continue proliferation, making it difficult to apprehend the depth of America's nuclear complex. This complex—by which I mean the various forms, institutions, iterations, conditions, and ideologies that led to and continue to reproduce the atomic age—intensify and transform nearly every iteration of systemic oppression. For example, the quest for what Cherokee and Appalachian poet Marilou Awiakta calls the "atomic frontier" extends settler colonialism ever more deeply as it continues the removal of Indigenous tribes from their ancestral lands by introducing the long-lasting effects of radiation and fallout—radically changing decolonial possibilities.[4] In turn, understanding Indigenous sovereignty movements in the 20th century requires an analysis of the U.S. nuclear complex as Indigenous resistance to uranium mining, atomic "test" bombs, and radioactive waste are central to the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the feminist arm of that movement, Women of All Red Nations (WARN). Similarly, rather than treating post-war social movements—Black power, civil rights, women's liberation, etc.—as discrete and monolithic movements, I examine them through the lens of anti-nuclear ideologies to reveal how intersectional and intersecting these movements really were. As I will argue across this project: we can't understand settler colonialism without the atomic frontier; Black power without Atomic Afrofuturism; women's empowerment without nuclear power; and anti-capitalism without the nuclear unconscious.

Furthermore, poetry was central to defining, mediating, and circulating these complex social formations and movements.

Poet-activists shaped the anti-nuclear movement in the U.S. during the 1970's and 80's with their activism, imagination, and community-building aesthetics. Black, Indigenous, queer, feminist, and anti-capitalist writers theorized America's radioactive nation-building project and demonstrated how nuclear power both extends and intensifies white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, and settler logics. In turn, they used poetry as a portable, social form to generate new imaginaries and alliances that could resist and reconfigure these structures of oppression. Reading poetry through its social forms articulates the obscured and contradictory logics of the nuclear age. As Margaret Ronda and Lindsay Turner explain, attending to poetry's social form allows us to move past strictly formalist readings of poetry to attend to "what happens *around* a poem or poetic text" and ask: "What kinds of social activity might a poem engender or enact?" or "How might a poem reverberate in (and beyond) a particular social context?"[5] I analyze the relationship between the poem on the page and the poem in place, examining how it forges relations and produces frameworks for imagining how to survive the new expression of violence represented and enabled by nuclear power. I read this social form of poetry through a method of representation I name *demonstration,* which accounts for the aesthetic and political tactics used by these poets to manifest the hidden, dispersed, and suppressed effects of the nuclear to in turn generate new ecological and social relations. Poetry works differently than other genres when it comes to social movements: as portable objects that can be performed and circulated to generate and consolidate social alliances, poems embed themselves directly in the relations that other texts might only narrate in retrospect.

"Nuclear Poetics" is a synthesizing project. It draws together the environmental humanities, post-1945 U.S. poetry, nuclear politics, and Cold War criticism as a critical nexus through which we can understand environmental and social justice movements in the 20th century. Situated within the energy and environmental humanities, this project considers how literary texts articulate the relationship between the nuclear complex and socio-ecological conditions. As Gabriele Schwab argues in her 2020 book *Radioactive Ghosts,* nuclear studies and "the continued threat of nuclearism" is "marginal[ized], if not silenc[ed]…in ecological debates" even as it is "absolutely central to debates about the Anthropocene and Capitolocene."[6] Indeed, within the environmental humanities, the emerging field of the energy humanities appears to be primarily focused on the histories and effects of fossil fuels, which are read through their current role in climate change as the primary agents in narratives of ecological crisis.[7] In the 2017 anthology, *Energy Humanities,* Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer position fossil fuels at the center of subjectivity and modernity: "To be modern is to depend on the capacities and abilities generated by energy…We are citizens and subjects of fossil fuels through and through, whether we know it or not. And so any meaningful response to climate change will have to tarry with the world and the people that have been made from oil."[8] While this project does not seek to dispel the magnitude of the effects of fossil fuels, it does demonstrate how responses to nuclearity have shaped the social and political formations that have coalesced around fossil fuels. Anti-nuclearism gives rise to environmental justice movements in the U.S. and shapes the contours of contemporary petrocultures.

In the era of climate change, nuclear power must be understood as part of the fossil fuel industry.[9] Today, nuclear energy is being touted as a silver bullet for climate change.[10] However, rather than a "clean energy" alternative to fossil fuels, nuclear energy should be understood as a

critical appendage of the fossil fuel industry, as it undergirds and sustains the extractive relations produced through the fossil fuel industry's neoliberal narratives and tactics of obfuscation, denialism, and delay. Furthermore, as this project will show, the proliferation of nuclear energy sustains the proliferation of nuclear weapons and in turn, the nuclear-military-industrial complex. In positioning nuclear energy as part of the extractive fossil fuel economy rather than an alternative to it, I hope both to augment the energy humanities' primary focus on fossil fuels and expand our understanding of fossil capital's enabling structures.

Despite this primary focus on fossil fuels within the field of environmental humanities broadly construed, several works published in the last decade have made important progress in the field of nuclear studies as it intersects with environmental justice. Historian Natasha Zaretsky's *Radiation Nation* (2018), which examines U.S. nationalism following the partial meltdown of Three-Mile Island (TMI), discusses the purposeful disarticulation of the nuclear complex, a process I explore across this project as writers attempt to rearticulate these hidden relations. Whereas President Eisenhower separates atoms for war from "atoms for peace" to sustain the proliferation of nuclear power as bombs and energy,[11] the poets I study work to connect these disparate forms of the nuclear. Zaretsky coins the phrase "culture of disassociation" to describe collective repression of this integral relationship and the "splitting of the destructive elements of atomic weaponry from its civilian uses."[12] This framework of disassociation complements my rendering of the nuclear unconscious, as it speaks to how certain aspects of the nuclear complex were disarticulated, obscured, and suppressed in order to sustain proliferation while activists were working to re-associate, connect, and manifest this complex network in order to apprehend and resist it. However, while Zaretsky argues that the accident at TMI helped to pierce this "dissociative logic," as activists began insisting on the connection

between nuclear weapons and energy, I demonstrate how many communities had been working to dispel this illusion from the outset of the nuclear era by exhibiting the incipient violence of the nuclear's many forms, which were evident in daily encounters more than "spectacular" disasters.

To inform my reading of Indigenous poets who address the "atomic frontier," I draw on two excellent case studies of how the nuclear complex affects Indigenous communities in the continental U.S.: Traci Brynne Voyles's 2015 book *Wastelanding* and Shiloh Krupar's 2013 *Hot Spotter's Report*. Both texts engage with how specific sites and communities are designated as expendable and pollutable within the U.S.'s project of radioactive nation-building. Krupar argues that "wasteland discourse" rendered New Mexico as "unproductive, infertile" and thus a "logical candidate for hosting secret bases, nuclear weapons production facilities, and extractive technologies.[13] Voyles defines "wastelanding" as a specifically settler-colonial process that assumes "nonwhite lands are valueless, or valuable only for what can be mined from beneath them," and then devalues and destroys "those very environs by polluting industries."[14] Whereas these and many other critical environmental texts draw on Ulrich Beck's defining study, *Risk Society* (1986), which was itself heavily informed by the prospect of nuclear war, Voyles and Krupar nuance how risk is distributed and why it is disproportionately experienced. Beck, for example, names the "boomerang effect" to illustrate how risks are compounded to produce "unseen secondary effects," such as when chemicals used to stimulate industrial agriculture in the short-term ultimately lead to a lack of fecundity, the extinction of plants and animals, and the erosion of soil.[15] Beck concludes that "under the roof of modernization risks, *perpetrator and victim* sooner or later become *identical.* In the worst, unthinkable case, a nuclear world war, this is evident; it also destroys the aggressor."[16] Krupar and Voyles, however, add distinction within this act of identification by breaking down specific aspects of the nuclear complex and focusing

on how important differences emerge when we view these environmental harms through the perspectives, stories, and histories of colonized communities. Similarly, my efforts to illustrate how different poets read nuclear power through their distinct identities and communal histories disallows the type of generalization that Beck draws on here. In fact, much of the work these poets did was to refute the common refrain that, because nuclear weapons threatened the extinction of all humans, all humans were equally threatened by the nuclear weapons. This type of default equality via shared risk is proven false time and again by the writers included in this project. Rather, they show how even within these seemingly totalizing threats, there is a hierarchy, a distinction, and a distribution of harm that is shaped by prevailing ideologies around race, class, and gender.

This project, while focusing on nuclear sites in the continental U.S., is informed and complemented by a wealth of research and writing on the historical and ongoing anti-nuclear activism in the Pacific Islands and around the globe. "Nuclear colonialism" names the externalizing strategies of radioactive empires, as colonized sites—often islands on the "periphery" of the colonizing empire—became the proving grounds for radioactive nation-building projects. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey writes, countries like France and the U.S. perpetuated "the myth of the island isolate…to justify the detonation of hundreds of thermonuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands (Micronesia) and in French Polynesia."[17] Anaïs Maurer and Rebecca Hogue, in their introduction to a special forum on transnational nuclear imperialisms, discuss the importance of differentiating "nuclear colonialism" from "nuclear imperialism," as the former "does not reflect twenty-first century political and environmental dynamics."[18] They suggest that, following this Cold War era of nuclear colonialism, the term "nuclear imperialisms" best describes how the nuclear complex acts today, as it "exist[s] and

extend[s] beyond geographic, temporal, and national boundaries and borders."[19] In the context of the environmental humanities, scholars within the subfields of the "blue humanities" and "critical ocean studies" have contributed to ecologically informed and transnationally situated perspectives that have moved the field of nuclear studies beyond the narrow confines of nuclear weapons and U.S-Soviet war games.[20] The frameworks of transnational imperialism and the blue humanities emphasize how the nuclear complex is never fully contained within one country or form and is always unequally distributed amongst communities and nations according to the legacies and mechanisms of colonization.

Within the field of U.S. poetics, my project draws together canonical poets from a diverse set of aesthetic schools with distinct formal and ideological commitments, cutting across traditional histories of American poetry. As a literary-historical project, "nuclear poetics" challenges the dominant mode of reading post-1945 U.S. poetry, which is frequently historized, theorized, and taught according to discrete "schools" that signify both aesthetic cohesion and geographical contiguity ("The Beats," "The New York School," "The Black Arts Movement," "Black Mountain," etc.). Within these discrete schools, critics of 20th century poetry have privileged particular modes of expression and experimentation. However, rather than simply cataloging poems written on a unifying theme, as anthologies like the 1984 *Nuke-Rebuke* do, this project understands "nuclear poetics" as a capacious category that names how poetry was a formidable force in shaping different communities' imagined and material relationships to nuclear power and the systems of oppression it was both representative of and materially imbricated in. In other words, these poems are both "about" nuclear power but also always about *more than* nuclear power. By creating a genealogy of nuclear poetics and social activism, I offer new readings of canonical poets like Amiri Baraka, Linda Hogan, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich,

Allen Ginsberg, and June Jordan, all of whom intercede in the ecological, social, and political conditions of the nuclear age. Rather than categorizing nuclear poetics according to the heuristic of lyric or language poetry, expression or experimentation, I provide an alternative set of parameters for articulating how these poems shaped and were shaped by their socio-ecological contexts.

By bringing poems about nuclear power to the fore, I do not intend to fetishize the nuclear or mark it as a wholly unique subject. While nuclear studies tends to predicate its theories on the idea that the Bomb changed everything or that the impending apocalypse of nuclear war forever shifted the stakes of art, I am more interested in how poets were navigating the apparent "newness" of the nuclear complex as well as its familiarity, doubleness, and the déjà vu that it provoked.[21] These poets, writing twenty to forty years after the first detonation of an atomic bomb, tended to emphasize how nuclear power repeated and reinscribed other forms of harm. Whereas Schwab "theorizes the ontological, psychological, and epistemological break inaugurated by the nuclear age,"[22] the poets I examine were often working against a nuclear imaginary that presented nuclear power as a break with history, instead reading different forms of the nuclear through the long histories of settler-colonialism, racism, misogyny, and capitalism.

This attention to forms of the nuclear—waste, weapons, fallout, etc.— is not merely a cataloguing of "content," but an alternative way of articulating poetic form by reading it through its social and ecological conditions. In doing so, I intervene in the historizing of U.S. poetry through the antagonisms centered on self-expression. As Jennifer Ashton writes in her introduction to the 2013 edition of *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Since 1945*, "one of the major questions of the period in U.S. poetry since 1945 has been how to explain the predominance of poems exemplifying or resisting, embodying or dissolving, the idea of a self in

the act of expression."[23] The result of this preoccupation has been the formation of antagonisms like "avant-garde" vs "mainstream" poetry, or "lyric" vs "language" poetry. Timothy Yu, in his 2021 introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-First Century American Poetry* cites the role that critics play in continuing to reinforce these binaries, which have "tended to structure most overviews of contemporary American poetry."[24] Cutting across these schools and antagonisms to examine poems and poets that engage with the nuclear complex, I seek to reorient this critical tradition, as its axes of valuation might otherwise result in overlooking or underappreciating the poems I engage in this project.

One way I chart an alternative method of critical engagement is by recalibrating what is meant by poetic form. An abiding dyad that is frequently layered upon the aforementioned critical binaries is "form" and "content." Yu discusses how the debate about the relationship between poetic form and poetic content is often "broken down along racialized lines; the work of writers of color has been more often read for its political or cultural 'content' rather than its use of or experimentation with poetic form."[25] However, "formal choices," Yu continues, "take place within social and political contexts as well."[26] Dorothy Wang, commenting on this racialized practice and the inadequacy of recent critical trends like "New Formalism" to fully contend with form and conte*xt*, rather than content, writes:

> It is possible to pay close attention to formal properties of a poem *and* take into account the historical and sociopolitical contexts of a poem and the large role ideologies and institutional structures and practice play, both in the production and in the reception of poems. We have been told forever and ever that form and content are not separable. Yet poetry scholars continued—and continue—to read poetry by minority writers primarily as

> ethnographic reportage or, in the rare case of the work of pet experimental poets, as the exceptional exception.[27]

This contextualizing work extends the definition of form or perhaps provincializes it: instead of "form" as the defining trait of the avant-garde, form is something all poems have and enact. And more importantly, "form" is not a privileged trait of whiteness, so scholars who find themselves creating these form / content divisions require new methods of reading.

The argument I make in this project is that form exceeds the poem to articulate these social and historical contexts—that the relationship between context and text is itself a formal relationship that offers us useful information about how the poem is working and what the poem is affecting. By tracing how a variety of poets, all of whom are what Wang calls "minority poets" in different ways, articulate their relationship to aspects of the nuclear complex, new forms of the nuclear are revealed. Using the nuclear complex as the locus of meaning for gathering this group of poets together shifts the burden of proof from these poems—which I do not interpret through the rubric of the expressive, experimental, or otherwise—to the social, ecological, and political occasions through which they arise. Claudia Rankine and Michael Dowdy offer "'poetry of social engagement' to describe contemporary poets who fall within "a range of racial, ethnic, and class identities, as well as a wide array of modes, styles, sites, histories, practices, and forms" and trace these modes "to the radical social-artistic movements and the 'new American poetries' of the Fifties and Sixties, many of which were led by poets and critics of color."[28] In re-reading the poetry that was engaging with new social movements in the 1970's and 80's through the shared locus of the nuclear complex, I offer a substantial archive that serves as a precedent for these poems of "social engagement," in addition to offering a method of reading poems through

their social and historical contexts that does not abandon, but rather expands, their formal complexities.

In centering the social interventions of poets as well as their aesthetic invention, I point to the centrality of poetry and poets in social movements. Audre Lorde, in framing the relationship between aesthetic forms and social action, writes: "Art is not living. It is the use of living," suggesting that art should be *useful* and positioning it in the realm of rhetoric.[29] Anglo-American Modernism, however, positioned rhetoric as the antithesis of poetry—its artful cunning the opposite of poetry's artistic ingenuity. As critic Charles Altieri argues, this suppression of poetry's rhetorical function was unsustainable and unsatisfactory as it ultimately diffused poetry's political power to address emergent conditions. After the 1930's, he explains, "constructivist models of expression…seemed incompatible with the rhetorical stances necessary for convincing others that in fact something might be done to increase social justice."[30] The distancing work of modernist poetry—from persona to perception—rendered the referential ground occupied by the public too distant to be moved by poetry's rhetorical function. Altieri explains how some early American poets writing after Modernism attempted to recuperate poetry's relationship to rhetoric without rejecting Modernism's formal legacy, instead attempting "to reformulate their strategies to elaborate new ways for poetry to take social responsibility."[31] However, the poets who built their reputation on the repudiation of Modernism as an institution and formal legacy—the Beats, Black Arts Movement, and second-wave feminist poetry—created a rift in the conversation regarding poetry's relationship to rhetoric, producing poems that were called "political" by some critics as a means of disparaging them, distinguishing this mode from poems that were more quietly rejecting aspects of Modernism, like those of Robert Lowell and the so-called Confessional School.

One example of this critical refutation of overtly "political" poetry is apparent in how feminist poetry, which was a tool central to the women's liberation movement, was roundly ignored by the academy. As feminist critic and writer Jan Clausen asks in her 1981 essay on feminist poetics, "Why has a movement which has generated such an extraordinary and compelling body of work produced so little in the way of critical reflection on that work?" and, lacking this critical attention, "what implicit assumptions and preconceptions about the form and function of feminist poetry, and the role of the poet, may be inferred?"[32] Though there was a general acceptance of poetry's essential relationship to politics at this time, poets associated with specific political movements were still being undervalued by the academy. This type of negative critical attention stems from evolving distinctions between political form and political content and their association with "properly" political poetics, a chasm reified by the experimental poetics of the Language School of poets. It is perhaps due to this lack of critical attention as well as the feminist movement's rejection of those metrics of success that new ways of relating form and function, politics and poetics emerged. This pattern of critical attention and dismissal remains true even for poets who were critically acclaimed for certain periods and inflections of their work—as we will see, the post-Beats work of Allen Ginsberg and Amiri Baraka's anti-nuclear writing is derided or ignored for their overt "themes." However, my reading of these poets positions their "political" and "rhetorical" poems within a broader transition in poetics that seeks to rescue form from aesthetics and recuperate its social meaning.

Finally, while there have recently been many important studies in the realm of Cold War culture and history, such as Steve Belletto and Daniel Grausam's *American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War* (2012) and Adam Piette's *The Literary Cold War, 1945-Vietnam: The Literary Cold War, 1945 to Vietnam* (2009), these works primarily focus on fiction and film

as their defining genres.[33] And while literary scholars like Daniel Cordle and David Seed have theorized how Cold War fiction represented nuclear anxieties, they tend to focus on the atomic bomb as the locus of this imaginary and do not situate nuclear power as an ecological concern. Scholars like Molly Wallace have addressed how the nuclear age relates to a larger set of ecological challenges through the rubric of "risk criticism," though her archive also primarily focuses on fiction and does not treat the relations between different forms of the nuclear. Anti-nuclear poetry, then, has not been adequately considered as an archive for understanding the nuances of social movements, environmental harm, and methods for expressing what was considered "unimaginable" or "unthinkable." Reading these works through their socio-ecological valences offers a nuanced account of the Cold War narratives of containment, repression, and apocalypse, as some poets reveal how apocalypse is not imminent but immanent and others consider how the many forms of the nuclear cannot only not be contained but persist in shaping and augmenting systems of social oppression and environmental degradation.

Because of the close connection between the Cold War and the nuclear complex, studies concerning the atomic age typically begin with the Manhattan Project or the U.S. bombing of Japan in 1945. However, I restrict my study to the aftermath of those events to consider how the nuclear complex is banalized, suppressed, dispersed, rehabilitated, and in some cases, forgotten. I focus on the period of the 1970's, which marks the birth of the U.S. "energy crisis," the rise of fossil gas, and the rise of conservative neoliberal retaliation against the social movements in the 1960's and 70's, all of which make it a key nexus for ideologies and conditions that continue to shape our social, ecological, and energy landscape today. While the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1961 and the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 may appear to mark the peak of nuclear power and nuclear containment, respectively, the 70's and 80's offer insight into the insidious proliferation

of nuclear power, which resurfaces in many forms beyond weapons and fallout. Articulating the extent of the nuclear complex helps activists elucidate other extant systems of oppression that they consider to be sustained or amplified by America's radioactive nation-building project, including racism, settler colonialism, misogyny, homophobia, and other ideologies and practices of exploitation. Studying this period of crisis also helps illuminate our current period of energy transition, as efforts to decarbonize the grid and eliminate fossil fuels have been thwarted by many of the same logics that helped sustain the nuclear complex.

Forms of the Nuclear and the Nuclear Unconscious

In this project, I use the term *forms of the nuclear* to indicate the material manifestations of the nuclear complex—weapons, waste, fallout, radiation, uranium and other products and byproducts of the nuclear complex. And I use the term *nuclear forms* to describe poems whose internal logics mediate the external logics of the nuclear age, demonstrating the relations altered, produced, and suppressed by its complex set of socio-ecological conditions. Nuclear forms do not merely represent the conditions of the nuclear age but intercede in them. Nuclear content—the mere mention of bombs, fallout, etc.—does not necessarily constitute nuclear form. Nuclear forms, rather, demonstrate the relations between forms of the nuclear, working to contradict, question, and subvert imaginaries that position them in static terms, revealing instead the altered conditions of materiality, agency, environmental justice, ethics, temporality, global politics, nation-building, production, and energy that are wrought by the nuclear complex. This project establishes a genealogy of nuclear poetics by demonstrating how poets intercede in the ecological, social, and political conditions of the nuclear age, which are underwritten by powerful imaginaries and figurations. Through demonstration, these forms manifest the

repressed contradictions that structure the *nuclear unconscious* and imagine alternative relations for living in and through the nuclear age.

The concept of the nuclear unconscious in and of itself is not new: Jacques Derrida considers the unconscious death drive propelling us toward nuclear war; Gabriele Schwab theorizes the nuclear unconscious in relationship to the new subjectivity formed as a product of the nuclear age—a "splitting" that "exiles those very fears [of the nuclear threat] into the nuclear unconscious."[34] My theorization of the nuclear unconscious is much broader. In this project, the nuclear unconscious is material, figurative, psychological, and historical. It is that which is "underground"—buried wastes as well as suppressed information, secret tests, and classified consequences of proliferation. It is also the site of the repressed contradictions that structure America's nuclear complex. State-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginaries, for example, defend proliferation by claiming its necessity for national security, international peace, economic prosperity, and even social equality while disavowing how the nuclear complex simultaneously undermines these goals. Historically, it is possible to chart the development of the nuclear unconscious in relation to peak moments of nuclear consciousness. For example, a key moment in the formation of this unconscious is signaled by President Eisenhower's 1953 "Atoms for Peace" speech, which proposes a utopian vision of the future through shared nuclear energy. In it, two forms of the nuclear—weapons and energy—are presented as exchangeable entities: "[Nuclear weaponry] must be put into the hands of those who will know how to strip its military casing and adapt it to the arts of peace…transformed into universal, efficient and economic usage."[35] However, rather than signaling the end of America's nuclear arsenal, as this declaration implies, these claims to transformation simply allowed for new forms of proliferation. In the decades following, weapons were not "transformed" into energy, but rather produced alongside

them, bolstered by the narrative the U.S. could, at any point, decide to change these weapons into tools for peace. This fantasy of a benign and remainderless transition helps perpetuate the simultaneous repression and production of nuclear power.

Suggesting that the unconscious is a useful concept for understanding how the nuclear complex persists and shapes socio-ecological conditions is not merely the super positioning of a term onto a historical period. Rather, discourse throughout the Cold War reveals that people were understanding their relationship to the nuclear complex through a range of psychological sites and conditions, especially the unconscious. Freud's rendering of the unconscious as the inaccessible site that hosts repressed desires and fears shapes the popular imagining of nuclear war as a threat prone to repression that simultaneously shapes collective consciousness. In "No Apocalypse, Not Now," Derrida articulates the collective death drive of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and the nuclear arms race through the repressed and contradictory desires of the unconscious: "Who can swear that our unconscious is not expecting this? dreaming of it, desiring it?"[36] Outspoken activist and doctor Helen Caldicott writes in her popular anti-nuclear tract *Nuclear Madness* of the public's willing suppression of the nuclear threat. She argues that in the early 1970's during the Vietnam War, "it was a relief to think about 'manageable' problems and forget the unthinkable. People became ostrichlike and pretended the nuclear threat had ceased to exist…In reality, nuclear madness had not disappeared: it multiplied."[37] The concepts of "unthinkability" and "unimaginability" return again and again in the discourse surrounding America's radioactive nation-building project. And yet, as many of the poets I study reveal, it was the *unliveability* that was the more pressing issue: those who were suffering from the effects of the nuclear complex did not have the luxury of *not* being able to imagine the nuclear threat: they were already living with it.

Psychological states—ranging from madness to anxiety to repression—were already a self-conscious way in which forms of the nuclear were being understood in public discourse, oftentimes reinforced by the state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginary. However, my theorization of the nuclear unconscious in the work of these poets accounts for its physicality and situatedness, as well as its inaccessibility. I look to how poets endeavor to manifest the hiddenness of the nuclear complex's structures of secrecy, demonstrating how conditions thought to be disparate or disconnected in fact correlate and are proliferated by the nuclear unconscious. June Jordan, for example, articulates the relationship between white supremacy and nuclear waste while Adrienne Rich identifies how patriarchal structures sustain nuclear proliferation. These relations are suppressed by pro-nuclear imaginaries that boast of nuclear energy's emancipatory capacities and suggest that the nuclear threat dissolves racialized and gendered differences through national unity.

Frederic Jameson's rendering of the "political unconscious" also shapes how I theorize the nuclear unconscious. Jameson argues that a text's attempts at closure are always an act of repression and that critics must look to the discontinuities and rifts within apparently unified texts to access the work's political unconscious.[38] While Jameson's attention to literature tends toward the internal structures of narrative, the concepts of form, closure, and mastery take on a different valence within poetry. In my rendering of the nuclear unconscious, poets perform the role of the critic and the author, constructing form through their desire to manifest the rifts and discontinuities in the apparently seamless nuclear complex. This self-awareness is another way of reframing what we mean by "political" or "protest poetry" as it reads what the poet endeavors to demonstrate alongside how the text is taken up and repurposed by various communities. The poet's self-conscious efforts to reveal the hiddenness of the nuclear unconscious and to articulate

contradictions that structure it repositions the poem as the tool that demonstrates the false unity of the nuclear narrative. Rifts are revealed, rather than suppressed, through these acts of demonstration.

Beyond the poet's intentions and awareness, nuclear forms perform their own deconstruction as contingent wholes. As Jonathan Culler argues, we tend to align understanding with referentiality: that it is by matching figures with their corresponding referents that the text becomes comprehensible.[39] However, he explains that "texts often undermine their own referentiality," making such understanding incomplete or impossible.[40] I argue that the prevailing conditions of the nuclear complex already make a closed circuit of reference impossible. To reference the forms of the nuclear that are above ground, manifest, or publicly disclosed is to also implicate the buried, obscured, and unconscious sites that sustain their proliferation. Nuclear forms, then, work to both disclose these structuring contradictions while also demonstrating how their own structures are formed through this reconfiguration of referentiality to point to what cannot be fully known.

Poetic Form and the Poetics of Demonstration

In this study, I define poetic form as that which demonstrates relationships. Form is structure that organizes; it is shape that structures and logic that shapes. However, forms are always in formation: this dynamic stasis is the contradiction that defines form, that makes it so difficult to pin down beyond terms like shape, genre, container. What forms do, then, is endeavor to make emergence portable.

A poem, for example, emerges from some combination of a poet's experience of and imagined relationship to the world. The poem's system of operations organizes sound, words,

and space in a meaningful way. Together, these parts form the contingent whole we call the poem. However, folded within and between these parts is information that is not immediately accessible or ultimately knowable. These are the excesses and recesses of meaning. Like the proteins that perform their proper function in an organism only by remaining folded, or the origami animal that is recognizable only because part of the paper remains hidden, forms are portable only to the extent that they suppress the particularities of their emergence.

Form often becomes conflated with genre in the history of poetics when theorizing the "portability" of a poem. The manifest relations of the Petrarchan sonnet—the rhyme scheme and lineation—are the part of form that repeats across time and space. The historical, social, ecological, psychological conditions from which the form emerged remain dynamic and resistant to its portability. To unfold the poem's form is to lose the identification that makes it portable. However, the act of unfolding does not reveal essential meaning residing within the poem, but rather makes one participate in the formation of the poem. To study poetic form is to de-form, un-form, and re-form all at once while holding together the portable, knowable, contingent whole of the poem—the origami crane, for example—and the intersecting creases that are the residue of the historical, ecological, social conditions through which the form was produced. The complexity of the form is at once finite but irreducible.

Forms, I argue, *demonstrate* relationships. Poems might reflect, represent, reveal, and parallel, but poetic forms demonstrate. Demonstration as a method of representation is, like a form, both portable and emergent. My evidence supporting this method for this project is rooted in specific historical, ecological, social conditions. However, I also theorize demonstration in such a way that it is portable for understanding what poetic form *does* in relation to the real and imagined conditions of the world. Poetry has remained on the outskirts of conversations

regarding "realism," or a text's given commitment to representing "the Real." The profuse use of quotation marks here speaks to the contentious debates surrounding these terms, particularly in relation to the novel or "fiction," a generic category that suggests it is imagined and so at odds with reality. Debates as to the "reality" represented by poems tend to center on the category of the lyric—the poem's legibility being tied to its function as a personal expression or enactment of self. However, recent critical attention to poetry's documentary functions—from Muriel Rukeyser's poetic reporting to Bernadette Mayer's poetic diaries—has invigorated debates concerning poetry's relationship to reality. And while documentary poetics helps us understand the poet's self-conscious attention to the mediated experience of history, it retains a backward-looking stance that does not fully account for the embodied, portable, and spontaneous qualities of the poetic tradition.

Demonstration, which means to prove, exhibit, and protest, is a way of framing the poem's relationship to reality that foregrounds its relationality, which comprises both the emergent and portable properties of form. When we claim that form demonstrates something, we make a claim about the poem and its relationship to the conditions from which it emerged. The form "proves" these conditions through the logic of its parts—the relations manifested through their arrangement. At its barest point, a form proves its relation to itself. This self-relation, however, is always already social, and so form demonstrates something about the nature of its emergence—the material, historical, ecological conditions through which it came into being. Demonstration also accounts for how poems exhibit their conditions of emergence—whether linked to the poet, audience, or occasion. Poetic form manifests the unconscious, makes meaningful the inexpressible, and organizes the poet's partial, fragmented, unassimilable experience of reality.

In this way, immediacy is wed with mediation—the text's inability to seamlessly translate this immediacy.

The final quality of demonstration that I wish to stress here is particular to my project, as it reframes how we think of poetry's political commitments. Whether one gathers *en masse* at the Pentagon or by oneself at a nuclear reactor, to protest or agitate through demonstration makes clear the individual's social nature and demonstration, then, reveals the political form of the social. A demonstration organizes social relations to intervene in, destroy, or re-configure existing political formations. The poets I examine use poems to disrupt the production of plutonium triggers, to invoke collective outcry against state-sanctioned violence, to map the failure of radioactive containment, to design alternative shelters, to gather support for legislation, and to transform lyric apostrophe into political address. Demonstration is enabled by form's portability, as the poem becomes an object that can circulate and embed itself directly in action rather than documenting or narrating it in retrospect. Not only does demonstration account for the emergence of the poem from social, ecological, and historical conditions but it registers how its portability enables collectives and actions.

Finally, forms demonstrate *relationships.* Some of what I've just defined regarding demonstration may seem to duplicate the stress here on relationships. And that doubleness is part of the contrariness of form, its oppositional thingness and abstractness. A favorite definition of form is simply the relation between parts. A delimited way of saying that is Anna Kornbluh's recent addition in *Order of Forms:* "form is composed relationality."[41] Robert Hass provides several definitions of form on his recent *A Little Book on Form,* but one in particular captures the emergent relations of form: "The way the poem embodies the energy of the gesture of its making."[42] Margaret Ronda and Lindsay Turner show how poetic form is always in relation with

other forms, nested within one another: "Pluralizing 'forms,' as we do here, underscores the extent to which all individual iterations of poetic form occur within broader networks and constellations of poetic *forms*, both within and across historical periods."[43] And Angela Leighton's *On Form* discusses how the relationship between oppositions has historically been used to define form: form versus content, form versus matter, form versus formlessness.[44] I offer my own pair of oppositions, but do not seek to conflate or separate them. Instead, I contend that the contrary relationship between portability and emergence is what makes a form a form. And it is by articulating the relationship between a poem's emergent and portable qualities that poetic form becomes comprehensible. Typically, scholars veer toward one side or the other—to speak of the portable features of the poetic form makes it substantive, visible, apprehensible. To speak of its emergence makes it urgent, dynamic, nearly formless. However, I offer, and will endeavor to enact, a methodology that holds in tension these two oppositions. My own formal relation to the texts acting as a demonstration of their relation to themselves.

Chapter Overview

Chapter One documents efforts to disrupt the production of nuclear weapons through poetry that addresses the haunting afterlives of nuclear waste. In "The Atomic Specter," I show how an anti-capitalist and post-Beats Allen Ginsberg fuses poetic and political address in his *Plutonian Ode*, which grapples with the discursive and material implications of nuclear waste. This poem, written during Ginsberg's tenure at the Naropa school near Boulder, CO, was recited by Ginsberg on the train tracks outside Rocky Flat Nuclear Weapons Factory, the site of an ongoing anti-nuclear demonstration in 1978. After Ginsberg and some of his allies in the Rocky Flats Truth Force were arrested, Ginsberg recited the poem again—this time as his arraignment.

While this “post-Beats” Ginsberg was not regarded as highly as the Ginsberg of the 1950’s and 60’s, *Plutonian Ode* was considered by some to be integrally connected to *Howl,* forming an aesthetic and political arc that was, at the center, contending with the suppression, obfuscation, and lasting effects of the nuclear age. The *Village Voice,* for example, calls *Plutonian Ode* an “Anti-nuclear *Howl.”* I read *Plutonian Ode* as an exploration of the nuclear complex’s material and mythical origins and an attempt to manifest the many forms of the nuclear that had been produced and repressed since Ginsberg’s reckoning with the atomic age in *Howl.* In reading the poem’s formal logics both on the page and beyond it—through the many revisions, recitations, and demonstrations that Ginsberg undertakes with the poem in the years following its original performance at Rocky Flats—I argue that Ginsberg fuses poetic and political address to manifest the nuclear unconscious, demonstrating a new way of relating poetry and protest within the altered conditions of the atomic era.

Chapter Two shifts from the deep future of nuclear waste to the deep history of resource extraction on Indigenous lands in the United States. “Decolonizing the Atomic Frontier” examines the long durée of settler colonialism through the work of Indigenous poets Wendy Rose, Linda Hogan, Terri Meyette, and Marilou Awiakta, who demonstrate how the recolonizing ventures of uranium mining, enrichment, and nuclear testing produce an “atomic frontier” that extends and intensifies the settler-colonial frontier. This new iteration of removal complicates the decolonization efforts of the American Indian Movement due to the enduring and unremediated wastes of the nuclear complex, as even when or if land is returned to Indigenous inhabitants, the land and the relations it once sustained have been irrevocably altered by this enduring material trace of the atomic frontier. These poets demonstrate the essential link between energy extraction and settler colonialism at four distinct sites of extractive dispossession: the Black Hills, the

Nevada test site, the Trinity test site, and the Oak Ridge nuclear complex. Each of these sites represents a different form of nuclear colonialism as it affects Native Americans, as the feedback loop of settler colonialism and energy extraction furthers America's radioactive nation-building project. By reconfiguring the 19th century trope of the "Vanishing Native," interrogating the biopolitical discourse of nuclear risk assessment, and drawing connections and distinctions between their own history of forced "disappearance" and that of Japanese victims of the atomic bomb, these poets show how the extractive dispossession of the nuclear complex differentially harms Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous communities and futures.

Chapter Three moves from specific sites of proliferation like Rocky Flats and Oak Ridge to the embodied experiences of women and their metaphorical and material relationships to energy and power. In "Nuclear Power and Anti-Nuclear Empowerment," I examine the relationship between feminist poetry and narratives of energy-intensive emancipation, as poets Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich explore where women's "power" comes from, literally and figuratively. Feminists across the 1970's and 80's were theorizing the relationship between the patriarchal social order and nuclear complex and articulating methods for surviving both. This anti-nuclear feminist mode of survival manifested how the nuclear complex was not simply a symptom of patriarchy, but a structure that undergirded and produced new forms of patriarchal violence. Reading Lorde and Rich through their engagement with the anti-nuclear movement, both by how their poems circulated and produced new ideas and relations and by how their poems interrogated the very feminist methods of empowerment they were imbricated in, offers a new framework for understanding how these canonical feminist poets propelled and complicated environmental politics and feminist poetics at this critical period. In doing so, they redefine power in terms of social empowerment and power as an index of energy.

My final chapter offers a reading of Black power through nuclear power, establishing a genealogy of "Atomic Afrofuturism" from Sun Ra and Langston Hughes to Amiri Baraka and June Jordan. The framework of Atomic Afrofuturism reveals the places and spaces where the racial and nuclear unconscious reinforce each other to threaten Black futures. Whereas the short-lived field of Nuclear Criticism, which is best represented by Derrida's 1984 essay "No Apocalypse, Not Now," contends with nuclear apocalypse as both unprecedented and impending, Atomic Afrofuturism demonstrates how the apocalypse has already happened for many communities and that, while the nuclear threat is distinct, it is not without precedent. Amiri Baraka, in his self-proclaimed "anti-nuclear" musical, instead shows how Black people have already experienced the apocalypse through slavery and are living in a post-apocalyptic temporality that can afford them fugitive power to alter their position within the impending nuclear apocalypse. June Jordan explores the spatial dynamics of this post- and pre-apocalyptic indeterminacy by reimagining shelter as a poetic and architectural form for Black communities in urban spaces. Her 1985 poetry collection *Living Room* explicitly demonstrates the threat that the nuclear complex poses to the enabling structures and infrastructures for Black futures and offers a poetics of shelter as a counter-imaginary to the Reagan-era ideologies of nuclear preparedness and "limited" nuclear war. And so, while the state used the threat of impending nuclear apocalypse as a rationale for national unity, Baraka and Jordan draw on their communal and historical experience of apocalypse to address yet-unrealized goals of liberation and articulate methods for building a future that had always been threatened in the U.S.

Nuclear power was not simply a tool for radioactive nation-building, but a form of energy and matter that structured political economic, social, and ecological relations that have been mediated through poetry across the Cold War period. Poetic engagements with the nuclear

complex played a major role in sustaining and shaping the defining social movements of the 1960's and 70's, a role that remains unacknowledged or portioned out to fit within a monolithic narrative of "the anti-nuclear movement." At its core, this project contends that anti-nuclear actions and ideologies helped Black, Indigenous, queer, feminist, and anti-capitalist writers express their distinct forms of oppression through new frameworks, which in turn led to the formation of alternative social alliances and possibilities that shaped the course of nuclear power in the U.S. and abroad. By exploring these undertheorized moments of expression, resistance, and demonstration, a new framework for reading poetry's social forms and effects emerges.

Chapter One: The Atomic Specter: Allen Ginsberg's Anti-Nuclear Imaginary

> *"O Unhappy Plutonian Day! Nagasaki radiance remains, remembrance in bodies of many on both hemispheres! Here I walk and breathe, and speak, and write, in a jail cell in Golden!"*
>
> *--Allen Ginsberg, on his arrest sheet, August 9, 1978*

On June 12, 1978, Allen Ginsberg wrote without ceasing through the night, completing a draft of *Plutonian Ode* just before dawn. After a few hours of sleep, he was awoken by fellow members of the Rocky Flats Truth Force, who informed him of imminent action on the train tracks leading to the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant near Boulder, Colorado. Ginsberg, along with his partner Peter Orlovsky and a few others, spent the rest of the day and night chanting and meditating on the tracks to block a shipment of fissile materials to the factory. After the train rounded the bend, braking at the sight of the protestors, Ginsberg experienced his first arrest as a consequence of direct action in the anti-nuclear movement. When asked to defend his non-guilty plea during his arraignment later that month, Ginsberg responded by reading *Plutonian Ode*.[1]

This was not, of course, Ginsberg's first run-in with the law. His poetry collection *Howl and Other Poems,* published by City Lights in 1956, was put on trial for "obscenity," a case that ultimately failed to censor the book but succeeded in publicizing both Ginsberg and the Beat Generation. Ginsberg, the Beats, and whether poetry could pose a threat to America's moral decency was a whole other matter in the late 1970's, however. This time, Ginsberg was arrested for trespassing, not charged with obscenity. And at this point, many of the core Beat writers had died or else knit themselves to the very academic institutions that they had once considered anathema to poetry. Even poetry itself now seemed a fangless threat to the entrenched nuclear-military-industrial complex. While in the 1950's poetry alone might have been enough to

provoke a reaction from the House Un-American Activities Committee and disrupt the status quo, by the late 70's, after the free speech movement and the shifting obscenity laws, poems needed to be coupled with direct action to incite legal action.

Charting the relationship between *Howl* and *Plutonian Ode* not only grants insight into this evolving relationship between poetry and politics, but also connects this development with nuclear and anti-nuclear imaginaries. These imaginaries include Ginsberg's anti-nuclear poetry and actions and what I refer to as the *state-sponsored nuclear imaginary*: the pro-nuclear representations deployed by various government institutions and actors to further what Joseph Masco calls America's "radioactive nation-building project." [2] By addressing the nuclear's various and multiplying forms, Ginsberg's anti-nuclear imaginary exposes the contradictions underlying America's nuclear complex and challenges the reductive discourse of politicians and activists alike. By tracing the nuclear complex's spectacular and subtle signs, *Plutonian Ode* demonstrates how material and mythical sites of production bolster the state-sponsored nuclear imaginary that represents nuclear forms as both everywhere and nowhere. Ginsberg's poem produces a figure I call the *atomic specter,* which manifests the nuclear unconscious that undergirds the state-sponsored nuclear imaginary.

Ginsberg counters America's state-sponsored nuclear imaginary though his poetics of demonstration, joining poetry and direct action to articulate, in this case, the relationship between forms of the nuclear. As I will show later, these relationships have been repressed in service of proliferation, enabling the formation of the nuclear unconscious. Lyric address, for Ginsberg, becomes an embodied act that stitches together social and aesthetic forms in order to manifest the ways that the nuclear complex now inheres in these relations. This method is nascent in *Howl,* which uses lyric address to express emergent forms of consciousness within specific

communities and which, while somewhat apocalyptic in tone, still maintains an optimism concerning the potential for solidarity. In *Plutonian Ode,* however, the ability of address to effect change in the now-totalizing atomic age, and the method of address itself, is necessarily transformed in response to these new material conditions that carry the burden of a deep future that is already harmed by the present.

As the nuclear unconscious continues to develop and inform the actions and discourses surrounding the nuclear through its absent presence during the Cold War, Ginsberg's poetic critique of America's radioactive nation-building project evolve and merge, a change we see most clearly in the arc from *Howl* and *Plutonian Ode.* Whereas *Howl* builds solidarity through a shared condition of "madness"—the "best minds" of Ginsberg's generation drawn together by their shared resistance to the suffocating status quo of post-WWII America—*Plutonian Ode* interrogates the false solidarity of M.A.D. (mutually assured destruction), exposing "shared risk" to be an ideology that the state wields to defend nuclear proliferation. In *Plutonian Ode,* Ginsberg-as-Bard "surveys Plutonian history" from his desk in Boulder, Colorado, noting how the apparently "tranquil politic" masks the fact that nations are "proliferating bureaucratic & horrific arm'd," fueled by billion-dollar "Satantic industries."[3] In the state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginary, mutual destruction functions as the logic that organizes social relations while the atomic bomb organizes the symbolic order. Rather than narrowing his gaze to these two axes, however, Ginsberg multiplies forms of the nuclear to demonstrate the networks that are repressed by the state's focus on the atomic bomb and the managed chaos of M.A.D. As Masco argues, nuclear weapons were originally a "national fetish" that "mobiliz[ed] a national-cultural imaginary. . .as a means of "building up a military-industrial infrastructure."[4] Through *Plutonian Ode's* re-envisioning of address, the future, and the atomic age, Ginsberg builds up an anti-

nuclear infrastructure, one that restructures the relationship between materiality and discourse, poetics and politics.

Atomic Address

Plutonian Ode, which was composed and circulated during the critical years of widespread anti-nuclear protests in the United States, offers a unique vantage on the rapidly shifting conditions of nuclear consciousness while also offering a new framework for understanding the ontological and imaginative limits produced by the nuclear. Composed on the edge of Cold War détente, it raises to consciousness the forms of the nuclear that would soon be reconsolidated and subsumed under Reagan-era cold-war escalation. These forms include nuclear weapons, waste, energy, and raw materials, which have been historically delinked from one another in order to justify proliferation. The anti-nuclear movement's desire to connect nuclear weapons with nuclear energy within a broader network of proliferation, however, became a focal point for pro-nuclear power arguments in the 1980's. For example, the 1982 defense of nuclear power *The War Against the Atom* argues that the anti-nuclear argument linking energy and weapons is mistaken because nuclear power plants do not produce weapons-grade plutonium, and so to imagine that countries with power plants could weaponize these radioactive materials is scientifically incorrect.[5] While this argument comes from the perspective of national security—ensuring that Eisenhower's "atoms for peace" couldn't be refashioned into weapons of mass destruction—anti-nuclear activists sought to connect nuclear weapons and power as two foundational parts of a larger radioactive nation-building project that represented problematic material and social changes. As well-known physician-activist Helen Caldicott (who was frequently maligned by nuclear proponents), argues: "this spread of nuclear power plants

around the world—and the directly related proliferation of nuclear weapons—seriously threatens global peace and order."[6] Her focus is on the *spread* of the nuclear complex, rather than whether plutonium from reactors can be adequately refashioned into bombs. Ginsberg intervenes in these arguments by neither collapsing nor separating forms of the nuclear, instead articulating the relationships between them, which enables him to circumvent the binary structure of pro- and anti-nuclear activist discourses that tend to perpetuate essentialist narratives in which the nuclear is simply "good" or "bad." In doing so, he offers a framework that addresses the structures undergirding the visible signs of the atomic age rather than catering to the pro-nuclear imaginary's logic of mutually assured destruction. While *Plutonian Ode* was historically an important tool for activism, it resists operating within the existing activist discourses and instead demonstrate how forms of the nuclear structure social relations, how they are inseparable from the American project of expansion and imperialism, and why America must contend with their oscillating presence and absence rather than facilitating their repression.

Soon after *Plutonian Ode* was written, the commencement of Ronald Reagan's presidency in 1980 and his proposal of a "limited" and winnable nuclear war channeled national anti-nuclear efforts away from nuclear power plants and back toward disarmament. America's return to what Masco calls its "technonational fetish"[7] represents a shift from regional issues to more global ones: because protests against nuclear reactors led by downwinders and resistance to nuclear waste sites and transportation were largely contained within certain communities or "sacrifice zones," it became difficult to sustain nationwide support of the material dangers facing people in Los Alamos or Hanford or Boulder when the "shared risk" of the arms race again loomed large in the nation's nuclear imaginary. This ability to redirect attention is in large part the purpose of establishing such sacrifice zones—they offer a psychological and geological

dumping ground for the most harmful effects of nuclear proliferation. The sequestration and separation of these parts of the nuclear complex facilitates the repression of these sites in the pro-nuclear imaginary, which is constructed primarily through the figures of the atom bomb and mushroom cloud. This imaginary is undergirded by what Shiloh Krupar calls the "wasteland discourse" that rendered New Mexico as "unproductive, infertile" and thus a "logical candidate for hosting secret bases, nuclear weapons production facilities, and extractive technologies"; this region, as well as its Indigenous inhabitants, is cast as expendable and is thus excluded from the pro-nuclear imaginary, which depends on images and symbols that represent an "equal" distribution of nuclear risk.[8] As discussed elsewhere in this project, this false universalization of the nuclear threat disproportionately affects Black and Indigenous communities.

While the use of poetic address, or lyric apostrophe, characterizes *Howl* and much of Ginsberg's work, the oscillating address in *Plutonian Ode* offers a new iteration of this poetic trope, one that reveals how poetic form responds to and is shaped by forms of the nuclear. Ginsberg's conjuring of the figure I name the *atomic specter* demonstrates the limits of address and manifests the contradictions of America's nuclear unconscious by articulating the relationships between forms of the nuclear that have been disarticulated and buried. While plutonium is not directly addressed as the "atomic specter" (though it is at one point called the "manufactured Spectre of human reason"), I use this term to describe the figure Ginsberg conjures by addressing plutonium's many faces and forms across the poem. Rather than understanding this address as a method of representation, I offer demonstration as a framework for understanding Ginsberg's way of connecting poetic and nuclear forms. Demonstration, which means to prove, exhibit, and resist, becomes the key entry point for engaging with the disparate forms of the nuclear. It both links the poem to direct action and considers how demonstration

becomes a trope within the poem itself, as accompanying his address to the specter is a series of self-referential invocations by which Ginsberg demonstrates the very acts he is performing in the ongoing present-tense: "I yell," "I chant," "I enter," "I manifest," "I roar" and so on.[9] Whether these actions are imagined or enacted varies depending on the context of the poem's performance. Sometimes Ginsberg did, in fact, roar, and sometimes this poem did, in fact, halt plutonium's production—at least temporarily. Poetry works differently than other literary genres when it comes to social movements: as portable objects that can be performed and circulated to generate and consolidate social alliances, poems embed themselves directly in the relations that other texts might only narrate in retrospect. And so, while the conjuring and exorcism of plutonium is performed in the poem, the power of this imagined feat is more fully realized when the poem also serves as an object that facilitates direct action.

This effort to demonstrate rather than represent forms of the nuclear differentiates *Plutonian Ode* from the quintessential nuclear literature of the Cold War. It is neither the ironic metafiction of postmodern novels like *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), nor the post-apocalyptic speculative fiction of *On the Beach* (1957). Rather than pursuing the narrative paths of representation (or the impossibility of representation), which operate according to a substitutional logic, address operates according to a supplementary logic that demonstrates how the poem is embedded in the world. To focus on the capacities of demonstration over representation may seem counterintuitive to how many have theorized poetry's capacities to intervene in indescribable or insurmountable events and conditions. Drew Milne, for example, agrees that "representations of the nuclear remain circumspect and partial" and offers a reading of post-Hiroshima poetry as working primarily by way of "implicature":[10] poems that glance but do not gaze directly at the nuclear. As evidence, he cites Lorine Niedecker and George Oppen's

measured references to missiles and bombs, Denise Levertov and Adrienne Rich's sideways angling at the systems and environments surrounding the nuclear, and so argues that post-war poets were wary of "milk[ing] a thematised nuclearism for quick pathos or reductive existential angst."[11] When confronted with Ginsberg's ode, however, Milne classifies it as an outlier in the category of nuclear poetics because it is "energetically old-fashioned, quasi-religious and flamboyant."[12] Ginsberg's poetry, as represented by *Howl, Plutonian Ode,* and his entire oeuvre, does not operate according to implication or obliqueness. This is not to say that Ginsberg does not excel in metaphor, figuration, symbolism, omission, and other traditional tools of poetic implication, but rather that he combines these formal devices with a directness that equips a poem to demonstrate the historical conditions in which it was produced while also reaching toward a mythic, timeless universalism.

Ginsberg neither glances at nor looks away from the nuclear. Rather, he stares directly at its many forms—employing abundant multiplicity rather than restrained implicature. The frameworks of representation—whether oblique or impossible—and "implication" do not make room for such a method, however. This chapter, then, theorizes Ginsberg's poetics of demonstration, revealing how it emerges from and responds to the conditions of the atomic age, offering a new framework for understanding how poetry addresses and responds to its material and historical contexts. Ginsberg's poetics of demonstration develops as a response to his evolving nuclear imaginary, which changes from *Howl* to *Plutonian Ode* to account for the accelerating proliferation and repression of the nuclear complex. By the time Ginsberg is sitting on the train tracks at Rocky Flats, poetry's relationship to politics has undergone a significant transformation, one that can be registered by the Beats' own transformation from the 50's to the 70's. In order to understand this shift in the context of the atomic age, this chapter explores the

relationship between these early and late Cold War iterations of the Beats, tracking how Ginsberg reframes the relationship between artistic freedom and democracy to reveal how both have been shaped by the nuclear unconscious.

An Atomized Howl

Tracing the arc between *Howl* and *Plutonian Ode* is necessary for understanding not only Ginsberg's nuclear imaginary, but how poetry relates to America's radioactive nation-building project, as both poems address the conditions that produce and proliferate America's nuclear unconscious. *Howl,* which Jonah Raskin calls "explosive—as befitting a poem for the atomic age,"[13] answers the new conditions that emerge between the end of one war and the beginning of another with its own structuring of poetry, performance, and the relationship between the personal and political. Unaffected by the lingering atmosphere of McCarthyism and determined to mythologize himself and his community, Ginsberg reconceives poetry's capacities for restructuring social relations in *Howl.* By contrast, *Plutonian Ode,* more an epic than an ode, narrates the history of America and the world in terms of nuclear proliferation, demonstrating how material conditions alter the structure of address and how this reconfigured address is a key political and poetic instrument. By reading *Howl,* often considered Ginsberg's most important work, through *Plutonian Ode,* a poem that has received mostly negative or minimal critical attention, we can better understand how Ginsberg's career was shaped in subtle and pronounced ways by the Cold War generally and the nuclear unconscious specifically. And by reading *Plutonian Ode* through *Howl,* the development of the nuclear unconscious can be connected to not only the atomic bomb but a modernist nuclear pre-consciousness.

That *Howl* was considered obscene positions it as avant-garde, as it trespassed the literary and cultural status quo maintained in part by the academic poets abiding by the limits of a New Critical definition of poetic content and form. Ginsberg's expressions of drug use, queerness, and madness broke the boundaries of the personal, political, and poetic and laid bare what dominant post-war America sought to suppress. In doing so, Ginsberg revealed the contradictions inherent in America's democratic ideology, in which the concept of artistic freedom was deployed as a symbol of America's superiority to communist regimes of conformity, while also linking this new American era to the rupture caused by the atomic bomb—both its discursive and material effects.[14] *Howl's* direct attention to the nuclear, however, is brief, mixing desire and the destruction of desire to America's fetishism of the bomb primarily through synecdoche. For example, the phrases "the sirens of Los Alamos" and "a cloud of sexless hydrogen" portray the bomb as alluring (the sirens of Greek myth as well as the warning sound of emergency) and dangerous, both the sexual object of desire and the thing that threatens reproduction through mutation. He also refers to "angelic bombs," a phrase sonically adjacent to "atomic bombs."[15] *Howl* treats the nuclear in terms of the bomb and its effects, viewing it as a symbolic and material disruption that irrevocably altered social relations—relations that could now only be described in terms of madness, as the logic underpinning America's nascent radioactive nation-building project depended on the destruction of minds and bodies alike. Rather than directly addressing the nuclear complex that was still in the early stages of development, *Howl* expresses the new forms of consciousness that emerged from the wreckage left by the atomic bomb that were already being suppressed by the drive toward nuclear proliferation.

Reflecting on the late 1940's, Ginsberg writes: "There was the splitting of the atom, and the splitting of the old structures in society and also a sense of the inner world splitting up and

coming apart."[16] *Howl* was an apocalyptic poem—both in terms of the real conditions of post-war life that it revealed, and in terms of how it viewed America—the nation Whitman could praise for its democratic capacities and which Ginsberg could only rebuke for its demonic ones. Positioned at the emergence of the atomic age, *Howl* focuses more on the psychological and social rifts caused by the atomic bomb, expanding its zone of exclusion to show the less obvious ways this defining matter and moment affected America. While *Howl* does not tend to the slow and incipient forms of the nuclear as *Plutonian Ode* does, it shares with the ode its contradictory attitude toward the nuclear, which was characterized by both love and hate, reverence and disgust. As Raskin writes of Ginsberg's position toward the bomb in *Howl*: "Hating [the Bomb] and wanting to ban it would only add to its power over humanity, he felt. The point was to negate it through acceptance. By the end of *Howl,* he'd come to that realization. The Bomb was holy too."[17] *Howl* does not view the atomic age as an inescapable totality, but rather articulates the mechanisms that would facilitate the development of America's nuclear unconscious over the next two decades. Its anaphora and address, which would become hallmarks of Ginsberg's style, anticipate the structure of *Plutonian Ode,* though the transformation of these formal techniques reveals the changing conditions of the material world and its relationship to poetic form. For example, *Howl's* Moloch, the monstrous embodiment of the state, becomes the atomic specter in *Plutonian Ode,* the shifting figure that cannot be contained or destroyed.

Plutonian Ode expresses Ginsberg's realization that the nuclear is an inescapable totality rather than a past event that caused a rift in consciousness—a reality he would later call "insoluble," and which could not be changed by "screaming" at the problem.[18] This "atomized *Howl,*" as the 1979 *Village Voice* article called it, drew on new methods of provocation, incorporating direct action and dramatic address into its very structure. The ode contends with

the contradictions first articulated in *Howl* by revealing how they had continued to proliferate and structure America's nuclear unconscious. Rather than the monstrous figure of Moloch, which symbolizes the shadow of America—its capitalist greed and mechanisms of consumption that caused the "best minds" to go mad and "bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination"[19]—Ginsberg conjures the atomic specter, which articulates the conditions of the atomic age from a perspective that appears both outside of human history and within the human body. Whereas Moloch is invoked by name over and over in the second section of *Howl,* the atomic specter's name transforms as Ginsberg conjures its many forms across *Plutonian Ode.* While address and invocation are used throughout Ginsberg's oeuvre, the structure of address and the relations it articulates between poetry and politics change when the object of that address is a form of the nuclear. *Plutonian Ode* reveals the necessary relationship not only between poetry and politics, but between nuclear and poetic forms. In doing so, it suggests that the defining conditions of both poetry and politics have been irrevocably shaped by plutonium, which is not simply a new form of matter, but a new formal relation, one that reorganizes social and poetic structures. Plutonium thus operates as a presence and absence that alters what types of thought, speech, and action are possible in the atomic age.

Moving from *Howl* to *Plutonian Ode* reveals how madness becomes M.A.D.—the precarious myth on which the Cold War logic of deterrence and the fate of the world depended. Madness, anxiety, paranoia, and fear are the primary affects expressed in Cold War literature and cultural production. The dark humor of *Dr. Strangelove Or: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb (1964),* for example, shows how one individual's madness might lead to global annihilation. Popular and political discourse alike drew on these psychic states, rendering the atomic age as a psychological complex that depended on bluffs and wagers as

much as rational logic and scientific accuracy. These contradictory methods of managing arsenals and attitudes toward the nuclear produced an oscillating awareness of these threats across the Cold War period. Helen Caldicott's 1978 text *Nuclear Madness* argues that in the early 1970's, "it was a relief to think about 'manageable' problems and forget the unthinkable. People became ostrichlike and pretended the nuclear threat had ceased to exist…In reality, nuclear madness had not disappeared: it multiplied."[20] While Caldicott here perpetuates the discourse of unthinkability, *Plutonian Ode* addresses the nuclear complex's multiplying forms. The singular looming figure of Moloch becomes the many headed hydra of the atomic specter, revealing that absence is always an illusion of absence when it comes to forms of the nuclear, which proliferate unseen and remain unarticulated by the conventional logics of representation. Supplementing address with action offers an outlet for the fear and paranoia that produces such nuclear madness.

In addition to finding alternative ways of configuring the relationship between nuclear bombs and reactors, local and global fallout, *Plutonian Ode* addresses the unstable distinction of life and death. As Krupar writes, the "regime of biopolitics must incorporate the threat of violence and death within the regulation of life" and "rationaliz[es] forms of violence and death as inevitable" in order to secure the nation.[21] Though biopolitics is based on a logic that divides life and death, human and nature, pure and contaminated, these boundaries and distinctions are constantly being redrawn in service of the nation as a "whole." Indeed, many of the arguments surrounding the nuclear in the late 70's centered on debates about thresholds of risk, cause and effect, and imagined future outcomes. This is why, as Natasha Zaretsky argues in *Radiation Nation,* the figure of the "unborn" became such a potent figure for the anti-nuclear protestors at this time, as it represented "the industry's most vulnerable, voiceless, and defenseless victim."

Caldicott, for example, was known to "carry a baby casket at antinuclear marches—a symbolic act that might have just as easily appeared at a pro-life rally."[22] The unborn became an important unifying symbol for the state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginary, one that could be deployed just as easily in an anti-nuclear demonstration as a pro-nuclear argument regarding the need for nuclear power plants (providing for the future, reducing fossil fuel usage) and nuclear weapons (securing the future of the nation and democracy against attack).

The figure of the unborn blurs the line between life and death while operating within the biopolitical framework that controls reproduction (including when life "begins") and reinforces the hetero-patriarchal vision of a reproductive future that duplicates the "nuclear" family. Ginsberg's figure of the atomic specter, however, is also "unborn," as stated in the first line of *Plutonian Ode:* "What new element before us unborn in nature?"[23] Here, Ginsberg queers the figure of the unborn, conflating it with the element plutonium, which is "unborn" because it has been created outside the "natural" cycle of reproduction, produced instead by scientific invention. As I will discuss in the next section, Ginsberg uses this unborn and undying figure to discuss the stakes of the future by reconfiguring the limits of life and death through a hauntological framework rather than making an ethical argument based on not-yet-born populations. Jacques Derrida's concept of hauntology illuminates the conditions of the atomic specter even as the nuclear complex poses certain challenges to this deconstruction of ontology. By circumventing the discourse that pits life against death, the unborn against the living, and resisting the flattened discourse of activists and government agencies alike, Ginsberg expands the anti-nuclear imaginary and manifests the nuclear unconscious in order to find new avenues for demonstration.

The Atomic Specter

The atomic specter, a figure conjured over the course of *Plutonian Ode*, knits together forms of the nuclear that had been strategically separated in the state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginary to distinguish between "good" and "evil" manifestations of the nuclear, much like the globe was divided between democracy and communism. While the strong arm of the military propped up the unceasing production of nuclear weapons, a "necessary" evil to protect America, the benevolent hand of peace promised prosperity and preservation of the future through the building of nuclear reactors for "cheap" energy. As each gained strength during the Cold War, they appeared to diverge, even while they emerged from and were sustained by the same nuclear complex. In this gap, new forms of the nuclear proliferated—waste, radiation, fallout, uranium mines—though they remained largely underground and out of sight, both literally and figuratively. *Plutonian Ode* resists the myth that these forms of the nuclear can be treated as discrete, viewing them instead as part of the same body. This body, however, is ghostly, as the atomic specter serves as a useful figure only in so far as it resists reification, as the static figure of the mushroom cloud, the organizing symbol of the state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginary, sustains a divided and partial view of the nuclear complex. The specter also reconfigures the activist discourses of the "unborn" by blurring the biopolitical distinctions of life and death as limits and expands the nuclear imaginary by manifesting the buried networks of nuclear forms that constitute America's nuclear unconscious. In doing so, it reveals the contradictory logics undergirding America's radioactive nation-building project and renders the nuclear in hauntological terms: something that is both present and absent, ever-transforming and resistant to representation.

Plutonian Ode begins by exposing the cracks in America's radioactive nation-building project by constructing a new atomic genealogy. Ginsberg's revisionary history undermines the origin stories offered by politicians and scientists alike by tracing its origins to the mythic underworld kingdom of Pluto, god of wealth and death whose kingdom guards the seeds necessary for life above. In doing so, he locates the history of the atomic age within the unconscious itself, the material space where what is buried is eternal, always threatening to rise from the dead. It also refutes the narrow narrative of what Milne calls "nuclear exceptionalism," which is "the almost moral or apocalyptic panic that tends to accompany imagining nuclear crisis as the over-determining characteristic of the age."[24] Ginsberg demonstrates how the nuclear complex has given rise to new forms of violence while still connecting these forms with a deep history, thereby refuting a narrative in which the nuclear complex becomes fetishized by pro- and anti-nuclear activists alike. The poem begins:

> What new element before us unborn in nature? Is there a new thing under the Sun?
> At last inquisitive Whitman a modern epic, detonative, Scientific theme
> First penned unmindful by Doctor Seaborg with poisonous hand, named for Death's
> planet through the sea beyond Uranus.[25]

The lineage of plutonium is planetary, mythic, and scientific, frameworks which often contradict each other by offering different faces of this "new element." While Pluto might best represent the nuclear complex structured by weaponry, his queen Persephone is like plutonium, "stored in salty caverns under white snow, black hail, grey winter rain or Polar ice."[26] This monochrome description conveys the deadening effects of radioactive waste while highlighting the permeability between surface and depth, life and death—to bury or store something is not to dispose of or disarm it, but to embed it more deeply within our material-discursive reality. In the

classical myth, Persephone reappears each spring to bring what has been buried to fruition, dispensing of the illusion that burial results in resolution. And in Ginsberg's atomic version, Persephone's absence from the surface is compounded by her presence underground—it is not merely her withdrawal from above that creates a nuclear winter, but her presence that wastes away beneath the surface and promises future violence. Nuclear weapons and the origins of plutonium are Plutonic—born from the god of wealth—but their waste products and future are Persephonic as they continue to decay and change, oscillating between exposure and repression. This genealogical account also invokes the absent figure of Demeter—goddess of fecundity who goes in search of her stolen daughter. In Ginsberg's radioactive mythology, Persephone-as-daughter also figures as the daughter isotope of plutonium, which continually changes the composition of the radioactive waste. As such, Demeter becomes the manifest yet unacknowledged source of Persephone's production, whose governance of growth has been distorted by the unnatural intrusion of plutonium as it reconfigures seasons and alters "natural" cycles of death and rebirth. The myths of the past and future are rewritten in the glow of this new modern epic as what is stored in underground caverns will continue to return, unable to find a final resting place.

One of the defining contradictions of the nuclear unconscious, then, is that the nuclear complex threatens to harm the very future that the nuclear is purportedly protecting. In other words, while the proliferation of weapons and energy signify the protection of and provision for the future, their connected yet repressed waste already configures the material conditions of a future in which the nuclear complex is an inescapable reality. Ginsberg exposes this contradictory logic in *Plutonian Ode* by oscillating between human and inhuman timescales to show how the measurement of nuclear energy in terms of half-lives repackages Zeno's paradox

for the modern era: if plutonium lives half of its life every 24,000 years, how can it ever die? How can it help achieve a state of security when that security is undermined through its own production? For example, Ginsberg considers the disproportionate effects that plutonium can have on the entire planet:

> Manzano Mountain boasts to store
>
> its dreadful decay through two hundred forty millennia while our Galaxy spirals around
> its nebulous core…
>
> One microgram inspired to one lung, ten pounds of heavy metal dust adrift slow motion
> over grey Alps
>
> the breadth of the planet, how long before your radiance beams death to sentient
> beings?[27]

In his footnotes, Ginsberg writes: "Ten pounds of Plutonium scattered throughout the earth is calculated sufficient to kill 4 Billion people." Radioactive materials reconfigure space as well as time, as a seemingly inconsequential amount is purportedly enough to kill billions. By connecting the expansive galaxy to the microscopic microgram through the shared materiality of plutonium, Ginsberg engages in the discourse of the "problem of scale" that is so prevalent in discussions of climate change today. Indeed, the atomic bomb, not the blue dot of Earth from outer space or the Gaia theory, first configures the globe as a whole that can be instantly altered by the actions of a single nation. It is no surprise that shortly after the bombing of Hiroshima there were calls for a world government as the only alternative to human extinction. Historian Paul Boyer describes how the mushroom cloud came to represent this atmosphere, with scientists and politicians alike voicing the ultimatum: "We face a choice between one world or none."[28] Ginsberg nuances this response by troubling its premise: the choice was already made for us the

moment that Dr. Glenn Seaborg helped bring forth this new element. Even a world government could not grapple with the spatial-temporal reach of the nuclear; we must learn to live both with and against it rather than believing it can be managed and contained.

Alongside this problem of space emerges the problem of time: how to account for the latent or slow growing cancers that cannot be definitively linked to radiation, or how to measure the effects of present violence on the future as we continue to proliferate, accumulate, and repress different forms of the nuclear? While the mushroom cloud conveys the immediate destruction wrought by nuclear weapons, the figure of the atomic specter slowly conjured throughout *Plutonian Ode* registers the incremental and accumulating forms of the nuclear that otherwise remain invisible. It does so in part by personifying the specter and spectralizing the person. This transformation reveals an ethical contradiction underlying America's radioactive nation-building project, which justifies nuclear proliferation as a means of protecting the future while at the same time endangering and potentially erasing that future. The atomic specter thus becomes the limit case of one's ethical obligation to the Other. As a figure, it stretches the imagination to consider what one's ethical commitment is to a future 10,000 or 240,000 years away.

This spectral Other flickers in and out of space and time. Addressing it, then, requires an equally oscillating address, as once its presence is named and reified, its proliferating forms can become hidden from view through the mechanism of containment. Ginsberg's dynamic address to the specter demonstrates the paradoxical intimacy one has with the object of one's antagonism, as throughout the poem Ginsberg describes how plutonium is already within and around himself and others—that plutonium-239 is but one face of the atomic specter. The poem's first section of unrelenting address thus consists almost entirely of I/Thou declarations,

each with a different verb that establishes a new relationship between speaker and specter. Ginsberg is alternately angry, respectful, sarcastic, intimate, rueful, and amazed: "I salute your dreadful presence," "I begin your chant," "I enter your secret places with my mind, I speak with your presence, I roar your Lion Roar with my mortal mouth," "I vocalize your consciousness to six worlds," "I chant your absolute vanity," "I dare your Reality," and so on.[29] With each declaration, the specter grows. It does not merely comprise plutonium or Pluto, weapons or reactors. The specter is the "Grand subject that annihilates inky hand and pages' prayers, old orators' inspired Immortalities." It is "a matter that renders Self oblivion." This accumulating address is a conjuring, not a revelation, demonstrating how the unconscious is not simply a presence waiting to be exposed, but a set of relations configured through mediation. As each strophe (or "turn") conjures the atomic specter, it manifests a new aspect of the nuclear unconscious. And through this action, both speaker and specter are shaped through a dynamic relationship that is never established but always in the process of formation. This oscillating address is thus essential for addressing the nuclear complex's proliferating forms, as the prevailing political framework presents them as distinct and manageable, a logic that facilitates their repression.

As Ginsberg's proliferating address conjures the atomic specter, ontological certainty is transformed into hauntological mystery. Hauntology, a concept that Derrida introduces in *Specters of Marx,* resists the metaphysical priority of presence, which Derrida claims enforces an essentialism that relies upon intrinsic meanings that can never actually be arrived at due to the differing and deferring structure of language. Colin Davis glosses this elliptically defined concept as that which "supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor

alive."[30] Rather than privileging the *presence* of being (ontology), hauntology accounts for the *absence* of being. It provides a way of drawing together latent, disparate causes in a speculative gesture toward their effects. A nuclear hauntology, however, complicates the relationship between absence and presence due to the nuclear's material persistence. Plutonium will likely outlast the human and so threatens to become both author and archive, sign and referent. Whereas Derrida conceives of a total nuclear apocalypse as marking the end of the symbolic archive, Ginsberg's atomic specter offers the possibility of its inclusion within a nuclear archive, a plutonic signature that decays and revises itself over a quarter of a million years.[31] The atomic specter redraws not only the boundaries of human and nonhuman, existence and nonexistence, but the very trace that attests to this presence by materializing the symbolic archive.

And so, even as the poem begins by establishing a clear scientific and mythic genealogy for plutonium, it soon turns away from this articulation of what plutonium *is* or *was* to who and what plutonium was becoming. This process begins when Ginsberg turns directly to plutonium to ask of its origins: "Radioactive Nemesis were you there at the beginning black dumb tongueless unsmelling blast of Disillusion?"[32] Already expanding the definition of plutonium by fashioning it in terms of Nemesis the Greek goddess of retribution and nemesis the antagonist, this story also complicates the concept of a single origin by conflating biblical and atomic creation—the separation of light from dark via the sun (the energy of which is generated through nuclear fusion) and the first nuclear explosion on earth. This comparison further confuses the linearity of origin and outcome through its syntactical complexity: it is unclear, for example, whether plutonium-as-Nemesis is "tongueless" and "unsmelling" or whether these adjectives modify the "blast of Disillusion." Rather, they serve to modify both the blast and that which it has created. Furthermore, "disillusion" signifies two opposing actions: illusion and the removal of illusion.

This tension between the revelatory capacities of the "blast" anticipate the paradox that forms the center of Jacques Derrida's 1984 article, "No Apocalypse, Not Now," the ur-text of nuclear criticism.[33] In it, he argues that total nuclear war is anti-apocalyptic because it cannot reveal anything due to its destruction of the symbolic archive (drawing on the definition of apocalypse as revelation). Rather than conceiving of forms of the nuclear as totally destructive, however, Ginsberg portrays them as proliferating and decaying at the same time. In doing so, he articulates the limits of representation—of what is illuded and alluded to—and its capacity to account for an unborn, undying substance that lives one half-life at a time. The inability to link plutonium to a single origin, to articulate the limits and effects of its absence and presence, intensifies as the poem continues to address plutonium by new names, revealing the multiplying networks in which it is embedded even as those networks fail to contain it. In doing so, the poem models the transformation of ontology into hauntology as plutonium transforms into the atomic specter.

Following this interrogation of plutonium-as-Nemesis, Ginsberg's address becomes performative and declarative, reiterating the link between the poem and direct action. In doing so, this address tropes on demonstration. Address becomes the event itself when Ginsberg says "I manifest your Baptismal Word," as apostrophe interpellates while it conjures. This rendering of address both aligns with and departs from Jonathan Culler's theory of apostrophe, or lyric address. Culler explains in *Pursuit of Signs* that the apostrophe attempts to *produce* an event (not simply represent one) "by replacing a temporal presence and absence with an apostrophic presence and absence."[34] However, in Culler's formulation of apostrophe, the absent other is made present through address. In other words, it is summoned. When this formulation is applied to a specter, however, these ontological distinctions do not hold, as the specter does not confine itself to being present *or* absent but is always already both. Ginsberg's address itself is thus

shaped by the specter's multiplying presence and absence as he must address the specter again and again, each time by a different name, each one insufficient to contain or define it. This hauntological apostrophe, while still an act of conjuring, does not distinguish between presence and absence, direct and aside, but rather demonstrates the flickering instability of these categories as it constantly turns, strophe after strophe, to face another face of the specter. Demonstration, which manifests the relationship between presence and absence, can thus be understood as a method for conjuring a hauntological figure. As I have already discussed, demonstration offers an alternative to representation, an aesthetic mode that implies the object is secondary in both temporality and consequence to the thing, event, or circumstance being represented. Similarly, understanding the address of apostrophe as being shaped by its material conditions, as demonstrating them, rather than as a unidirectional utterance or turn toward an object unable to respond, establishes a new framework for relating speech to action, poetry to politics. It is the specter's uncontainable shifting that demands a new mode of address and this in turn reveals the proliferating network of the nuclear complex. This accumulating address, then, also works to prevent the repression and crystallization of the nuclear as that which can be named and contained.

As Ginsberg's repetitive and oscillating address to the specter suggests, the nuclear complex's intimate presence and repressed absence requires that it be addressed according to its multiplicities rather than negations. Augmenting Derrida's conception of the specter as *neither* absent *nor* present, Ginsberg reveals the atomic specter to be both absent *and* present, dead *and* alive, material *and* immaterial. Indeed, Ginsberg's expansive rendering of the atomic specter imbricates materiality and discourse at a historical moment when they were being pulled apart, as one of the criticisms of deconstruction and its project of Nuclear Criticism in the mid-1980's

is that its overemphasis on language excluded the extra-linguistic complexities of matter. The post-Cold War "material turn" is often described in terms of its reaction to the "linguistic turn" of post-structuralism.[35] These new materialisms insist on matter as agential and meaningful, with special attention paid to the nature of being in a "material-discursive" reality as well as to how subjects and objects are entangled and formed through intra-action. In doing so, as Diana Coole and Samantha Frost write, new materialisms are equipped to address "new definitions of life and matter, as well as the inadequacies of constructivism to account for materiality in our contemporary world."[36] Thus, while the deconstructive possibilities of hauntology clarify how the atomic specter is working, a New Materialist turn toward the materiality of these relations exposes the multiple forms this specter takes.

Addressing the atomic specter also demands a New Materialist rendering of hauntology due to the nuclear's temporal and spatial reach, which exceeds human scales and produces its own temporality. By altering the material conditions of the planet, the nuclear alters the relations that produce relata, or what Karen Barad describes as the process of "intra-action" in her critical New Materialist and feminist reading of quantum physics, *Meeting the Universe Halfway.* For Barad, phenomena, not objects (which, she argues, form the basis of a static, undifferentiated, human-centered ontology) serve as the primary ontological units.[37] The atomic specter, then, can be understood as a phenomenon that is hauntological and intra-active, immaterial and material, exerting influence through the imagined threat of apocalypse as well as its undying presence around, beneath, and within matter. It shapes and is shaped by the present and future as plutonium will likely outlive what we conceive of as the human species. Thus, a nuclear hauntology not only names the specter's expansive mode of being but describes how an "unborn" substance like plutonium lives, one half-life at a time, beyond the human. This specter

cannot be accounted for solely in ontological terms because it exceeds the definitions of life and nonlife, presence and absence, materiality and immateriality. To think of the atomic specter as an Other in hauntological terms is to complicate the ethical imperative toward that Other, one that the poem itself represses as Ginsberg cannot address the future without addressing plutonium, without affirming the very presence he wants to negate.

The material stakes of conjuring the atomic specter are demonstrated in the poem's final section, in which Ginsberg tries to turn away from the atomic specter to address future publics but ultimately cannot do so without including the specter in this address. He addresses the "Poets and Orators to come" who are connected to him not only through poetic tradition, but through the new material reality wrought by plutonium.[38] Ginsberg imagines these future others as filters who must take in the "black poison to your heart," "enrich[ing] this Plutonian Ode" in order to "destroy this mountain of Plutonium with ordinary mind and body speech."[39] These future others are called upon to sacrifice their bodies and minds, as Ginsberg has demonstrated throughout the poem, by accepting the atomic specter's inhabitation and reconfiguring it into a "blessing from your breast on our creation."[40] However, the entanglement of the specter and poet, the inability to destroy one without destroying the other, becomes clear in the conflation of *Plutonian Ode* the poem with plutonium the radioactive element through the process here described as enrichment. Just as Ginsberg's repeated address to plutonium personifies it into a spectral Other to which he is beholden yet also wants to destroy, the enrichment of the ode to destroy plutonium (enriched uranium) enriches this very contradictory position—to make the ode more potent is to make the atomic specter more powerful, further undermining this desire for destruction. This double bind represents a key logic that structures America's radioactive nation-building project: proliferation as a means of ensuring peace. While repression and containment are not sufficient responses to

the specter, neither it seems is address, at least if that address is defined according to ontological limits of being and becoming.

Foregrounding address as the logic by which the poem works, as well as the method by which the poem circulates in the world, encourages the type of thinking necessary for registering the nuclear's shifting forms. The poem's form is not a mimetic representation of forms of the nuclear, but a set of relations that demonstrates the stakes of addressing them. These stakes include the reconfiguration of the material and symbolic conditions of language, the poem, and even genre itself. While a formalist reading might leave this concept of address within the poem, the circulation and production history of this poem allows us to extend these terms to examine its social form—how it was used as a tool for addressing different audiences and environments, and how Ginsberg's desire to demonstrate—to make visible—the hidden and repressed nuclear forms in America is materialized as *Plutonian Ode* becomes embedded in a wider literary and political context. In what follows, I turn toward the history of the poem as an object to demonstrate how addressing the atomic specter is put into practice, as this figure becomes a means of thinking through the entangled nuclear forms at this critical moment in the Cold War.

The Afterlives of *Plutonian Ode*

The life and afterlives of *Plutonian Ode*, from its frantic origin to its repeated publications and performances in the four-year span from its composition until it was consolidated as a book in 1982 (published by City Lights as *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems*), illuminate a heightened moment in the national nuclear consciousness and how a poem might actually "address" nuclear forms and re-form a national nuclear imaginary. These performances also demonstrate how poems circulate and participate in social movements and reconfigure the

relationship between figurative and discursive knowledge, which contributes to the anti-nuclear imaginary. *Plutonian Ode* is a poem that desperately wants to be understood and to share information about the nuclear complex while also resisting clarity in service of a poetics of accumulation and spectrality. Ginsberg's record of revision—which includes adding an arsenal of footnotes—offers insight into how poems do not simply represent crises but offer performative avenues for those crises to take shape as the poem is shaped through its participation in demonstrations. By examining the ode's circulation and revision, we gain insight into how anti-nuclear narratives evolved and diverged before they were largely redirected to focus on nuclear disarmament and the final "hot" period of the Cold War.

The many transmissions and versions of *Plutonian Ode* offer insight into the relationship between poetry and direct action, as this poem sought to both explain and nuance the narratives produced by the anti-nuclear movement. Indeed, the occasion that gave rise to *Plutonian Ode* essentially launched a nationwide tour in which Ginsberg performed and published the ode, sometimes accompanied by additional articles, interviews, or notes that expanded on his theories of nuclear power and its relationship to consciousness and America's radioactive nation-building project. Known performances of the ode include the Whole Earth Jamboree festival in August 1978; back-to-back readings at the State University of New York at Buffalo and the Allentown Community Center in early October 1978; a workshop at the end of that month on "Radical Ecology" in Madison, Wisconsin, which proposed "stopping the nuke, turning the earth into a planet-garden."[41] The following year, in March 1979, he performed the poem at a benefit for the Concerned Citizens for Cerritos at University of New Mexico, followed by a reading in April in Toronto for the World Symposium on Humanity. In addition to live performances, publications of the ode proliferated in little magazines, chapbooks, and established literary journals.

Publications of the *Plutonian Ode* include the Fall 1978 issue of *CoEvolution Quarterly*, "Journal for the Protection of All Beings," which featured an article by Ginsberg called "Nuts to Plutonium!" that was followed by Anne Waldman's "Plutonium Chant" and then *Plutonian Ode,* marking its first appearance in print. A lesser known little magazine, *Quixote,* published the poem soon after, though without a contributor note or attribution to the poem's previous publication. Next it appears with some explanatory notes in an interview in a January 1979 issue of the *Village Voice.* The Fall 1979 publication in *River Styx* is the first time Ginsberg's footnotes are included with the poem, followed by its 1979 publication in *Clean Energy Verse,* the chapbook that emerged from the Rocky Flats demonstrations. The poem then appears with additional footnotes written by a scientist in the 1980 publication of *Nuke Chronicles,* edited by Ed Sanders. After this point, the performances and publications of the poem significantly decrease until it is published by City Lights as *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems* in 1982, which goes on to win the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award. Throughout the rest of his life, there are occasions when Ginsberg performs the ode, though often in commemoration of a specific event rather than as an active form of protest (ironically, this includes a performance of the poem at Naropa to celebrate the FBI invading Rocky Flats in 1989). In these performances, Ginsberg invokes the original occasion of the poem's writing, ensuring that it circulates with the political context in which it was written.

It was the 1979 issue of the *Village Voice* that first announced the newly written poem as the successor to *Howl,* proclaiming: "Ginsberg has created an anti-nuclear 'Howl.' It requires clarification, as does the question of how his persona interacts with the movement."[42] Though the article never actually clarifies Ginsberg's relationship to the anti-nuclear movement, other than claiming he is a "spokesman for the environmental movement,"[43] it does attempt to clarify

Plutonian Ode. This clarification comes in the form of discursive notes in the article itself, commentary that would have already been familiar to audiences who had heard Ginsberg perform the ode in the six months since it was written. However, it would not be until *Plutonian Ode's* next publication in *River Styx* (1979) that these explanatory notes would become an official part of the poem, even as both they and the poem transformed over its many performances and publications until the 1982 City Lights publication. These notes became as much a part of the poem as the lines themselves, blurring the boundaries between text and context.

Typically, when performing the poem, Ginsberg recited these notes by way of introduction, an act that sometimes lasted longer than the reading of the poem. In a reading just a few months after the poem's composition in October 1978, he explains to the audience: "a couple of weeks ago, I wrote notes to [*Plutonian Ode*] because there's confusing mythology involved, so I'll read you the notes."[44] A few months later at a reading at University of New Mexico to benefit a group protesting nuclear waste, Ginsberg tells his audience: "I'm giving you all possible footnotes here so you will understand completely what the poem is all about."[45] These discursive notes, which range from explanations of Dr. Seaborg, the relationship between Pluto and the Furies, the length of the Platonic "Great Year," and various Buddhist citations, reflect Ginsberg's desire for the poem to reach a wide audience and for his poem to serve as an object that, backed by science yet also against it, could prove the validity of both his and the anti-nuclear movement's claims about the dangers of the nuclear complex's many forms. As the reporter Anna Mayo recounts in the *Village Voice* article, Ginsberg worried that no one other than a few scholars would read the poem, no less understand it. His insistence on the poem being totally comprehensible to his audience reveals his hope for the poem to become a useful tool for

a wide-scale movement. If that is the case, why write a poem at all? Why not offer pamphlets, graphs, and pictures depicting the levels of strontium in cow's milk or the amount of iodine released by the Hanford nuclear plant? Despite Ginsberg's repeated claims that he wants readers to "understand completely what the poem is all about," it is in fact the oscillation between clarity and obscurity in the poem and its notes that offers a real glimpse at the complex forms of the nuclear.

In asking *why* a poem might be the chosen vehicle to propel and invigorate a movement, we are forced to consider from a different angle what, if anything, sets poetry apart from other creative and discursive forms of communication. Poetry in general, and *Plutonian Ode* in specific, is particularly suitable to this task due to its demonstrative capacities. Here I use "demonstrate" to refer to both its activist connotations—to picket, sit-in, stand-up for—and to its aesthetic ones—to reveal, manifest, or prove. As I have already argued, central to *Plutonian Ode* is how it addresses forms of the nuclear, rather than merely representing them. In doing so, the poem's form demonstrates the material relations in which it is embedded. And as an object, the poem becomes a way to demonstrate the relationship between forms of the nuclear and even, sometimes, alter those relations, as when *Plutonian Ode* helped temporarily halt one small part of the plutonium economy at Rocky Flats. In fact, recounting that infamous day in June at a reading a few months later, Ginsberg tells the audience how, after he was informed about the action he responded: "Yes, my script is written, so I'm all ready,"[46] referring to *Plutonian Ode.* The poem shaped the direct action, helped realize it, rather than simply respond to or represent it. And so, the story of its composition, like the notes, became an inseparable part of the poem.

Ginsberg also viewed the poem as a unique source of knowledge necessary for understanding the forms of the nuclear that could not be fully grasped. In his *Village Voice*

interview, after lamenting the poem's inaccessibility, Ginsberg argues for its necessity: he tells the reporter that he did not want to simply *explain* how harmful plutonium was, but to "give a feeling of the time, the space of it."[47] Indeed, as Natasha Zaretsky writes, the hidden nature of certain forms of the nuclear produced a "culture of dissociation" wherein U.S. citizens feared the invisible effects of radiation as well as buried or suppressed information, as the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal eroded the public's trust in the government. This inability to grasp the space or time of radioactive elements like plutonium became a driving force behind the anti-nuclear movement's ongoing efforts to expose and manifest hidden aspects of the nuclear complex.[48] And while some technological devices could measure immediate radiation exposure, such as the Geiger counter, these tools could not make palpable the unknown, looming, and ongoing repercussions of the nuclear unconscious. As Zaretsky notes, the Cold War logic of dissociating harmful bombs from beneficial energy was haunted by "the specter of radiation."[49] *Plutonian Ode* renders visible what is hidden and connects what has been delinked by addressing this specter—a task seemingly beyond the "non-literary" pamphlets and reports that circulated along with the poem. And yet, Ginsberg himself admits that to understand the poem, to "read" it, the poem requires its own arsenal of discursive notes.

The formal possibilities of the poem—its figurations of time and space—supplement and are supplemented by these evidentiary interjections, which are themselves seeking to demonstrate the validity of the poem as it demonstrates the realities of the nuclear complex. And yet, many of these notes are as elusive as the poem proper. For example, one note in the 1982 version reads: "Divine Wind= kamikaze, typhoon, wind of Gods." Others cite allusions, such as the note to line 37: "'I sing your form' etc. 'The Reactor hath hid himself thro envy. I behold him. But you cannot behold him till he be revealed in his System.' Blake, Jerusalem, Chapter 11

Plate 43 1. 9-10."[50] These notes, rather than clarifying the poem, make it even more complex. As if Ginsberg's own notes were not sufficient, in the 1980 publication of the poem in *Nuke Chronicles* they are followed by another set of notes by Graham Hale (Called "Notes on Plutoni*um* Ode"—a common misnomer for the poem), who we can assume to be a scientist (no biographical data is given). These notes serve to testify, it seems, to the validity of Ginsberg's "data," though they diverge from the poem significantly, oscillating between statements like "MPLB: Maximum Permissible Lung Burden of ^{239}Pu" and the condemnation of researchers who considered the correlation between cancer and exposure of workers in Richland, Washington to be "nothing unusual."[51] Indeed, these are not exactly notes on *Plutonian Ode*, but on *plutonium,* and even as such they become a paratext that further connects the poem to the material conditions of the nuclear age. The poem's heavy allusive and elusive character seems to generate commentary and reflection—precisely the type of work one hopes to do with a poem that is intended to circulate and demonstrate. Furthermore, this very accumulation of knowledge that appends facts, dates, faces to the ones figured within the poem speaks to the difficulty of accessing the contradictions of the nuclear unconscious. This desire to clarify while necessarily obfuscating the realities of plutonium inversely corresponds to the movements of America's radioactive nation-building project, which performs transparency and assurance alongside burial and secrecy.

An allusive relationship worth probing in this poem is one left uncited in its official footnotes. The influence of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land,* as well as the resistance to it, shapes how we position both *Howl* and *Plutonian Ode* within a broader nuclear-era canon and understand the Beats' relationship to modernism. Like Ginsberg, Eliot seemed to worry that his audience would not adequately comprehend his poem, as the extensive notes on *The Waste Land*

help explicate many of the poem's dense and allusive moments. Also like Ginsberg, many of these explanations likely require still further explication, at least for a "general" audience. However, unlike Ginsberg, Eliot was not aiming at the public, or rather was assuming his public was well-educated and fluent in Latin, Greek, and Italian.[52] In fact, a defining impulse of the Beat movement was its resistance to the coterie poetics of Eliot and Pound's modernism. As Fiona Paton writes: "In allying themselves with Williams and Whitman rather than Eliot and Pound, the Beats consciously rejected Old World elitism and embraced an egalitarian American vernacular."[53] In fact, Whitman is directly addressed in the beginning and end of *Plutonian Ode* and Williams is alluded to elsewhere and referenced in the notes. The second line of *Plutonian Ode* can even be read as a rebuff to the epic-obsessed modernists, as Ginsberg declares: "At last, inquisitive Whitman a modern epic, detonative, Scientific theme / First penned unmindful by Doctor Seaborg with poisonous hand." In Ginsberg's perspective, plutonium so fully redefines the conditions of creation that it produces a new genre: a material "modern epic" in which the atomic inscription subsumes the symbolic one. Historically, the epic has been considered a nation-building tool, and here, that tool is revealed to be a form of the nuclear. Pound's epic, or the "poem including history,"[54] becomes that which remakes history altogether by changing the material conditions from which genres emerge. The claim that plutonium has become the modern epic, a radioactive nation-building tool, pits the ode against this new totality, even as the subject of this ode complicates its own generic conventions.

And yet, despite his resistance to Eliot's version of modernism, *Plutonian Ode* draws on and includes *Waste Land,* the latter forming a type of nuclear pre-consciousness. Though excluded from the printed notes, Ginsberg briefly mentions a direct relationship between his ode and Eliot's poem in his 1978 performance in Buffalo, though this relationship is neither one of

influence nor antagonism. He tells his audience that the words “pacify,” “enrich,” “magnetize” and “destroy,” which are embedded in the poem’s final lines, are aspects of Buddha-nature, which “pacifies, enriches—(pacifies where it can, enriches what’s lacking), magnetizes and draws together, attracts, and what it can’t deal with, destroys—what ignorance is dissolvable, destroys.”[55] He notes that these words “appear earlier in 20th century American literature in ‘give, sympathize, control,’ the end of Eliot’s *Waste Land.*” He does not say that these words *allude to* or *respond* to Eliot, but rather presents them as being already present in Eliot’s “*Datta, dayadhvam, damyata,”* a mantra which, like Ginsberg’s, comes from Eastern spirituality (Hinduism, rather than Buddhism). By imagining that his nuclear-era mantra exists already within Eliot’s (with “enrich” also changing its connotation in the atomic age), Ginsberg expands the reach of the nuclear to a time before “the bomb.” In doing so, he positions *Waste Land,* not as a reflection on the destruction of the Great War or the alienation of modernization, but as a foreshadowing of the still greater destruction to come, the depository that would host the nuclear unconscious already forming within Eliot’s present. The poem’s prophetic position is bolstered by its very title: the waste of *The Waste Land* as intractable and ever-transforming form of the nuclear that Ginsberg addresses and which demonstrates the conditions from which this unconscious—both material and psychological—will arise. And so, while Ginsberg somewhat obfuscates the ode’s relationship to Eliot, the relationship between the two extends the arc of the nuclear age, locating the conditions from which it could arise amidst the detritus and ruin of *The Waste Land.*

Anti-Nuclear Naropa

In a decade that saw continuation of a fruitless war, a major economic recession, the rise of the neo-conservative Right, and Reagan's re-escalation of the Cold War arms race, how did Ginsberg maintain or reform the Beat legacy of being "anti" (establishment, modernist, academia, war, America)?—a stance that had never quite clarified into political ideology, but instead saw freedom of expression as the unwavering cause of art. While poetry might have been wielded as an effective weapon against the state in the 1950's and 60's, by the 1970's, it no longer seemed to threaten the entrenched nuclear-military-industrial complex. And yet, the conversations surrounding the relationship between poetry and politics were perhaps louder than ever before. No longer content with apparently apolitical poetry, many poets in the 1970's were looking to express their identities through their poems as political acts, or else were considering how language itself was an ideology that needed to be interrogated in order to spur political and social change. These differences in method are later called the Poetry Wars, a narrative that many rely on to frame American poetry in the 70's and 80's.[56] However, the Beats were mainly on the sidelines of this war; in fact, Tom Clark's dramatically titled book, *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars,* which recounts a scandal at Naropa called the "Merwin Affair," [57] highlights the exclusion of the Beats from these debates over aesthetics, politics, and identity. And yet, when Ginsberg is under intense scrutiny from the literary and scholarly communities for his role at the Naropa Institute, he generates an anti-nuclear poetics that offers an alternative narrative to the Poetry Wars regarding how poets were refashioning the relationship between poetry and politics—one that sees artistic expression as inseparable from the atomic age.

When Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman were invited to start and co-direct The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics in 1974 (hereafter referred to as the Kerouac School),

they became, for the first time, a permanent part of the academy, no matter how alternative of an institution Naropa Institute prided itself as being. Naropa was the first Buddhist school of higher education in North America and was founded by the much praised and sometimes reviled religious leader Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Waldman's description of the school distinguishes it from the canon-consolidating academe of traditional institutions:

> The Kerouac School is an *akademi* of writing and poetics at which a peripatetic faculty gathers, disperses, and gathers again—a faculty that is out in the world—active, doing things, engaged. The flavor of their teaching is as various as their jobs, their lives, their travels and love affairs, their studies—it is informal, inflammatory, activist—a socratic rap of rhapsody that takes up issues as various as militant naturalism, race, feminism, ethnology, and of course Language.[58]

The emphasis on the erratic and erotic behaviors of the faculty attempts to distance it from the stodgy and stale rules of the academy. However, soon after the school opened, these same attitudes contributed to the occasion of the Merwin Affair, which then called into question the school's poetics and politics and forced Waldman and Ginsberg into the role of academic administrators and defenders of this new institution. During these same tumultuous years, however, Waldman, Ginsberg, and other Naropa faculty and students were regularly participating in the burgeoning anti-nuclear protests focused on the nearby Rocky Flats weapons factory. This anti-nuclear movement, then, became central to Ginsberg and the Beat Generation's identities at a time when their "anti-" legacy was being publicly called into question. It not only provided a cause around which they could shape their politics but generated a poetics that critics considered contradictory to the "authentic" origins of the Beats. Ginsberg's response to those who criticized his actions as an administrator or his activist-oriented poetry was the same: that

they had become indoctrinated with the state's alignment of artistic expression and democracy, which is inseparable from its radioactive nation-building project. To hold late Cold War Ginsberg to the aesthetics of the early Cold War Beats and dismiss the changing relationship between art and politics was to tacitly accept this problematic alliance and its role in proliferating the state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginary.

The Beat movement, as many have argued, encapsulates the literary enclaves that moved from San Francisco to New York and elsewhere—always clustered, it seems, around Ginsberg. And while tracking the boundaries of any movement or aesthetic school is fraught, Beat scholar Bill Morgan argues that the Beat Generation ended with the deaths of Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady**,** and that while "there is no tidy closure for this group," what follows is merely "the later years of each of the participants."[59] Something of the Beat spirit does seem to die with Kerouac and Cassady, in part because their deaths also aligned with the death of the 60's idealism and genuine hope for revolution. However, Morgan's post-mortem on the movement implies that these later years consisted of the remaining Beats living and working individually, only occasionally crossing paths at the odd conference or memorial service. And yet, the founding of the Kerouac School by Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman carved out a new, semi-permanent space for the afterlife of the Beats, akin to what St. Mark's Poetry Project was for the New York poetry scene in the 50's and 60's, as Diane Di Prima, Gregory Corso, Amiri Baraka, Gary Snyder, William Burroughs, Philip Whalen, and many others all spent time teaching and gathering at the school during its first decade.

By situating Ginsberg within his role as co-founder of the Kerouac School in Boulder and as a participant in the Rocky Flats Truth Force, the contours of a beatnik anti-nuclear poetics emerge and help us reframe the legacy of the Beat Generation. This *Plutonian Ode* era of the

Beats is thus institutionally separated from yet connected to the *Howl* era, as by the late 1970's the latter was in the process of being canonized and standardized as scholars had essentially declared both that the Beat movement was over and that it was unavoidably an important part of literary history. In general, literary critics at this time considered Ginsberg's participation in Naropa—his burgeoning Buddhist and political activity—a great detriment to his career. Their critiques considered the "true" Ginsberg to be located somewhere between *Howl* and *Kaddish* and they were unable or unwilling to incorporate Ginsberg's more explicitly political direction into their assessment of his work. Indeed, Naropa did bring together several different strands of Ginsberg's identity, some of which were in direct conflict with one another: Ginsberg-as-poet, Ginsberg-as-activist, and Ginsberg-as-administrator. And yet it is perhaps because of these contradictions, which in some cases appeared to betray the foundations of the Beat aesthetic, that a different perspective on the relationship between politics and poetry emerges, though it was one that proved to be unpopular with literary critics who, while reluctantly accepting the Beats into the canon, felt that Ginsberg's work should remain consistent with the aesthetics of his *Howl*-era writing.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Ginsberg's involvement in the anti-nuclear movement, while offering the late Cold War Beats a political and aesthetic center, diminished the value of his work in the eyes of the academy. Overall, literary critics saw *Plutonian Ode* as a soapbox sermon whose volume was not loud enough to transform it into the avant-garde "scream" of *Howl* and so failed as a *poem* despite its popularity outside of the academy. [60] To them, Ginsberg was betraying the Beat aesthetics he had established with *Howl* by becoming too literary while also betraying the boundaries of poetics by becoming too political. Steven Gould Axelrod reflects this rejection of this new iteration of Ginsberg's aesthetics in his 1984 review of

Plutonian Ode and Other Poems. Axelrod, recalling how he was living just a few miles from both Ginsberg and the Rocky Flats weapons facility during the time of the title poem's writing, acknowledges the importance cultural thrust of *Plutonian Ode,* admitting that: "It was impossible then, as it is impossible now, not to sympathize with the antinuclear sentiments of the piece."[61] However, his sympathies cease when it comes to evaluating the poem as a *poem*: "Yet it is also impossible not to worry about 'Plutonian Ode' as a poem, and about what it indicates concerning Ginsberg's future as a poet."[62] Interestingly, of Ginsberg's major works, Thomas Merrill, in his 1988 biography of Ginsberg, argues that *Plutonian Ode* was his most "literary" poem. *Plutonian Ode* is rich with intertextuality, he argues, as it incorporates "*Waste Land* type footnotes…the classic form of the ode," as well as "allusions galore to Williams, Whitman, Blake, the Bible, most of whom are pressed into the service of a poetic breath."[63] However it is this very "literariness" that Axelrod bemoans and considers to be contrary to the *first thought, best thought* mantra (which, ironically, Ginsberg credits to Chogyam Trungpa of the Naropa school) that had come to represent the long legacy of the Beat tradition and the productive contradictions of *Howl.*

When Axelrod pivots in his review to examine *Plutonian Ode* less as a *poem* and more as a cultural object that might communicate something important about its historical condition, his appreciation of it improves temporarily. He writes: "Since we can hardly foresee a time that is not perplexed by nuclear threat, perhaps that question is trivial when we think about it, and we ought to ask instead whether 'Plutonian Ode' expresses its theme in an enduring and significant way."[64] His conclusion to that hypothetical question is: yes, sometimes, though it also "devolves into mere 'oratory' and becomes "a parody of William Blake and Walt Whitman," leaving Axelrod to conclude that the only way Ginsberg can return to his reputation as an innovative poet

is to "defeat" the "literary voices [he]….mimics so inescapably" and "start over."[65] Axelrod's assessment of Ginsberg's poetic trajectory paved the way for similar critiques following the publication of his *Collected Poems* in 1984, a reception that Ginsberg blamed partially on the neoconservative Reagan revival and partially on the reviewers' own inabilities to move beyond *Howl*. Ginsberg tells Raskin in an interview: "'Most reviewers didn't seem to actually read the book…They were stuck in the past—with *Howl* and *Kaddish*, which they admitted are good, but they mostly argued that I was in decline.'"[66] Perhaps if *Plutonian Ode* had been written in the 50's or 60's it would have been hailed as an important sequel to *Howl;* however by the late 1970's, critics no longer had the capacity to hear Ginsberg's prophetic addresses to the future, not when it was seemingly a foreclosed and immutable nuclear wasteland.

Other critics attributed this apparent decline to Ginsberg's dedication to Buddhism—even longtime friend and editor Lawrence Ferlinghetti thought that his "Buddhist practice really harmed his poetry."[67] Ginsberg's Buddhism, however, was important to his development of a poetics of breath and mind, which was integral to his activist work with the Rocky Flats Truth Force, the organization that led the demonstrations at the weapons factory.[68] During his preamble to a 1979 performance of *Plutonian Ode* in Toronto, in which Ginsberg explains the occasion for its composition, he stresses the role of sitting meditation as a different form of direct action (sitting on the train tracks, that is): "we went and did some sitting meditation on the railroad tracks outside of the Rocky Flats plant, (decided to) sit with the problem, rather than scream at the problem, (I think the problem's, actually, insoluble), so we're just going to sit with it."[69] For Ginsberg, Buddhist practices offered a new way of manifesting the nuclear unconscious—its insolubility and its contradictions. They also offered a way to bring together the political and poetic via the body. If an anti-nuclear poetics was one that acknowledged the symbolic and

materials ways in which forms of the nuclear shape poetic forms, then a poet must also consider the body as inseparable from the process of addressing these conditions. By literally sitting with the problem, by addressing it with words and actions, Ginsberg demonstrates the bodily risk that an anti-nuclear poetics must wager in order to intervene in America's radioactive nation-building project.

While literary critics were questioning the merits of Ginsberg's linkage of poetry and politics, members of the literary community were critiquing Ginsberg's politics in relation to his new institutional affiliation with the Naropa Institute. In a disgruntled response to how the Kerouac School handled the Merwin Affair, Ginsberg is accused not only of betraying the Beat legacy, but of stifling free speech—a movement for which he was once an icon. The May 19-23, 1979 issue of the *Berkeley Barb* features a letter to the editor from Jim Hartz of San Francisco's Intersection Poetry Center in response to an article called "Buddha-gate: Scandal and Cover-up at Naropa Revealed":

> Allen's become sort of a lapdog and apologist for a Tibetan monarchist who loathes anything that smacks of democracy. . . .I think the Beat trip is dead. For the cover of the investigation. . .they ought to have a picture of Allen, in his Uncle Sam hat, wrapped in the Shambhala flag, pissing on Walt Whitman's grave—and Neruda's too!!! At least, Allen as a "Beat" is dead."[70]

The caricature of Ginsberg here paints him as a sell-out and a traitor. Hartz believes that Ginsberg has not only betrayed Whitman, perhaps his greatest poetic influence, but the legacy of the Beats, whose historical resistance to censorship and the establishment has been tarnished by Ginsberg's defense of his new teacher and institution. Instead of giving a middle finger to the party line, he was toeing it.

However, while Hartz accuses Ginsberg of "loath[ing] anything that smacks of democracy," Ginsberg challenges what this concept of democracy represents and interrogates how it has become an accepted ally of artistic expression. If democracy is America's rationale for stemming the spread of communism, the totalizing rallying cry of West's Cold War agenda, then why should poets advocate for this tainted ideology? Ginsberg, in discussing the Merwin Affair and its aftermath, exclaims: "Democracy, nothing! They exploded the atom bomb without asking us. Everybody's defending American democracy…after twenty years of denouncing it as the *pits!*" The equation of artistic expression = free speech = democracy troubles Ginsberg, who suggests this problematic conflation is part of America's radioactive nation-building project. This turn toward the atomic bomb as the ultimate demonstration of democracy's sham of freedom is a defining mantra of Ginsberg's career, though it becomes explicitly defined when he is forced to respond to criticism later in his career. As Jonah Raskin writes, "Ginsberg turned the atom bomb into an all-inclusive metaphor. Everywhere he looked he saw apocalypse and atomization. Everything had been blown up. And almost everywhere he looked he saw the Cold War."[71] And so, while critics attacked his association with Naropa and his teacher Trungpa, he demonstrated the dangerous alliance between American democracy and artistic expression by participating in the Rocky Flats Weapons Factory occupation. Rather than trying to remain true to the image of the liberation-loving, censorship-hating beatnik of the past, he refines his political and poetic positions of the present by foregrounding an anti-nuclear imaginary as the primary vehicle for rethinking poetry's relationship to politics and democracy's relationship to expression.

Ginsberg's resistance to the conflation of democracy and artistic expression names an aspect of what later becomes known as the "Cultural Cold War," during which experimental

artistic movements such as modernism became strategic weapons to woo European intellectuals to the American cause and to demonstrate the merits of democracy in contrast to communism.[72] In *Cold War Modernists,* Greg Barnhisel shows how the deployment of "expression" meant that many well-meaning artists and writers were unwittingly supporting an American agenda they thought their work refuted or at least challenged. As such, "freedom of expression" soon became the rallying cry of pro-West propaganda as well as progressive artistic movements, as was demonstrated through the notable trial against Ginsberg's purportedly obscene *Howl*. Ginsberg's comments reveal that this cultural Cold War not only worked on European intellectuals, but on American artists who thought they had won the war of representation and expression, which were now imbricated with democracy—a democracy, in Ginsberg's view, that was built by and deployed through the nuclear complex. And while his trust in Trungpa may have been misguided, Ginsberg views his ideology as preferable to one that now aligns artistic freedom with democracy and America's radioactive nation-building project. Ginsberg claims that Trungpa "is questioning the very foundations of American democracy," [73] implying that the literary community should interrogate what, exactly, it is supporting by disparaging Trungpa and Naropa and by extension himself and the Beats, in the name of these democratic ideals. The entanglement of artistic freedom with pro-democratic and pro-American ideals is yet another outcome of the radioactive nation-building project, Ginsberg shows, as he links the conflation of these values with the proliferating contradictions of the nuclear unconscious.

In her description of the Rocky Flats anti-nuclear movement, Waldman turns to the psychological underpinnings of the radioactive nation-building project: "This specter of death is built upon neurotic energies of passion, ignorance, aggression…Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant was built on this psychology. Paranoia monitors this condition."[74] Ginsberg draws a similar

parallel in a 1978 issue of *CoEvolution Quarterly,* in which his and Waldman's poems appear side by side. An article by Ginsberg titled "Nuts to Plutonium!" precedes both of them. In it, Ginsberg argues: "As Marxists observe the means of production determining cultural superstructure, so the great ENERGY argument may be interpreted. If the energy is a centralized and poisonous Nuclear base to our culture, a monolithic Surveillance State will result."[75] It is not merely the nature of plutonium, but its complex, secretive networks that enable its production that result in the type of state that Ginsberg views as anathema to freedom. He later describes how this underlying cause has been developed and conditioned over time—the unconscious that has been gradually accumulating into a mass that guides and directs the conscious world: "Psychological inertia remains, the conditioned complex of indolence, fear, luxury and cultivated dependence on robot energy, anxiety over survival, un-disciplines characteristic of our long-developed petrochemicalnuclear addiction."[76] Here, the general anti-establishment, anti-war politics that characterized the 60's and the Beat movement are narrowed and defined through an attempt to trace the intrepid networks of the nuclear-military-industrial complex. The manifestation of such a complex requires something like an anti-nuclear *Howl,* something like *Plutonian Ode.*

If *Howl* marks the beginning of the Beat movement—the jeremiad of the military-industrial complex that banned books and built bombs—then *Plutonian Ode* might be considered the poem that marks the end of this tradition—jeremiad for the now totalizing atomic age. While the fear of instantaneous destruction might have shaped the context of *Howl,* it is the insolubility, as Ginsberg says, of the nuclear condition—the pervasive and ongoing irreparability of fallout and waste and production—that shapes the context of *Plutonian Ode.* Both poems mourn and rail against unjust structures of power, though the latter is largely considered by critics to be

excessive, unoriginal, and unimpressive. However, by considering *Plutonian Ode* as a poem that generated an anti-nuclear imaginary and addressed the buried contradictions of the nuclear unconscious, we not only see the Ginsberg's career and the Beat movement in a new light, but also the trajectory of the anti-nuclear movement and its influence on reconfiguring the relationship between poetry and politics in the 1970's.

Ginsberg was arrested a second time during a demonstration at Rocky Flats on July 9, 1978—thirty-three years after America bombed the city of Nagasaki. This time, rather than reading *Plutonian Ode* at his arraignment, Ginsberg wrote the following on his arrest sheet: "O Unhappy Plutonian Day! Nagasaki radiance remains, remembrance in bodies of many on both hemispheres! Here I walk and breathe, and speak, and write, in a jail cell in Golden!"[77] While not considered part of the poem as it circulates today, this poetic statement conjures the atomic specter again to sustain and supplement the plutonian address he began two months prior. The attention to time and place—on this day, in this cell—demonstrates the effort to specify the embodied conditions of this particular address (while also recalling the "O doomed Plutonium" of *Plutonian Ode*) even as the apostrophe lends itself to universalization. In other words, while *Plutonian Ode* imagines the atomic specter as a totality that is inescapable—inhabiting everything, everywhere—actually addressing this specter requires tending to its specific and embedded material circumstances. It can only be addressed when mediated through texts and bodies together. Without this mediation, this totality is unavailable for address—being everywhere, it easily becomes nowhere. To ignore the material situatedness of this address is to participate in the repression of the nuclear and to unravel the supplemental relationship between poetic language and direct action. In short, it is to rely on representation as the method of manifesting the nuclear. While narratives of speculation and metanarratives of anxiety mediate

the network of nuclear weapons as they shape reality, poetry's capacity for address supplements this narrow grasp of the nuclear by manifesting forms that are latent and prone to repression. Ginsberg's turn toward the many faces and forms of the nuclear allows him to manifest the contradictions that structure America's nuclear unconscious and expose its relationship the state-sponsored nuclear imaginary. As readers of *Plutonian Ode,* we too are interpellated as one of the publics it addresses. Rather than turning away, we must face it.

Chapter Two: Decolonizing the Atomic Frontier: Indigenous Poets at the Black Hills, Test Sites, and Oak Ridge Nuclear Complex

> *"Indian people do not want to be colonized by the energy corporations or the U.S. Departments of Energy and Interior. Indian people demand a right of self-determination, but are subjected to severe repression by three stages of the nuclear fuel cycle."*
> *—Winona LaDuke, 1979*

A map of the Black Hills territory of the greater Sioux nation, which extends from South Dakota into Wyoming and North Dakota, reveals the intertwined projects of energy extraction and settler colonialism cutting across the land[1]: mining sites, from gold to coal to uranium, intersect with waste disposal sites, power plants, and more recently, fracking sites and pipelines. The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty boundary encircles these as well as the communities at the center of this extractive conflict: Pine Ridge and Standing Rock. The long history of resource extraction and land disputes in the Black Hills demonstrates how the settler-colonial project of accumulation is, at its core, about energy. In turn, it is necessary to understand how energy disputes, at their core, depend upon settler colonialism. As environmental studies scholar Traci Brynne Voyles writes in *Wastelanding,* all "environmental injustices, whether on Native lands or lands of other others, must always be viewed through the lens of settler colonialism" due to the centrality of resources to the project of settler colonialism.[2] An article reprinted in *Akwesasne Notes,* a newspaper published by the Mohawk Nation starting in 1968, argues that the mineral extraction of Indigenous territories in the 20th century is a continuation of the forced removal of Native Americans onto lands in the West outside of their ancestral territories.[3] However, upon realizing that the "seemingly useless lands" onto which the U.S. government forced them were actually harboring vast deposits of coal, oil, gas, and uranium, the settler-colonial project of

removal pivoted, using corporate and national interests in energy to expand the boundaries of a nation that depends upon the extraction of Indigenous energy and resources.[4] In the words of anti-nuclear and Indigenous rights activist Winona LaDuke, "They steal our resources, and we work on organizing the people."[5]

This chapter examines the relationship between America's radioactive nation-building project and settler-colonial logics. Indigenous studies scholar Kyle Whyte defines settler colonialism as "a social process by which at least one society seeks to establish its own collective continuance at the expense of the collective continuance of one or more other societies…Settler colonial domination undermines social resilience."[6] Traci Brynne Voyles specifies that "Settler colonialism is a distinct form of colonial power, with a very particular relationship to resources and land….it is a form of colonial power that involves the settler making a home in a land that is already home to indigenous peoples."[7] I argue that the atomic age, specifically the advent of uranium mining and weapons testing on Indigenous land, marks an important moment within this social process, as it simultaneously enables the "collective continuance" of the U.S. as a nation (through the exclusion and oppression of Indigenous peoples) while also threatening its continuance through the expansion of the nuclear arsenal and the increasing threat of nuclear war. The writers explored here demonstrate how the atomic age intensified and transformed the forms and legacies of settler colonialism, extending its frontiers even more deeply, suppressing the lasting harms of this occupation. They suggest that the nuclear era alters the stakes of decolonization, as the radiated, extracted, colonized land cannot simply be "returned" to Indigenous peoples after energy companies have finished extracting its resources. Rather, as Voyles argues, settler colonialism institutes a process of wastelanding, which first assumes "that nonwhite lands are valueless, or valuable only for what can be mined from beneath them," and

then devalues and destroys "those very environs by polluting industries."[8] This key nexus of energy, settler colonialism, and nuclear power thus offers a particular framing of Indigenous-led anti- and de-colonial movements in the U.S., especially the American Indian Movement. This chapter traces how Indigenous resistance to certain manifestations of the nuclear complex—uranium, fallout, and radioactive waste—shape the American Indian Movement generally and how conversations and actions furthering Indigenous sovereignty theorized this atomic extension of the U.S. energy enterprise as connected to its broader history of settler-colonial extraction and the present and future possibilities of decolonization.

The poets I examine in this chapter offer interventions in four representative sites of the atomic frontier—the Black Hills, the Nevada test site, the Trinity test site, and the Oak Ridge nuclear complex. This frontier is peripheral and central, as it is marked as a frontier by the joint military-settler-colonial appropriation of land and resources while it is simultaneously sequestered from public access and knowledge during and long after its occupation. Each of these sites represents a different form of nuclear colonialism as it affects Native Americans, as the feedback loop of settler colonialism and energy extraction furthers America's radioactive nation-building project: Black Hills and uranium mining, military test sites and atomic bombs, Oak Ridge national laboratory and nuclear reactors. Cherokee and Appalachian poet Marilou Awiakta links an atomic "Trail of Fire" to the Cherokee "Trail of Tears" in her poetry collection, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet* (1978) to demonstrate how America's project of nuclear proliferation transforms Indigenous lands into energy frontiers. In situating herself within this nuclear apparatus, she differentiates between the atom as the spiritual and mysterious center of the universe and the atomic as a tool deployed by the state as a weapon of destruction. This distinction reclaims Indigenous ways of knowing that have been overshadowed

by Western science while also complicating the binary of pro- and anti- nuclear arguments. At the atomic proving grounds referred to as the Nevada and Trinity Test Sites, Hopi and Miwok poet Wendy Rose and Yaqui poet Terri Meyette demonstrate how radioactive settler colonialism transforms the narrative of the "Vanishing Native" into the "Vanish*ed* Native" in order to justify the "test" bombs on Indigenous lands. In exposing how the levels of acceptable causalities are constantly adjusted to exclude Indigenous lives and relations, marking them instead as sub- or non-human, they demonstrate how nuclear weapons do not only threaten apocalyptic harm in the future but permit ongoing violence Indigenous peoples. Lastly, Chickasaw poet Linda Hogan's chapbook *Daughters, I Love You* (1981) explores the potential for solidarity between Japanese victims of the atomic bomb and Indigenous victims of uranium mining, linking but also distinguishing between the specific harms these communities have suffered under the imperial reach of America's nuclear project. She too reappropriates the "Vanishing Native" trope, exploring how the nuclear threats of instant annihilation and slow violence "disappear" people, histories, and futures. While her project spans many sites of the atomic frontier, her poem "Black Hills Survival Gathering, 1980," written after attending the anti-nuclear demonstration there, draws together these sites of oppression that have been delinked through the secrecy and suppression of the nuclear complex. The Black Hills, the historical site of energy extraction and colonization which only recently saw the Indigenous demonstrations against the Dakota Access Pipeline, reveals the ongoing effects of settler colonialism's "wastelanding" process and how the nuclear complex alters the stakes of decolonial efforts. Taken together, these poets expose how extractive settler-colonial logics both undergird the U.S. expansion of energy frontiers and sustain the site-specific re-colonization that creates the atomic frontier.

Sites of Extractive Dispossession

Kyle Whyte argues that “anthropogenic climate change is an intensification of environmental change imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonialism.”[9] Indigenous scholar Daniel Wildcat calls the displacement caused by climate change the fourth “removal” for Indigenous peoples in the U.S., the first three being “geographic, social, and psycho-cultural”—the colonization of space, relations, and consciousness.[10] The removal caused by climate change is an accumulation of these preceding removals, which though historically marked, continue on with their lasting effects into the present. The “atomic frontier,” a term I borrow from Marilou Awiakta, denotes another form of removal preceding anthropogenic climate change but also imminent to it, as the long arc of energy extraction propels and enables the displacement of Indigenous peoples.[11] This radioactive stage of removal, however, is not necessarily geographic, in that it does not always lead to the physical relocation of Indigenous peoples, as was the case in the “Indian Removal” campaigns of the 19th century. Rather, it was and continues to be a form of extractive dispossession that not only affects the present, but the future possibility of decolonization, as forms of the nuclear can render land uninhabitable for thousands of years. In other words, even if decolonization is achieved in the return of stolen lands, if these lands have been made into atomic test sites, uranium mines, nuclear reactors, and waste disposal sites, the full aspect of the land cannot be returned or restored.

The production of the atomic frontier follows the same settler-colonial logics of “discovery,” invasion, removal, occupation, and extraction that produced the Western frontier during the early stages of Indigenous displacement and extended genocide perpetrated by settlers in the United States. As Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall discuss in their book *Agents of Repression,* when the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) “discovered” high-grade uranium near the town of Edgemont in the Black Hills in 1952, they subsequently sponsored several “exploratory”

missions that led to extensive mining and milling ventures on historic Lakota land only thirty miles west of Pine Ridge reservation. Though the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) shut down production once extraction became less profitable, and subsequently vacated the area (following the process of "wastelanding" described by Voyles), the project left "3.5 million tons of mill tailing, a sandy waste by-product which retains 75% of the radioactivity found in the original ore," which they dumped into a creek that serves as main tributary for the Cheyenne River, which in turn flows into the Pine Ridge water table.[12] While these atomic settlers may have vacated the land, actual repatriation or rematriation of the land must be coupled with its remediation. The contamination produced by the atomic settlement therefore changes the stakes of decolonization.

In their essay "Decolonization is not a metaphor," Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically."[13] Decolonization, in this sense, is a material action that requires literal, not symbolic, return of land to Indigenous peoples. However, the atomic frontier radioactively salts the earth, such that when or if it is repatriated, the harms of settler colonialism remain, accumulating and embedded in the land, intensifying the psychological and social effects of settler occupation. Voyles is again useful in reframing this toxic iteration of settler colonialism, offering the "haunted house" as an alternative figuration to Ulrich Beck's "boomerang" for thinking of the recursive and expansive effects of toxicity.[14] Voyles argues that "Toxins in particular haunt our lives and bodies in ways that both threaten and beckon morbidity and death; they are supernaturally transhistorical and transboundary."[15] The effects of radiation on genes, which live on through

generation to generation, the persistence of nuclear waste, which is buried and contained but never inert, reflect the type of "undead" perseverance of settler colonialism, which persists in shaping social relations and environments long after the physical space of the "frontier" has shifted and even after decolonization. Nuclear power in its many forms makes material this haunting and imposes new limits and possibilities on the repatriation and rematriation of Indigenous lands. As we will see in Terri Meyette's poem, which contends with the Nevada Test Site, the undead presence of settler colonialism is reinforced by its ideology of *mortem nullius,* which redefines life and death to exclude Indigenous lives and justify the detonation of nuclear weapons on "barren" land where "they say no one died."[16] In contending with the shifting yet persistent haunting presence of the atomic frontier, these poets seek to imagine new avenues for remediated decolonization.

The atomic frontier repeats and intensifies the logics of the Western frontier, which was in part facilitated and justified through the proliferation of the "Vanishing Native" trope. To aid in the expansion of the frontier, settlers in the early 19th century claimed that Native Americans as an undifferentiated group were, or would soon be, extinct. Extinction itself was a newly "discovered" concept, one that helped naturalize the violence committed by settlers on behalf of the state to "remove" Indigenous inhabitants from the expanding nation. It also relegated them to "a world previous to ours"[17]— which was how Georges Cuvier first explained the concept of extinction ("ours" here reflecting the assumption of settler ownership). In contrast to Darwin's evolutionary theory, which he developed in the mid-19th century to postulate how extinction was an ongoing and ever-present condition, Cuvier theorized extinction as a past event. This otherworldly explanation facilitated the removal of Indigenous people from the time and space of the settler-colonial nation-building project. The trope of the "Vanishing Native" also helped

fabricate a "deep history" of America, rendering it comparable to nations whose histories reached back thousands of years. While Native Americans might have 'been here first,' they were rendered as being *too* prior: like the mastodon, they were transformed into fossilized objects of wonder deployed to prop up the still tenuous nationhood of America. This 1825 Independence Day address by Boston banker and amateur poet Charles Sprague encapsulates this logic:

> Here lived and loved another race of beings. Beneath the same sun that rolls over your heads, the Indian hunter pursued the panting deer…Here they warred…Here too they worshipped….And all this has passed away…As a race they have withered from the land…[18]

In this description, Native Americans are relegated to Cuvier's prior world of extinct species, even while many tribes were actively fighting for treaties and negotiations with the U.S. government during this time. Cuvier's event-based extinction is also framed here in natural terms—like corn stalks in the winter, this "race" has "withered" away. In order to explain the mass killing of Native Americans, poets and politicians aligned their "disappearance" with natural laws that were as uncontrollable as the will of God—a force *outside* of human control. As an event, extinction was a foregone conclusion, and as a process, it was an inevitable aspect of life.

As we will see in Wendy Rose's poem addressing Robert Oppenheimer and the Manhattan Project, the atomic age purported to alter these so-called "natural laws," harnessing a god-like power to transform the face of the earth. Nuclear power, similar to extinction, is naturalized through a scientific framework, repurposed as a "technology" that can cut through the complications of social and material conditions. In this iteration of scientific naturalization,

the trope of the "Vanishing Native" returns, though it too is relegated to the past: the "Vanished Native." Rather than needing to be fabricated through narrative, it is a fact already assumed that enables the occupation of land for the production of the atomic frontier: "no one" lives on this open or empty or deserted land; "no one" will be affected by the fallout, run-off, or waste from these "tests." The concept of "vanishing," transforms within the imaginary of atomic bombs as weapons of mass destruction: their power to instantly annihilate people, cultures, and nations. In turn, Indigenous poets self-consciously mediate their relationship to genocidal atomic violence through their historical relationship to pre-atomic genocidal dislocation and disappearance. Linda Hogan, for example, writes about a vision in which her daughter's body appears to disappear only to be replaced by the bodies of children in Hiroshima; she also imagines the women who suddenly disappear elsewhere, leaving no trace of their life behind save the absence of their touch. The threat of atomic annihilation figures as the time-lapse disappearance of the centuries-long extraction of Native American land, culture, and identity. In this way, the atomic frontier becomes a figuration through which these writers condense and apprehend hundreds of years of dislocation and disappearance, connecting the long arc of extraction and energy. Their poems demonstrate the ways in which these colonizing tropes and logics are not only repeated to further the expansion of the nuclear complex, but also how the threat of "vanishing" posed by nuclear annihilation is a form of settler-colonial violence that, ultimately, cannot be controlled by settlers or scientists, tending instead toward the destruction of the system through which it is reproduced.

Another tactic of "disappearance" facilitated by the atomic frontier is what I will call *extractive dispossession:* a form of removal in which land is carved out from below Indigenous people's feet, pieces of reservations previously protected through treaties are cordoned off for the sake of "energy security,"[19] and soil and water are irrevocably altered as radioactive materials

are released to become new and enduring cohabitants of that land. The physical site of the atomic frontier might be located elsewhere—upwind or upstream, outside the contemporary boundaries of Indigenous nations—but it will inevitably drift or seep into and across borders, silently and secretly infiltrating every living thing. The atomic frontier produces a psychological and physical instability as it permeates these boundaries and sovereignties, even when it's nowhere in sight. This radioactive settler colonialism sets the stage for the intensification of fossil-fueled settler colonialism, demonstrating how the culpable operatives—whether the Atomic Energy Commission (or today, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission) or Exxon—suppress the contradictions of its simultaneous nation-destroying and nation-building logics. Radioactivity itself becomes an autonomous colonist that has and will continue to leave an indelible trace on Indigenous nations, even when or if the corporations and the U.S. government that introduced it return that land to Indigenous peoples. This toxic transformation thus complicates the ongoing decolonial efforts of "land back." As energy companies vacate and laboratories leave, the land may on one level be "returned" to Indigenous inhabitants, but it is not the same land: radioactive tailing piles, open pit mines, fallout, and reactor wastes have transformed it into an atomic frontier that will never be fully unoccupied.

How to grapple with this toxic legacy is of central concern to many of the Indigenous writer-activists confronting the long histories of resource extraction under various iterations of the U.S. settler-colonial nation-building project. Kyle Whyte argues that, rather than anticipating climate change's apocalyptic effects, "Indigenous peoples have already endured harmful and rapid environmental transformations due to colonialism and other forms of domination."[20] The production of the atomic frontier by corporations and government entities, often in partnership, marks an interval in this legacy of environmental transformation that entrenches the settler

colonial presence even further by transforming Indigenous lands into national "sacrifice areas." Designating Indigenous lands as such, writes Voyles, " allow industrial modernity to continue to grow and make profits."[21] However, unable to "expand" any further across the surface of the land, these settler-colonial projects of extraction must turn depth-ward, consuming and transforming the buried and unseen environments that nevertheless are integral to the surface. Jason Moore argues that in the era of climate change, our fossil-fueled capitalism is reaching the end of its ability to expand its "commodity frontiers" and appropriate Nature's "free gifts" (what he calls the "four cheaps": labor-power, food, energy, raw materials) to solve its crises.[22] The atomic frontier reveals an earlier source of exhaustion, however, as this particular form of extraction and accumulation resulted in the permanent "sacrifice" of that frontier as a source of value. In other words, the atomic frontier facilitates this crisis of value, as through its damaging actions to build the nation via nuclear weapons and energy, it makes impossible for the near and distant future any further extraction of that frontier. Beyond the vacated fallout zone or the field riddled with non-productive mining pits, the atomic frontier leads to resource exhaustion as well as the impossibility of future production on that site. The atomic frontier accelerates the very crisis it is attempting to solve, and this rupture in the narrative of fossil capitalism intensifies the post-2008 crisis of commodity frontiers Moore defines as near exhaustion.

Indigenous communities on the frontlines of this exhausted atomic frontier frequently read the twinned ventures of nuclear weapons and energy through their shared source: uranium ore, the majority of which is located within Native American nations. As Winona LaDuke explains in a 1974 issue of *Akwesasne Notes,* "We are the 'source' of the nuclear fuel cycle, but not by choice…Indian people are in the process of being recolonized for energy development."[23] Winona LaDuke presses this point further, arguing that the logics of colonization and extraction

are co-constitutive: “Racism, oppression, and death are integral components of the resource development process, and they are all contained within the mining, milling, and technological use of uranium.”[24] Similar to Awiakta’s connection of the Trail of Tears and the Trail of Fire, LaDuke classes this exploitation as only the most recent form of settler colonialism, which is fueled by the need for ever-greater stores of resources to support its capitalist ventures. She writes: “With each generation, the techno-industrial system creates demands for more resources from the land. First it was land for agricultural crops, then for gold, then for iron, then for oil, and now uranium.”[25] It is not simply that America’s nation-building project depends on the destruction of Indigenous nations, but that this project produces new forms of exploitation and extraction that recolonize Indigenous lands, further deferring, and potentially destroying, the possibility of total decolonization.

Women of All Red Nations (WARN), the feminist arm of the American Indian Movement (AIM) that formed in 1978, focused its efforts on documenting how this new form of energy extraction was linked to historical forms of settler-colonial occupation. When discussing their central concerns as a movement, co-founder Pat Bellanger reports, the “bigger issue…is the energy problem, the energy destruction, that is destroying our future, for our grandchildren and the unborn…It’s genocide, what they are doing.”[26] WARN conducted a study on the women who lived on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation southeast of the Black Hills and found that in 1979, 38% of women reported miscarriages before their fifth month of pregnancy, while many of the children who were born at full-term suffered from health complications. They linked these health issues to contaminated water and air from the thirty years of uranium mining and milling that took place in the nearby Black Hills. Tests conducted around this same time by the EPA on wells in reservations in the Southwest also showed high levels of radioactive contamination, though

the government agency resisted linking this contamination to nearby sites of extraction. Congressman Morris Udall of Arizona, responding to these EPA findings argued, "No one knows for sure the source, nature, or extent of the radiation in excess of standards proposed by the EPA."[27] WARN activists, however, were documenting the sources and extent to which extractive practices were turning Indigenous lands into national "sacrifice areas" that were being recolonized to solve the U.S. energy crisis and pledged to resist them: "the U.S. energy policy will be resisted by WARN and Indian people throughout the energy belt. Water is life."[28]

The Indigenous poets I explore in this chapter document and demonstrate the logics and sites of radioactive settler-colonialism's pernicious forms. In focusing on specific sites of extraction and how they intersect with the modes of radioactive nation-building—mining, milling, testing, generating—they expose how settler-colonialism is imbricated with U.S. energy systems. By addressing the toxic legacies of the atomic frontier—the contaminated land that, even when vacated by settlers, still carries the byproducts of colonization in its very water, soil, and air—they imagine what alternative formations of sovereignty, autonomy, and community might exist within these conditions. These forms of resilience and survival offer frameworks for thinking through the doubleness of removal and colonization as well as the doubleness of Indigenous identity. Marilou Awiakta, for example wrestles with how her settler Appalachian ancestry relates to her Cherokee ancestry, positioning herself as someone who both benefits and suffers from America's settler nuclear complex, while Wendy Rose's *Halfbreed Chronicles* addresses her own complicated ancestry and her experience of isolation within Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. In addressing the root contradiction of this radioactive nation-building project—that it purports to protect "the nation" for the present and future while simultaneously destroying that nation and the many sovereign nations it has colonized to sustain itself—these

poets demonstrate how the extractive dispossession of the nuclear complex differentially harms Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous communities and futures.

Settling the Atomic Frontier: The Trail of Fire at the Oak Ridge Nuclear Complex

In her essay in *A Gathering of Spirit,* Marilou Awiakta retells the story of Cherokee dispossession in the 18th-19th century, noting how the white settlers did not value women's input in treaties or politics. She recalls a time when Cherokee leader and first "Beloved Man" Attakullakulla asked the white settler delegation, "Where are your women?"[29] Awiakta argues that with this question he is also asking: "Where is your balance?" and "What is your intent?" as the settlers' exclusion of women signals "irreverence for all."[30] According to Awiakta, women are connected to "Mother Earth/life/spirit" and so their presence in negotiations and positions of power is essential for a healthy community. The question "where are your women?" becomes for Awiakta a refrain that distinguishes settler-colonial relations from the social and political structures of the Cherokee. This disavowal of women also foreshadows the disavowal of Cherokee sovereignty, as Awiakta pinpoints this moment of questioning as the symbolic turning point in Cherokee-settler relations. In her time-lapsed narrative of collective memory, which occupies "a dimension beyond time/space where time stands still—past, present and future are one," Awiakta watches as the white, male delegation refuses to answer this question and sees in their eyes the future collapsing into ruin: "crumpled treaties. Rich farms laid waste…the Cherokee, goaded by soldiers along a snowbound trail toward Oklahoma."[31] She connects the Cherokee "Trail of Tears" to a "Trail of Fire" that will be experienced "by all" if the present conditions of the atomic era do not change. And though she acknowledges the universal effects of possible destruction, her work also seeks to uncover how a colonized form of the atom

participates in the recolonization of Indigenous peoples, specifically the Cherokee post-relocation. Similar to understanding that the production of atomic weapons threatens everyone, Awiakta explores how the settler-colonial logics of the atomic frontier not only harm Indigenous peoples, but settlers too. In doing so, she finds a way to position her own settler and Cherokee histories through their relationship to this frontier, as well as reframing her childhood participation in the nuclear proliferation at Oak Ridge, which signaled the beginning of the atomic era.

Marilou Awiakta (who also published under the name Marilou Bonham Thompson) is best known for her 1994 collection of prose and poetry, *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother's Wisdom* and was "widely regarded as the 'mother of atomic folklore'" during the 1980's.[32] Her 1978 poetry collection, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet,* was also read widely during the 1980's and reprinted six times that decade. Despite this popularity, Awiakta's poetry has not been the subject of sustained critical analysis—either as part of Native American literary movements or feminist movements. Awiakta's poetry collection documents her childhood at the Oak Ridge nuclear complex in Tennessee, the secret production site responsible for enriching the uranium that was used in the atomic bomb deployed by the United States on Hiroshima. Oak Ridge, in the lead-up to Hiroshima, was ostensibly a "secret city," referred to as "Site X," that contained two uranium enrichment plants (K-25 and Y-12), a liquid thermal diffusion plant (S-50), and a plutonium production reactor (X-10 Graphite Reactor, which was nicknamed "The Graphite Queen"). Nearly thirty years later, Awiakta's collection of poetry negotiates the secrecy and surveillance of this site while also trying to document and understand her childhood experience as part of this war machine. Her collection weaves together Cherokee history and settler scientific theories to produce an account of the atom that does not fit neatly

into the ideologies of anti-nuclear activism. She also grapples with what it means for her, as a child with Cherokee ancestors, to grow up in the white company town that was helping to extend the U.S.'s imperial power across the globe. She demonstrates how the scientific rendering of nuclear energy as a force of destruction is linked to the settler-colonial logics that seek to contain and transform what she names instead as "spirit." In exploring the atom as a form of spirit—a source of creation rather than destruction—she theorizes a non-extractive relation between indigeneity and energy, one that models what Métis poet Warren Cariou calls "energy intimacy," which is a "direct and personal relationship" with the sources of energy one relies upon to live.[33]

In the beginning of *Abiding Appalachia,* Awiakta designates the "place where atom and mountain meet" as a site, spirit, and way of relating to one another. It is in this meeting place that Oak Ridge nuclear plant would "release a force older than earth"; it is also the place where spirit abides in "the mountain, in the atom, in the hearts of my people—Cherokee and pioneers."[34] She calls this spirit "A'wi' Usdi', Little Deer," a sacred deer in the Cherokee tradition. Little Deer becomes a symbol that shapes how Awiakta understands the sacred potential of atomic energy. In fact, she designs a visual representation of this unification of spirit, placing a leaping deer within the orbits of an atom where the nucleus would be, with three symmetrically aligned electrons circling it. This harmonious fusing of energy and spirit serves as visual refrain throughout the collection, as it appears at the start of each new section. Awiakta develops a relational logic that prizes the atom's power for its potential to connect life rather than destroy it. She writes: "What the Native Americans refer to as 'spirit,' the scientists call 'energy.' And it's on that deep level of the very source of energy or spirit—the mystery—that these two worldviews meet. A crucial difference is that the Native American concept includes the sacred, and science does not."[35] This collection differentiates itself from others in the anti-nuclear

tradition in that Awiakta's goal does not appear directed at U.S. policy regarding nuclear power, or even in direct protest of the ongoing proliferation of nuclear weapons in and of themselves. Rather, she focuses on remediating the social relations that have been destroyed through the long arc of settler-colonialism that is tending toward a "trail of fire," as the U.S. nuclear complex cannot be understood outside of its extractive dispossession of Indigenous peoples. The form of the collection represents this nested relationship by entwining poems about Native American history, settler history, and atomic history with first-person narrative poems told from the perspective of Awiakta's younger and current selves.

The collection's opening poem, "An Indian Walks in Me," theorizes atomic energy as a binding agent, an ancient and timeless force that exceeds the scientific representation of it. The poem begins:

> Long before I learned the
> universal turn of atoms, I heard
> the spirit's song that binds us
> all as one. And no more
> could I follow any rule
> that split my soul.[36]

Awiakta contrasts ontologies that operate by way of fusion versus fission, a distinction she returns to throughout the collection as she imagines alternative ecological and social relations. Two types of knowing are considered in the slant rhyme of "learned" and "heard." It is simply hearing the "spirit's song" that reveals to the speaker the nature of being in a world that is fundamentally connected. "Learning" atomic theory explains the relations between these parts in scientific terms but only categorizes what she already knew to be true through experience.

Awiakta explains how it is the “Cherokee part” of herself that instructs her to listen to how the leaves, wind, and hawk speak and that each of these manifestations of spirit and speech precede any theory of atomic energy. This poem deconstructs notions of progress that suggest settler scientific concepts should replace Indigenous cosmologies and ontologies and suggests that by recovering the relationship between spirit and energy—showing how the latter grows out of the former—it might be possible to transform our relationship to nuclear energy from being a force that “splits the soul,” to instead being the spirit that “binds us.”

In order to chart the specific cultural, historical, and environmental conditions that shaped her identity as a Cherokee and Appalachian woman, Awiakta poetically documents how settler-colonial logics transformed “spirit” into “energy” and recovers Indigenous theories and figurations of the atom. Blending her own coming-of-age narrative with the development of the Oak Ridge nuclear complex, she details her ongoing struggle to distinguish her Indigenous heritage from the settler project of atomic weapons and energy. *Abiding Appalachia* is hybrid in form, as poems are interspersed with brief personal essays that incorporate settler science, Cherokee stories, and the history of the Oak Ridge nuclear complex told through the perspective of early settlers, Cherokee, her childhood self, and the cultural lore that proliferated in surrounding communities due to the site’s secrecy. The essays “The Removal,” “The Prophet,” “Pine Ridge: Pilgrimage to the Prophet,” and “The Graphite Queen” span in their subjects nearly 150 years, from the Cherokee Trail of Tears in 1838 and the founding of Oak Ridge in 1942 to the transformation of the complex into a national historical monument near the end of the Cold War in the late 1970’s. In weaving together these dispersed events, Awiakta documents how the atomic frontier not only continues the violence of Cherokee displacement, but how this displacement as a settler-colonial practice is imminent within the radioactive nation-building

project. Interspersing poems with these narratives enacts a woven formal structure that Awiakta explains is patterned on specific representations of Cherokee history: the spiral of the ancient Indian ceremonial grounds of Old Stone Fort, Tennessee and the double-woven basket.[37] To read *Abiding,* Awiakta instructs the reader that "Only by following the spiral and reading in sequence can you reach the heart of mystery."[38] This reading practice emulates her desire to re-form atomic energy by recuperating its position as spirit. This spiraling through time, toward a center, organizes the past and future in non-linear and overlapping relation with one another, linking the logics of 19th c. settler-colonialism with 20th c. radioactive nation-building project.

While the two opening sections of *Abiding Appalachia* address the historical conditions of Cherokee Removal, positioning Awiakta as part of the "remnant" that "did remain and is here still,"[39] the second two sections explore the origin and aftermath of the atomic frontier. Opening with the essay "The Prophet," which describes how a settler in the early 20th century foresaw the development that would come to be known as Bear Creek Valley in Tennessee, the section explores the lure and limits of the atom's power to produce a fundamentally new way of being. Rather than upholding accounts of atomic energy's "discovery" as that which ushered in entirely new temporalities and ontologies, Awiakta suggests that these perspectives are colonial appropriations that disregard how Indigenous people have long understood the mystery and effects of atomic energy—well before these systems named and controlled it. The first poem of the section, "Genesis," demonstrates how the concept of a discrete atomic age was a myth perpetuated by settlers to justify colonization. Like all American myths, it required a divine origin and manifest mission to justify the overturning of land and the undertaking of labor, a role filled by atomic energy.

"Genesis" begins as a type of atomic fable that describes how one settler frontier was transformed into yet another:

> Settlers sowed their seed.
>
> Then their sons took the plow and in their turn grew old.
>
> And the mountains abided, steeped in mist.
>
> But in the deep was a quickening of light, a freshening of wind…
>
> And in 1942, as fall leaves embered down toward winter,
>
> > new ground was turned near Black Oak Ridge.
> >
> > The natives pricked their ears.
> >
> > These descendants of old pioneers
> >
> > lifted their heads to scent the wind—
> >
> > A frontier was a-borning"[40]

In this atomic creation story, it is the bomb, not the human, that is the culminating creation. Oak Ridge, which would later be referred to as the birthplace of the atomic bomb, is the ostensible "garden of Eden," perfectly manufactured to serve its purpose for the state. The settlers who already occupy the frontier ready the land for its production, making it fertile for further appropriation through generations of colonization. Out of these conditions, the atomic frontier is born, bringing with it fences and roads and houses, the sudden emergence of which starkly contrasts with the enduring mountains that remain as one version of the frontier gives way to the next. Here, "where mountain and atom meet" marks a consummation of two different temporalities, two different ways of being in the world. The same light that Awiakta was taught to listen to in "An Indian Walks in Me" now quickens into a new form. The same mountains that provided shelter for the Cherokee remnant after the Trail of Tears have become "the sheltering

ridges" between which "they built the Graphite Reactor that split the atom."[41] While many settlers are driven from their land during this process, rather than a decolonizing act that returns the land to its Indigenous inhabitants, this dispersal instead re-colonizes the land, repeating the trauma of removal and occupation. Those who did not leave "joined the energy that flowed toward Black Oak Ridge."[42] They are drawn to transform the land into the atomic frontier "as to a great magnetic power."[43] Atomic power, unlike its parallel figure in the biblical creation story—the sun—does not emit energy but consumes it, a vortex that produces "a new vibration" that "chang[es] rhythms everywhere."[44] In Awiakta's view, it is not the atom itself that causes these changes, but how settler-colonial occupation has fashioned it into a tool of destruction.

In this creation story in reverse, light is sucked out of the environment and captured by the reactor's core, the pitch dark of the "Graphite Queen." The magnetic power of this concentrated form of atomic power moves mountains seemingly all on its own:

> Thousands of people streamed in.
> Bulldozers scraped and moved the earth.
> Factories rose in valleys like Bear Creek
> and houses in droves sprang up among the trees
> and strung out in the lees of ridges.[45]

This new form of energy terraforms and occupies the land even before it fully comes into being. The anticipation alone compels people, renders invisible their labor, and organizes the spaces where productive and reproductive labor will occur. Instead of "people driving bulldozers," animated bulldozers drive themselves as they autonomously clear the way for the frontier to proliferate. Metaphors that might otherwise go unnoticed as commonplace now demonstrate how the machinic production of the city is naturalized: houses "sprang up" like plants among the

forest; factories "rose" high in the air like the sun. The greenwashing of the frontier begins with naturalizing these re-colonizing actions through metaphor. This naturalization helps cultivate the fantasy of industry powered entirely by machine labor, absent the complexities of humans, foretelling the dream of atomic energy: a seemingly endless and endlessly cheap source of energy. However, before this dream can be realized, the way forward must be cleared through the creation of the atomic frontier. This production process utilizes the colonizing logics of early settlers, who first rendered the frontier as "open" or "empty" before forcefully removing the Indigenous inhabitants. Awiakta's time-lapse representation of Oak Ridge's formation through autonomous machine labor demonstrates how these logics stand at the core of America's nation-building project; that, when deemed necessary to sustain itself, it will destroy and displace even those who were previously, under the auspices of building the nation, emissaries of its colonizing work. Settler-colonialism, through this framework, does not only harm Indigenous peoples, but the settlers and settler-state as well. It is the toxic waste that poisons the nation in perpetuity. For "America" to continue to reproduce itself, its new atomic frontier pushes out those who will not help build it. The creation-myth promise of the atomic age is thus inseparable from the destructive logics of settler-colonialism, which transforms land into frontier and place into space that can be managed and reconfigured according to its accumulating needs.

After this time-lapse documentation of the atomic frontier's "birth," the poem shifts from the universalizing angle of fable to the personal perspective of 7-year-old Awiakta. "Genesis" continues:

> …for even at seven
>
> I knew something was stirring in our blood,
>
> something that for years had drawn the family along frontiers

from Virginia to West Virginia, on to Kentucky and Tennessee.

And now, a few miles away, we had a new frontier."[46]

Here, the historical allure of the frontier—an edge that is not merely geospatial, but psychological—draws new settlers to the atomic one. Awiakta includes herself in this group, as she traces the settler part of her Appalachian family's story. The pull of the atom is generational, unescapable; the Genesis framework of the poem demands that all events and stories culminate in the final act of creation: the atomic bomb. Awiakta recalls how she felt herself drawn toward the mystery at the center of Oak Ridge: "the hum grew stronger. / And I longed to go." In the coming-of-age story of Awiakta and Oak Ridge, childhood desire is something Awiakta does not yet have the language to understand or articulate. She can only compare it to "magic" in her naïve framework of what might compel someone to be drawn so strongly to something they haven't even seen. Her desire for the atom, however, differentiates itself from the desire for destruction that Derrida articulates in "No Apocalypse, Not Now." He writes: "Who can swear that our unconscious is not expecting this [nuclear war]? dreaming of it, desiring it?"[47] Whereas Derrida postulates an unconscious drive toward death and destruction, Awiakta locates the desire for the "mystery" of the atom, not the atom itself, as something that's part of her blood, an inherited desire to move toward the edge of what is known. The atomic frontier in this instance is the desire to push beyond the edge of the settled frontier—a desire that holds in tension Awiakta's settler-Appalachian and Native-Cherokee history. Like the mutations caused by radiation that would later be shown to be genetically inherited, Awiakta considers how her desire for the atom and her desire to participate in the atomic frontier emerge from her complex personal and social history. By situating her childhood fantasies about atomic power within this framework, Awiakta explores the complicated story of her identity, establishing a more nuanced

relationship to atomic power than either “pro” or “anti” nuclear narratives could. By aligning her own subject formation with that of Oak Ridge in the before-time of the atomic “Genesis,” Awiakta discovers a form that can hold both her admiration for the atom and its mystery and her resistance to the destructive potentialities represented by its power. How one relates to the atom’s power and mystery determines which aspects of that power are proliferated. And this relation is mediated by the linguistic and social structures that position atomic energy as something that should be controlled or something that should be respected.

Toward the end of the poem, the mysterious pull of the frontier fades when Awiakta’s wonder and longing are redirected toward the forest: “But the woods sounded best to me. / My mind went to them right away…”[48]. The “sound” of the wood drowns out the “magic sound” of Oak Ridge and, following the spiral reading patterns, returns us to the collection’s opening poem in which Awiakta describes learning to “listen” to the spirit that preceded the “universal turn” of atomic energy. In contrast, the hastily built infrastructure of “houses sized by alphabet” that “came precut and boxed”[49] casts doubt upon the eternal promise of the energy they were built to surround. Turning away from the allure of the magic of the nuclear complex and toward the sounds of the enduring mountains, Awiakta’s childhood voice reassures herself of what is constant: “if the frontier grew too strange / my mountains would abide unchanged, old and wise and comforting.”[50] Of course, here too is a childhood fantasy, the desire to believe that whatever was being formed at the center of Oak Ridge would leave “my mountains” untouched. The conflict between desiring what is “strange” and what remains “unchanged,” amplified by the end-rhyme of these two lines, is dissolved rather than resolved by the destruction of both conditions at the end of the poem:

So I kept listening to the hum and longing…

Mother said we'd go someday, in the fullness of time.

And when I was nine the fullness came,

exploding in a mushroom cloud that shook the earth.[51]

The light of Genesis quickens into apocalypse while the fullness of time is rendered as the birth of destruction. The link between Oak Ridge and the atomic bomb is material and metonymic, as the uranium enriched there powered the first atomic bomb intentionally deployed on people. The bomb occupies the teleological end toward which history tends—it produces the fullness of time while at the same time marking the end of it. It is the "fullness" here that explodes as a "mushroom cloud," the bomb itself displaced, hidden within this abstraction of history; and it is the cloud, the signifier of that fullness, that shakes the earth, rather than the bomb itself. This use of synecdoche collapses time to erase the forces that enable this violent erasure. Just as the bulldozers, not the workers, "scraped and moved the earth," the poem represents this culminating moment as both autonomous and removed, even from itself. Even when the secret guarded by chain link fences is finally revealed, it remains unnamable as "the fullness" refers to more than just the atomic bomb itself. Contrary to Derrida's theorization that we unconsciously desire destruction, Awiakta demonstrates how the "fullness" of the bomb's destruction destroys desire. In other words, the birth of this new form of annihilation radically reshapes the relations that make desire possible. Nine-year-old Awiakta's "longing…" is not satisfied by her mother's reassurance but is instead destroyed through the revelation of the mystery she once desired: the ellipsis extending her reach for the object she will never grasp.

Awiakta and Oak Ridge share a defining coming-of-age moment. For nine-year-old Awiakta, this moment is marked by the betrayal of what she longed for, as she simultaneously realizes Oak Ridge's real purpose and fails to fully articulate how this revelation alters her own

relation to herself and her desire. From this point on, the collection turns a newly critical eye toward the cemesto cabins, the containing fences, and the "test cow" that is "radioactive" and "locked behind a fence."[52] Appearing at the center of the collection rather than the beginning, "Genesis" signals a rupture in time for Awiakta as well as the world. However, the spiraling reading pattern of the text resists the ideology that this rupture produces an entirely new consciousness or "age," and instead returns to the underlying settler-colonial logics that connect the Trail of Tears to a Trail of Fire.

This connection continues as Awiakta links the Cold War logics of containment to the historical "Indian Removal" campaigns waged by settlers. In the section following "Genesis," Awiakta describes the surveillance state of Oak Ridge from her perspective as a child, exploring the ways she was taught to normalize these structures of containment and secrecy. Even the infrastructure surrounding the reactors worked to produce appropriately "nuclear" families that became part of the wider network of protection woven around the atomic center. Her house, she recalls, was a model "B" cabin, one of four options available to residents who passed as white. The houses of this newly built labor town were in turn surrounded by a fence that designated who was "in" or "out." At first, she thinks these demarcations are there to protect her and her family; however, she soon comes to understand them as technologies that contained yet separated workers and residents, including herself as a child. In the present tense of her past self, she reflects: "We're sheltered in the secret / and free to play / as long as we stay / inside the fence."[53] To be "sheltered" within "the secret" is to be made complicit in the structures that help obscure and suppress the nuclear complex, the structures that, on the surface, deploy containment as a strategy directed toward external enemies. With freedom contingent on this containment, Awiakta demonstrates how the atomic logics of this frontier mark every inhabitant as a potential

threat, working to partition knowledge and constrain communication beyond, and even within, the scope of the nuclear family. Even “relatives and friends” are required to check-in at the guard gate, no longer able to “drop in,” as the state now controls the means that determine the intimacy of these social relations.[54]

Containment on the atomic frontier is a method for limiting the spread of information as well as radiation, justifying new biopolitical methods of documentation. Interestingly, it is the children, not the adults, who understand that the “enemy” is not “far away” but actually “pressing / on the fence”;[55] the enemy is both the fence itself and those who enforce its perimeter, keeping them in rather than keeping harm out. This meditation on the uncontainable reach of containment shows how the structural logics of settler-colonialism are not limited to expulsion and appropriation of Indigenous peoples but have been sharpened through this atomic project to control those in settler positions as well, a position that Awiakta’s family unit ostensibly occupies within the purview of the complex. This extension of settler-colonial logic does not diminish the differential harm that Indigenous peoples have and continue to experience; rather, like the universal yet targeted threat of the atomic bomb, Awiakta navigates how certain forms of violence can be a threat to everyone as well as a specific threat to certain communities. Reading settler-colonial logics through the nuclear complex exposes the tension of navigating these scales and temporalities of violence that are built into the very infrastructure mediating social relations.

Toward the end of this section of the book, there is a sudden shift from the child speaker to the voice of Tsali, the Cherokee warrior who Awiakta addresses in the beginning of the collection and who led the resistance against Cherokee removal. “Tsali’s Return” is a short poem punctuated with a promise voiced in the continuous present tense: “I come.”[56] Tsali is

"returning" both in the narrative of the collection and in the historical formation of the frontier. This short lyric interrupts the otherwise unrelenting narrative of Oak Ridge's "progress" and repositions the atomic city within a history marked by layered forms of settler-colonial containment. Central to this poem and the collection's spiraling structure is Tsali's promise to imminently return "in the honing cry of the wind."[57] Here, the wind works as an agential force that evades the state's structures of containment; it is a secret code that travels in the open, holding meaning only for those who have learned how to "listen," returning us to Awiakta's learning process in "An Indian Walks in Me." What began for the poet as a way of understanding the interconnection of nature and culture, resurfaces in the atomic frontier as a method of resisting state logics of containment. The poem also invokes the opening lines of "Genesis" wherein the premonition of the bomb comes on the wind: the settlers lifted their heads to "scent the wind" while "the natives pricked their ears," listening.[58] Tsali's return is enabled by a method of listening that resists and circumvents the state infrastructures that seek to suppress him and his history.

In the final section of the collection, Awiakta describes Oak Ridge from her perspective as an adult, revisiting the graveyards and woods surrounding the now decommissioned graphite reactor, which is designated as a historical landmark. In a prose poem, she reflects on her relationship to the atom as a child—how it filled her with wonder and hope like poetry—before it became subject to the weaponized logics of proliferation:

> The atom was poetry in my childhood…Then the atom went awry…was alien….They'd split the nucleus in those days—neat, precise, controlled—and described it in heavy, concrete prose. But the language didn't fit.[59]

Like the concrete poured to encase the reactor's graphite core, scientific methods and discourse controlled and transformed the atom, extracting energy from spirit. Even discussing this transformation alters the form of her expression, as she shifts from the traditional line and stanza form of the poems preceding this one to paragraphs interrupted by ellipses. However, this untitled interjection also differentiates itself from the essays that appear across the collection. This intermediary form, between poem and prose, approaches the meeting place between "mountain and atom," the language that might "fit." Poetry here is associated with both the naivete and magic of childhood—a mixture of not knowing and not being able to know the truth of what was hidden behind the object of wonder. Poetry in this context could touch but not contain the atom's mystery. In contrast, the methodical transformation of the atom for the purposes of nation-building was facilitated by structures that could contain its mystery—description being the ideological form of containment.

As her forms interweave and return, searching for language that approaches without containing, respects without controlling, Awiakta does not reach a resolution as much as a "deeper kind of knowing."[60] The collection's final poem "Where Mountain and Atom Meet" imagines the atom splitting in secret, deep inside the earth, its only trace "a fine blue glow" that reflects the "smoke-blue" haze on the mountain.[61] This return to the abiding power of the mountains, the mystery of atomic spirit, demonstrates the forms that keep alive alternative ways of knowing and being, even when the surface has been appropriated and colonized. This hidden knowledge resides both "deep below the valley waters" and within "the soul,"[62] connecting people to place as "deep calls out to deep / and the mountains call their children home."[63] While this abiding relation survives the rupture wrought by the atomic frontier, the frontier's own logics rupture its teleological end. Awiakta's rendering of the atomic frontier throughout the

collection reveals how settler-colonial logics work against themselves, destroying the people and resources extracted to further the growth of the nation as well as the possibility of the nation itself. Written at the height of the anti-nuclear and anti-uranium mining movements in the late 1970's, Awiakta reaches back to a time before the atomic era was fully "born" to expose the logics that methodically produced this rupture: the exclusion of women in settler delegations, the forced march of Cherokee and other Indigenous peoples to Oklahoma, the pattern of extractive dispossession, all of which lead to, but also extend beyond, the production of the atomic frontier and its subsequent "Trail of Fire."

Unsettling the Atomic Frontier at the Trinity and Nevada Test Sites

A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women (1984), edited by Beth Brandt, is the first collection of writing published in the U.S. to solely feature Indigenous women. The collection contains prose and poetry by well-known writers like Winona LaDuke and Joy Harjo as well as writers who had never before been published. Unsurprisingly, given the influence of WARN in the Indigenous feminist movement at this time, many of the essays and poems touched on questions of energy, including nuclear energy and uranium, as well as other expressions of environmental violence that Indigenous women were fighting on the frontlines. One of the less well-known poets, Terri Meyette, who describes herself as "Yaqui…a lesbian and a poet…currently incarcerated in Santa Maria prison in Goodyear, Arizona," offers one of the most compelling critiques of how the Manhattan Project used settler-colonial logics to justify the creation of the Nevada Test Site.[64] Her poem "Celebration 1982" demonstrates how the colonial logic of *terra nullius,* which figures land as empty or unused so as to justify settlement, serves as a precursor to the neocolonial nuclear logic that I will call *mortem nullius:* the justification of

atomic testing and other ecological violence based on the claim that it will result in "no deaths." The poem develops this logic through its repetition of anonymous nuke-speak: "They say no one died."[65] This refrain demonstrates how this logic proliferates, shaping past and present realities, and develops as a biopolitical measurement that enforces a particular hierarchy of life within America's radioactive nation-building project. Voyles, commenting on how Navajo activists refer to abandoned uranium mines as "zombie mines," considers how this portrait of nuclear power as "undead…provides a compelling metaphor that suggests connections to larger systems of the threat and promise of environmental and social ruin in an increasingly toxic world."[66] Meyette's figuration of life and death within this poem offers a way of thinking through the line between "unliving" and "undead" that the nuclear complex erases and redraws. This framework accounts for the other-than-human and more-than-deadly forms of harm that result from the destructive force and aftermath of nuclear bombs and yet do not "count" as casualties within the settler classifications of life and death.

The poem begins its subversion of this lethal justification by redefining who counts as living and what counts as dying on the land that is marked as a sacrifice zone: "Tiny desert flower / micro beetle bug / are they not life?"[67] These small, specific formations of life are contrasted with the expansive and anonymous "authority" that defines life as an exclusive human quality:

> Scientist, unconscious
>
> mushroom button pushers,
>
> Secretary of Defense what's his name,
>
> President what's his name,
>
> when will they be tried[68]

Nameless politicians and scientists determine what counts as life and what defines reality. The "unconscious / mushroom button pushers" are the invisible hand that guides the logic of *mortem nullius*: the imagined big red button that deploys atomic bombs is fused with the over-saturated sign of the bomb's aftermath: the mushroom cloud. This hybrid figuration of the "mushroom button" works by the logic of metonym and metaphor to empty the sign of its power. First, it establishes metonymic logic—the causal and relational chain of meaning of button to bomb to mushroom cloud—and then removes the central referent: the bomb. The result is absurd, nearly comical, when the logic of the resulting metaphor is examined: an unconscious scientist pushing a mushroom-shaped button or a button that conjures a mushroom, not a bomb. That "button" is a generic name for a common varietal of mushroom adds to the absurdity rendered in this conflation of these signifiers detached from their violent referent. In removing the "bomb" from the metonymic equation, the resulting metaphor and its erasure of the central referent first performs and then subverts the logic that undergirds a policy of *mortem nullius.* While *mortem nullius* erases life (through biopolitical redefinition) to justify the erasure of the living, Meyette's figuration of the "mushroom button" reveals the absurdity of that logic at work by erasing the violent signifier (the bomb) and collapsing cause (the button) and effect (the mushroom cloud). For these "mushroom button pushers" to say that "no one died" after the testing of an atomic bomb is to erase or modify the central referent to which "no one" refers and suppress the effects of that violence. And as this poem demonstrates, there is an entire ecosystem of life that has already died, will die, or has been violated by the atomic complex, and it is the work of the poem to erase the erasure proliferated by this settler-colonial logic.

Midway through the poem, regular stanzas and syntax begin to deteriorate as this logic is exposed for what it is: the state-sanctioned killing of those who are deemed outside the category of "the human":

> It wasn't enough
> in "45"
> Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
>
> They say no one died.
> Nevada desert
> 1000 miles into her bowels
> earth melted.
>
> radiation, radiation, radiation,
> radiation.
>
> oozed into blood
> of Shoshone and Paiute.[69]

The line "it wasn't enough" figures the logic of *mortem nullius* as an insatiable force that must continue to devour in order to survive. Here, the refrain of "They said no one died" can be read as a shared justification for the bombing of Japan and the Nevada "test" bombs, as the value of non-American lives are aligned with the value of the desert and the earth in this radioactive and neocolonial framework. The definition of what or who counts as living narrows even further: one must not only be human, but American. Or: to be American is to be fully human. The fragmented

stanza repeating "radiation" extends this history of destruction into a deep time structured by generational time that reveals the stakes of these so-called tests on the future of the Shoshone and Paiute peoples. Indigenous lives, according to this framework, exist outside the narrow definition of the American human, counting instead as "no one" or as suffering from a violence nonequivalent with death. The singular "They" in "They say no one died" then, becomes a type of cyclops: "closing their eye," the poem continues, "they dismissed death / dismissed life." As the definition of life is narrowed through each deployment of the bomb, test or no, so too is the structure that reinforces that logic, the faceless scientific and political actors merging into a solitary I and eye that is "blinded / by white flash / their God."[70]

Seen through this framework, the giant nuclear complex can claim "no one" was killed because "They" have designated the Japanese, the Shoshone and Paiute, the earth and the desert flower as "no one," collapsing these people and sites into a singular entity to reflect its own monolithic form.[71] This settler-colonial logic justifies and excuses the death of "no one" in the same breath, enabling the proliferation of weapons and tests to continue unabated. The violence that melts the bowels of the earth, while hidden from view, surfaces in an ongoing futurity that draws from this source of life: "The bomb lasted minutes / the intent lasts generations / in the womb of Creation, herself."[72] Meyette's figuration of the "womb of Creation, herself" as a site and figure that remembers and retains the violence of an instant for many generations fuses the undead and the unborn as co-constitutive.

In *Radiation Nation,* Natasha Zaretsky argues that the "unborn child" served as a malleable figure for anti-nuclear and anti-abortion advocacy and was "often portrayed as the industry's most vulnerable and defenseless victim."[73] And while Zaretsky demonstrates how this figure and the focus on reproduction helps link the nuclear age with the emergent ecological one

in the 1970's, Meyette troubles both this figure and the environmentally inflected discourse being deployed in the anti-nuclear movement. She shows how the figure of the "unborn" can justify proliferation *or* disarmament: the former because nuclear weapons are said to protect the future by preserving the nation and the latter due to dangers of fallout, the longevity of waste, and destruction of war. To justify violence by claiming "no one died" is to diminish the harm that exceeds the limits of life and death; similarly, the atomic desecration of tribal land harms the site that produces the conditions for life, not simply individual people yet to be born. "Creation, herself" is personified, both site-specific and far-reaching. As such, this figuration demonstrates how to value many forms of life without relying on the metrics of what counts as life or death according to nuclear and settler-colonial imaginaries. This specificity works to reveal the contradictions underlying the abstract, nameless, faceless logic of a neocolonial nuclear state that calls bombs "tests" and justifies them by claiming "no one died."

The relationship between the "bomb" as a site- and time-specific event and the "intent that lasts generations" that is lodged within "the womb of Creation" refutes the tools of measurement and risk assessment that the state uses to diminish the threat of the nuclear project on present and future generations. By rendering intent as a material, akin to nuclear waste or radiation, yet not conflating it with those forms, Meyette's figuration of the unborn does not conform to the logic of *mortem nullius,* which can claim that no one died through its biopolitical redefinition of life and death. She also does not claim that these current or future generations will die, which fetishizes death as the measure of what forms of violence remain within "acceptable limits." Instead, she demonstrates how the effects of the bomb are disproportionately and materially bound to Indigenous communities, even if the Geiger counter or fallout zone indicates otherwise. The "intent" that alters future generations, human and more-than-human, is an

extension of the settler-colonial logic that intends to and then justifies erasing communities and places, rendering them exchangeable. By tending to the precise communities affected by these specific atomic bombs—the Shoshone and Paiute, who have together experienced over 1,000 nuclear denotations above and below their historic land—and by expanding the definition of fallout to include "intent," Meyette's figuration of future generations can be transported forward in time to show the extent of this pattern of violence while remaining grounded in the history of a specific place and community. As such, it is less available to be co-opted by political movements and coalitions like the figure of the unborn, which is emptied of its significance only to be filled with the rhetoric that does not interrogate the settler-colonial structures supporting America's radioactive nation-building project. As Meyette's poem demonstrates, the logic of "no one died" participates in the historical trope of the "Vanishing Native," which in this recalibration facilitated the more permanent the state of the "Vanish*ed* Native." This narrative in turn cleared the way for the production of the atomic frontier and its accompanying violence.

Hopi and Miwok poet Wendy Rose, whose work also appears in the *Gathering of Spirit,* similarly grapples with the legacy of the Manhattan Project and how it both proliferated and suppressed the enduring effects of the settler-colonial nuclear complex. The White Sands Trinity Test Site in New Mexico, host to a singular atomic detonation in 1945, irrevocably marked the start of the global nuclear age, though uranium mining on Indigenous lands preceding this event had already marked the start of radioactive settler-colonialism. Rose's poem titled "Robert," published in her 1985 poetry collection *The Halfbreed Chronicles and Other Poems,* addresses the "Father" of the nuclear bomb, Robert Oppenheimer. In it, "Robert" is represented as a personified figure who has lost his ability to be addressed as a person, as his whole identity has been consumed through the production and detonation of the atomic bomb. The poem explores

the "vanishing power" of the atomic frontier, redirecting the figurations that were used to negate Indigenous presence back onto the settlers themselves.

The epigraph of "Robert" features the often-quoted words of Oppenheimer after the Trinity detonation, which he himself draws from the Bhagavad-Gita: "I am death, the destroyer of worlds."[74] Rose pairs this vatic statement with another made by Oppenheimer in a lecture at Massachusetts Technical Institute two years after the detonation: "the physicists have known sin and this is a knowledge they cannot lose."[75] Oppenheimer's spiritual allusions and sublime rendering of the atomic bomb's "greatness" contrasts with the poem's familiar and intimate title, "Robert," who is addressed but not invited to respond throughout the poem. While Rose uses the second person "you" to describe what "Robert" is doing and thinking, she does so at a distance, as if he were the subject of an experiment that she is merely observing—talking about and toward, but not directly addressing. Through this indirect address, Rose demystifies and banalizes this so-called "Father" of the atomic bomb by showing how "ordinary" the bomb's violence is. In doing so, she does not ignore its harmful effects, but instead demonstrates how typically "human" it is to create such an inhuman and, in Oppenheimer's figuration—divine—form of violence. Rose de-figures and de-hyperbolizes Oppenheimer's awestruck regard of the atomic bomb to show how, as with the settler-colonial logics that preceded it, ordinary people have always been capable of producing extraordinary violence, and there is no divine explanation needed to understand this fact. Rather than provoking the sublime, spiritual crisis that Oppenheimer substantiates with his references to death and sin, Rose reveals how the atomic bomb is yet another expression of settler-colonial violence produced by yet another man who had never before witnessed world-ending violence.

Following the epigraph, the body of the poem opens with a view of Robert mid-transformation: He is in the process of becoming death, holding within his body the effects of the atomic bomb. Rose speaks toward Robert: "the lines of your arteries / begin to glow   making maps."[76] Maps are the colonial technology that transforms land into space, measuring and marking out the extent of territory and the location of resources that may yet be extracted. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Rose discusses the many forms colonialism takes across time: "first comes the explorer, then comes the military, then comes the missionary, then comes the anthropologist, then comes the tourist."[77] "Robert" is figured as both the explorer and the map, the technologies he helped produced now fused with his body. Robert, however, is "afraid": his skin "pale like the alamagordo sky / the white lizards in the sand."[78] Rather than asserting his presence on the place, transforming it in his image, he is transformed by that which he thought he controlled: the White Sands "Missile Range" southwest of Alamogordo, now referred to as the "Trinity Site" in the Jornada del Muerto (Route of the Dead Man) Valley. The secret Trinity detonation occurred within the vicinity of 19 Native American pueblos, two Apache tribes, parts of the Navajo Nation, as well as unsuspecting residents of the city of Alamogordo; as studies would later estimate, a total of 19,000 people were within 50 miles of the blast when it occurred.[79] Rose here folds Oppenheimer into the narrative of the "Vanishing Native," as the project he created now causes him to disappear, his body transformed into his creation, colonized by the harm he has unleashed on the world. His failing body substitutes for one of the sites on the map that mark the boundaries of the atomic frontier: "los alamos / trinity   alamogordo   (frail robert) / jornada de muerto."[80] Diminished even further by this lower-cased aside within the parenthesis, "Robert" is both out of place and *of* place, his previously extraordinary, archetypal position consumed by the places he tried to transform that instead transformed him. Rose renders

Oppenheimer as the failed explorer who, rather than getting his name on the map to mark his conquest, becomes the map itself, as he shields himself from the effects of what he has made: "you crouch / in the bunker   hands to your eyes."[81]

Bisecting the poem halfway through what is otherwise a single stanza, is a left-aligned piece of direct speech from Oppenheimer who, trembling and crouching in the bunker, is "speaking to / transparent friends or to no one / in particular."[82] He tells these ghostly others: "It's amazing how / the tools, the technology / trap one."[83] Distancing himself from his culpability in shaping these tools, Oppenheimer frames himself as an object acted upon by the technics of the nuclear complex, equally determined by its power as those it has vanished in order to reproduce the frontier as a proving ground. Rose carries his naïve amazement forward to his detachment from his own body, which continues to transform: "& you are amazed at the welts / so wide on your wrists, those chains / enormous from your belt." Oppenheimer's "trap" is of his own making, Rose shows. Chained to himself, he has created the conditions through which he has been rendered as an extension of this atomic frontier, while others are appropriated and transformed without choice.

The second half of the poem explicates the sexual and patriarchal logics of the bomb, which surface casually in the name "Little Boy," for example (the name of the atomic bomb that the U.S. deployed on Hiroshima), as well as the moniker later worn by Oppenheimer: "Father" of the atomic bomb. As Joseph Masco argues, this biological and masculine figuration continued throughout the Cold War, as the codes used to report successful detonations—"it's a boy"—demonstrated how "weapons scientists were not only positively valuing their achievement as a form of creation, but also working to contain linguistically the destructive reality of the event."[84] Rose, rather than refuting this figuration, amplifies it, exploring the logical effects of its power.

With no "mother" of the atomic bomb, Oppenheimer is rendered as a masturbatory progenitor who forsakes the ties of his marriage for his atomic love affair:

> not even your wife was awake
>
> morning pivot of your life
>
> the radio groaned   you twisted
>
> the knob feeling[85].

The "pivot" of his life is one he himself is not even present for, witnessing it through transmission. He hears through the radio how his "kids went screaming / from the crotch of the plane / mouth-first."[86] Oppenheimer, in whose veins glows atomic power, has found the perfect surrogate for his creation: the war plane that births his progeny, which are at once multiple and singular—the "kids" with a singular "mouth." Here Rose compresses the event of the Trinity bomb and the Hiroshima bomb (called by the military "Little Boy"), demonstrating how this atomic progeny continues to proliferate. Oppenheimer's kids devour mouth-first the "play yard & roof top / & garden & temple" as well as "hair & flesh…steel & clay."[87] Though this destructive task is masked as an act of creation, Rose deflates the figure of Oppenheimer as the ur-Father by showing how even he cannot escape the violence he has created. Oppenheimer, rather than a conquering hero, is instead alone in his bunker, vomiting and crying, his "own fingerprints" perpetually preserved "in the ashes" of destruction.[88] Here the trope of the genius scientist peering into the minute innerworkings of matter and energy is likewise destroyed, as that which he has created overpowers and exceeds his controlled experiments. "Robert," the person, is erased, replaced by the destruction he unleashed on the world. Rose is not merely showing how he stands in for the hidden and disarticulated workings of the nuclear complex but demonstrates how the transformative logics of settler colonialism abstract and "vanish"

personhood, leaving in its stead a legacy of violence. In applying these logics on lower-case "robert," Rose enacts a decolonial de-figuration that deflates the sublime symbols and tools of colonization and turns them back upon their exceptionally ordinary makers. Through their inversion of settler-colonial tools of vanishing, displacement, and occupation, both Meyette and Rose demonstrate the historical and ongoing effects of the atomic frontier while also modeling forms of resistance that, while unable to remediate the land to a pre-atomic, pre-colonized state of wholeness, offer methods of reclaiming land and personhood that has been systematically erased.

The Disappeared and the Atomic Frontier: From Hiroshima to the Black Hills

The Black Hills, known as "Paha Sapa" in Lakota, is a holy site. It is also a contested site and has for the past two centuries become the physical and symbolic representation of how U.S. energy policy depends upon and enables extractive settler-colonial logics. A brief overview of the conflicts between the Lakota and various U.S. agencies and military operations, which centered on the Black Hills: In 1874, the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, which clearly designated the boundaries of the sovereign Lakota nation to include the Black Hills, was violated when a Jesuit missionary trespassing on the land reported to the local *Sioux Falls* newspaper that he believed there was gold in the Black Hills.[89] Subsequently, a contingent of the U.S. army led by Lt. Colonel Custer and sanctioned by President Lincoln invaded the Lakota nation under the auspices of an exploratory expedition for gold. A series of battles ensued as the U.S. government attempted to extract a forced cession of the Black Hills, which it now deemed a valuable mineral reserve. After expropriating the bulk of the Lakota land, the U.S. government then passed laws outlawing spiritual practices and altering land ownership customs (under the "Dawes Act") to

further chip away at Indigenous sovereignty. Lakota resistance leaders, including Sitting Bull, were assassinated by the army, aggressions that culminated in the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890 when the U.S. military killed hundreds of unarmed Lakota men, women, and children.

Nearly a century later, in 1973, American Indian Movement (AIM) activists chose to occupy Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation as a historical and symbolic site of protest. And a few years after that, in 1979, the Black Hills Alliance (BHA) was formed to protest the uranium mining and prospecting that was accelerating in and around the Black Hills that decade. At the time, over twenty-seven corporations were exploring one million acres across South Dakota for uranium: the "yellow" gold rush.[90] The BHA consisted of AIM and WARN members as well as some of the settler ranchers and farmers living in nearby towns who aligned with Indigenous tribes and anti-nuclear activists on concerns about the contamination and occupation of the land. Katsi Cook, member of WARN, foretold the importance of the site in the ensuing energy wars: "It may be that the Black Hills will become the national symbol of resistance to uranium mining…this is not just for us, this is to safeguard all life, everywhere. Uranium mining is the ultimate threat to our very survival."[91]

A year after the formation of the BHA, the Black Hills Survival Gathering took place in from July 18-27, 1980. It was reported that "over ten thousand women, children, and men from 23 Indian nations, and 36 other nations around the world" joined together for a week of training, learning, skill- and knowledge-sharing and planning.[92] The primary goal of the gathering was to determine how to "defend the Black Hills area from its 'planned destruction' as a 'national sacrifice area'"[93] due to uranium mining and milling.[94] This diverse, multi-national coalition not only shows the extent to which the Black Hills had become a representative site for material and symbolic demonstration over the past two centuries of Indigenous resistance against energy

extraction, but also how integral Indigenous resistance was (and continues to be) to the anti-nuclear movement.

Indigenous nations have been on the frontlines of the anti-nuclear movement since the Manhattan Project began building its labs and facilities at the start of World War Two. And when Kerr McGee opened its first uranium mine in Navajo Nation in the 1950's to fuel the production of nuclear weapons, Indigenous peoples became leaders in the resistance against the phase of the nuclear fuel cycle most often overlooked by pro- and anti-nuclear proponents alike. Mines for radioactive uranium intensified the extractive logics of coal, gold, and other minerals before that, as its local effects persisted long after the mines were abandoned. When corporations left as soon as the mines became unprofitable, as Kerr McGee did in the 1970's, the inhabitants of the area were left with radioactive tailings, open pits, and contaminated water while the formerly employed miners suffered from severe health problems and frequently died of lung cancer.[95] And so, while the actions of the Black Hills Alliance led to the temporary cessation of uranium mining in the Black Hills area in the 1980's, the land was left with contamination that would take at minimum decades to remediate, even if there was any effort by the corporations and the U.S. entities to do so (the US Forest Service, EPA, and Bureau of Land Management are a few of the responsible parties). Furthermore, exploration for uranium ore, and later for fracking sites and pipeline routes (such as the Dakota Access Pipeline), picked up again beginning in the 1990's and has continued well into the 21st century, continuing the centuries-long extractive dispossession of this sacred site.

Chickasaw poet and activist Linda Hogan was one of the participants in the 1980 Black Hills Gathering for Survival and writes about the experience in her 1981 chapbook, *Daughters, I Love You,* which later appears as a section within her full-length collection *Eclipse* in 1983. In

her introduction to the chapbook, Laguna Pueblo poet Paula Gunn Allen aligns the prospect of "instant disappearance" from nuclear annihilation with the experience of "American Indians, who daily, for five hundred years, have lived in the face of imminent disappearance."[96] Across this collection, Hogan integrates these historical and material threats of disappearance by extending the scope uranium mining, occupation, and extraction to include the experiences of Japanese survivors and victims of the atomic bomb in addition to women in Russia and India who were affected by the international reach of the nuclear complex. The dedication page of the collection should be read as a poem itself, titled "Dedications":

> These poems are dedicated to the Navajo women
> Who have been struggling for their lives and
> safety against the multi-national corporations.
>
> They are dedicated to Sister Rosalie Bertell, M.D.
> whose words reached me at the Black Hills
> Alliance International Survival Gathering.
> She said, "Everywhere I go, women are grieving
> the death of the species. You can either turn it
> around or help it to die."[97]

"Dedications" continues for two more stanzas, addressing women who are mourning the planet and "my Lakota daughters and the children of all women." Hogan situates the plight of all women and Indigenous women in particular as an intersectional nexus that must struggle to survive within a multi-national, corporate, nuclear complex, one that has initiated the "death process" of the planet and distributed the effects of this process across the globe, making the web

of culpability nearly untraceable and certainty unprovable in any legal sense. The collection holds to account this nameless web of corporate antagonists by centering the voices of women who have always been on the frontlines of survival.

The collection as a whole address these "daughters of all women," Hogan's "Lakota daughters" and the women around the world who have been harmed by the nuclear complex. As the collection progresses, Hogan moves from a focus on the U.S. attack on Hiroshima toward the more subtle forms of nuclear violence that are intensified and sustained by America's settler-colonial logics. In doing so, she both extends and condenses the sites of dispossession created by the atomic frontier, demonstrating how the location of this dispossession spills over the edges of containment structures, as those affected by the many forms of atomic violence carry its effects with them as they are forced to leave their homes through forced disappearance. "Daybreak," the opening poem in *Daughters, I Love You,* following "Dedications," demonstrates how difficult it is to distinguish between the violence of near and distant, past and future when viewed through the seemingly totalizing reach of the nuclear complex:

> Daybreak.
> My daughter sitting at the table,
> strong arms,
> my face in her eyes
> staring at her innocence
> of what is dark
> her fear at night of nothing
> we have created
> light as a weapon against.[98]

Here, as throughout the collection, light is double-edged; in the atomic age it is both that which annihilates and that which creates. Even dawn is tinged with harm in this framework: “daybreak,” the breaking open of day, ushers in a confusion of boundaries and meaning. The mother watches her daughter, reflecting upon what she does not yet know, and sees in her daughter’s eyes her own face reflected back to her: her gaze returned to herself, as if it has reached a barrier it cannot traverse. This point of view—in which the surface shines back the light of inspection—disallows the speaker from addressing “the thing” itself, from naming precisely what her daughter does not know to fear.

The negative doublespeak of the stanza turns in upon itself as prepositions pile up and detach subjects from direct action. The mother notes “her fear at night of nothing” rather than saying more directly, “she fears nothing at night” or “she does not fear anything.” The fear, which has its own object, becomes the object of the daughter: “her fear”; and the object of her fear: “nothing,” which is to say, she has no fear. This negative possession leads to dispossession, which is complicated by the following line: “we have created.” The mother separates the daughter from this otherwise universal “we”—her daughter is protected from culpability by “nothing.” The daughter does not know to fear what “we have created.” Rather than ending the sentence within the stanza at this point of vague clarity, Hogan modifies the statement with one final line, which again defers an arrival at conclusive meaning: “we have created / light as a weapon against.” Ending the sentence on “against” pushes the weapon itself from the spotlight—as it is not the weapon that the daughter does not know to fear, but the thing against which light is now being used as a weapon. Here the light, which before caused the mother only to see her own gaze reflected in the daughter’s eyes, confronts itself, as light is being used as a weapon against light. Later in the poem, the day broken, the light split becomes “a field / of energy” in

which "Matter is transformed."[99] The paradox of light as that which makes life possible and that which can annihilates irrevocably alters the significance of "night" and "day" as well as "fear" and "love."

As the poem wrestles with this doubleness, the daughter's body transforms in the mother's gaze from a representation of nuclear violence's effects to a demonstration of these effects. Instead of seeing her own reflection in her daughter's eyes, the mother looks at the daughter and now sees:

> in her dark eyes
>
> the children of Hiroshima
>
> are screaming
>
> and her skin is
>
> their skin
>
> falling off.[100]

This time, it is not that the mother cannot see past the surface but that her gaze travels too deep, beyond her daughter herself. She sees in her daughter's eyes what her daughter cannot see yet still represents. Her daughter, despite her innocence, her lack of fear and knowledge, is transformed through the analogy of empathy into a container that holds the intimate costs of the nuclear bomb. Her eyes become the vehicle for the possibility of metaphor—standing in for what has been destroyed—a portal to figuration. From the mother's perspective, the possibility of this substitution both aligns and detaches her daughter from these children: this both is and is not her daughter's fate. However, as the stanza continues, propelling this logic of substitution, the daughter's body is transformed further. No longer a portal to figuration, she is part of the figuration itself: "her skin is / their skin." While the binding verb of "is" may suggest this

comparative structure should be read as metaphor, the situating referents of this would-be metaphor disallows this logic. Rather than a tenor and a vehicle, the likeness drawn here demonstrates the limits of understanding suffering through empathetic analogy—the imagining of others' pain in relation to one's distinct positionality. While the poem seeks to understand how the radioactive settler-colonial project of nuclear power affects both Indigenous and Japanese people alike, it encounters the universalizing limits of this comparison. Just as nuclear power affects "everyone" but also affects some groups of people more than others, Hogan struggles to find the appropriate figurative logics to both compare and distinguish the violence her child is at risk of experiencing and the violence already experienced by Japanese children. As soon as the daughter's skin becomes a substitute for "their skin," the next line, "falling off," reveals the impossibility of comparison and the distance between her body and theirs. There is no resolution to suffering offered through this comparison. While the figurative affordances of poetry seek to make portable such experiences, Hogan's poem exposes the limits of conflating site- and community-specific experiences of violence, countering the logic of colonial narratives that conflate the experiences of the colonized through the perspective of their shared oppressor.

At this turning point in the poem, this ruptured metaphor, no longer able to sustain direct comparison, turns toward the conditional. After this distinction between "her" and "their" skin, the daughter is now included in the "we" from which the mother previously distinguished her at the start of the poem. The poem continues: "How quickly we could vanish, / your skin nothing."[101] "Skin," previously the connection that made her daughter and the children in Hiroshima analogous, is now repositioned within the settler-colonial context of the U.S. The "Vanishing Native" trope is here is newly rendered an imminent possibility. The daughter's skin would not only "fall off"—it would "vanish" and become "nothing." The complete obliteration

of every trace of their existence returns the poem to its exploration of figuration's limits. How does one remember the "disappeared" or the "vanished"? One must build a structure, conjure a link. For Hogan, this link is her daughter, tenuous and imperfect as it may be in grasping the fullness of the suffering of those who died elsewhere in the world due to the U.S.'s radioactive nation-building project. That Hogan must imagine this destruction, both past and future, does not make either any less real. In imagining the screams of the children of Hiroshima by imagining the future violence to which her daughter may be subjected, she recuperates that which has been repressed by the nuclear complex: the effects of nuclear power are not invisible, they are made to "vanish" so that the radioactive nation building can continue unabated.

The poem concludes by abandoning the comparative framework through which Hogan had previously aligned and held separate her child from the children of Hiroshima; instead she concludes with this inclusive address: "daughter / daughters / I love you."[102] The mother no longer tries to distinguish the boundaries of her daughter—to see her and only her with her gaze. Instead, she allows herself to see what the daughter represents and who she is held in relation to, as well as the entire web of violence in which she finds herself positioned. Maintaining her daughter's ignorance to these weapons will not protect her from their violence. Neither will the mother's unwillingness to see how precarious her daughter's life is. The response to arriving at this place of understanding is not to search for a metaphor capacious enough to hold these tensions. Rather, it is the turn to direct address, to use the phrase that is nearly a bottomless well into which poets across time have thrown metaphor after metaphor to try to explain. She tells this daughter and these daughters "I love you," the "you" expansive enough to hold all of these meanings and beloveds at once.

The transformations that take place across this poem demonstrate the possibilities and limits of solidarity across different historical, cultural, and racial positionalities when they are brought together under the oppressive structures of the nuclear complex. Beyond the loose analogical structure that says "our struggle is like your struggle," Hogan imagines how figuration can both challenge and create continuity between those who are oppressed by the settler-colonial logics of American nuclear power. The poem traverses the processes of disidentifying and identifying with an "Other" as it learns to deconstruct that category altogether. The contradiction the poem confronts arises in the mother's insistence and deflection of guilt: she is a part of the "we" responsible for children who died when the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, yet she is also part of the "we" that could vanish so quickly by the same logic. She is threated by U.S. colonialism and imperialism, but she also is an unwilling participant in it. In trying to protect her daughter from complicity, she obscures the potential for identification with a larger network of relations that are akin to one another because they have or might "vanish" through instant or slow violence wrought by the nuclear complex and its predecessors. Her daughter is transformed not simply into the vehicle for a metaphor, her skin standing in for the skin of those who died, but rather she becomes like a poem herself: her material form a memorial for those who have disappeared, her skin an elegy for those who have died.

Hogan's desire to sustain the presence of those being disappeared and displaced by the nuclear complex continues in the following poem from *Daughters*, in which she demonstrates how "ordinary" the violence of American imperialism has become. In "Disappearances," she contrasts "natural" forms of death with deaths produced by the settler-colonial nuclear complex: "bridges collapse…street lamps vanish," even "the old horse I love" will die "too quickly."[103] In all of these cases of vanishing and ending, however, "Nobody is at fault"; they are the natural

result of time tending toward death. In contrast, there is nothing faultless about the "disappearances" of the Japanese women:

> I remember how the Japanese women
>
> turned to go home
>
> and were lost
>
> in the disappearances
>
> that touched their innocent lives
>
> as easily as they touched small teacups
>
> rattling away
>
> on shelves.[104]

These women have not "disappeared" but "were lost" in the disappearances that "touched" their lives. As in "Daybreak," the accretion of modifiers defers conclusive meaning, stretching the chain of signifiers until it becomes difficult to determine who is acting and who is being acted upon. The comparative framework that emerges to illustrate the magnitude of these disappearances demonstrates the difficulty of measuring what is no longer there. "Disappearances" becomes a singular subject in the stanza, personified into the hand that "touched" the women's lives. Similar to "Daybreak," in which the daughter's skin becomes that of the screaming children, the women's hands merge with the personified hand of the disappearances through the poem's figurative logic: "the disappearances / that touched *their* innocent lives / as easily as *they* touched small teacups" (emphasis mine). The first "their" clearly refers to the women, who in the same moment that "disappearances" becomes personified are separated from the lives they lived only moments ago: now their lives are objects in their possession rather than a part of themselves. The metonymic logic, in which the women's lives

stand in for the women themselves, is further complicated by the following line as the poem attempts to establish a logic of cause and effect—what touched who—in order to identify some structure amidst the seemingly random violence of these disappearances. However, the only trace that can be recovered are the "small teacups / rattling away / on shelves." Their "rattling" is evidence of both the cause of destruction—the bomb—and of the effect—the women's deaths. Were the women still alive, they would have touched the teacups to still them. This attempt to trace, to find a trace, inside the annihilating violence of nuclear power cannot compare with "ordinary" death and destruction. These disappearances are of a different magnitude and require a different mode of representation to preserve what traces do remain.

The relationships between the ambiguous deictic references (their / they), complex comparative structure, and oscillation between subjects as the objects of themselves (the women's lives) and objects that become subjects (disappearances), demonstrate the seeming impossibility of representing in any measurable way what this experience of disappearing and being disappeared is like in the era of atomic power. Even as Hogan draws connection between her Indigenous history of vanishing and being vanished and the violence experienced by Japanese victims of the atomic bomb, she realizes the impossibility of situating each experience on either side of a simile. Narrowing in on how this violence is like and unlike other forms of violence reveals suffering's non-portable, site-specific form. Hogan grapples to find frameworks to understand her community's own suffering at the personified hand of the nuclear complex but finds there is no form that can seamlessly translate this experience across cultures, geographies, experiences. And yet the poem, which seeks figures to represent the unrepresentable, cannot help but continue to try and situate how different expressions of violence that come from the same

complicated nuclear complex are necessarily connected—that it is through this connection that solidarity across distinct experiences can be produced.

The poem, returning to the eye as the portal to figuration, finds in old women's eyes the "quiet surprise of space / carrying the familiar shape of what it held,"[105] demonstrating how the trace of those who were disappeared remains present through memory, witness, and testimony. In other words, absence can constitute presence through the form created by its relations to other subjects and objects. The cultivation of this double sight—seeing what is present and what has been disappeared—is the gaze necessitated by settler-colonialism, which removes peoples, land, and resources both to fuel its expansion and to facilitate the forgetting that enables the settler side of the process to succeed. To look at a place or time and see both what is there and what has been made absent through "easy" violence is to see the relations between things rather than only the things themselves. This relational perspective directly contradicts the logics of the nuclear complex, which depends upon isolating cause from effect and nuclear site from nuclear site. In short it is sustained in part by not being represented.

Hogan's attention to the logics that facilitate different types of disappearance—from the instant annihilation of the atomic bomb to the "silence they force on mothers / who sorrow" [106] —demonstrates how the nuclear complex's many forms both reproduce and reconfigure the settler-colonial project that has used material violence and metaphorical figuration to realize its expansion and accumulation for centuries. In connecting this project to the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Hogan suggests these tactics are at the center of the U.S. nation-building project, which consolidates its empire by either appropriating or extinguishing the threats to its progress. Rather than feeding settler-colonial narratives of disappearance, which justify expansion by claiming there is "no one" there opposing it, Hogan focuses her attention on

what's left behind, including the means through which absence becomes a presence, such as in a poem. Even when a space appears unoccupied or vacated, her gaze reveals the trace of living that continues in spite of the violence of disappearing. For example, in a poem that appears later in the collection, "Prayer for Men and Children," she contrasts the gentle light of a lantern to the vanishing light of the atomic bomb. She imagines "the shadows of bodies / flashed on walls,"[107] referencing a phenomenon reported after Hiroshima called "nuclear shadows," in which the bomb annihilated the matter of one's body but left behind a silhouette on the wall behind it, like a shadow without a casting form. However instead of this imagined destruction, here the shadows are of women keeping vigil, saying "a prayer against heat / that burns dark roses from shirts into skin / because fire passes first through the dark."[108] The knowledge expressed here is knowledge no one should have to pass on: that when a nuclear bomb explodes, dark fabrics absorb the heat more than light fabric. Following this logic: "Newspapers held casually / write a day's history / across the sleepless faces of women."[109] The text of the newspaper, of the history preceding the history-altering event of the atomic bomb, might literally become inscribed upon the faces of these women. In saying a "prayer against" these horrors, the women here are forced to consider their own destruction in that very moment within this imagined but not fantastic realm of possibility: that their lives might also be known only by their imprint. These haunting images, full of the precise knowledge of atomic violence, crystallize the moments of care and attention of a community holding vigil as well as the violence they have endured. The closing image of the poem transforms this imagined future destruction into present reality, as it tells of "the dark wedges between blue fingers"[110] etched on the wall: the inverse shape of the women's hands pressed together in prayer. The shadows of those who have "disappeared" are preserved through the form of this gesture. Even the atomic bomb cannot annihilate their presence

completely, as Indigenous people have confronted its genocidal logics for centuries and found ways of survival in spite of their alleged "disappearance." The trace that remains is the form of survival, one that Hogan keeps alive through a poem that can hold together both the imagined and real destruction, the ongoing present and the remnant of absence.

The form of this survival, after being shaped through its negations and disappearances, is materialized in the collection's penultimate poem. As the collection progresses, it moves from identification with Japanese victims and survivors of the atomic bomb to a focus on the domestic threats posed by the nuclear complex for Indigenous peoples in the U.S. As such, the structure of the collection draws a historical, global arc that connects past manifestations of harm with present and future ones, articulating what is otherwise disarticulated by the prevailing ideologies of the nuclear complex (such as the argument that nuclear weapons are altogether separate from nuclear energy). Hogan's poem, "Black Hills Survival Gathering, 1980," which was also published in the 1983 anthology, *Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back,* documents the 10,000-person gathering at the Black Hills to protest the occupation and extraction of uranium and demonstrates how Indigenous tribes might resist and overcome this fourth "removal": the extractive dispossession that removed land, energy, and water from beneath their feet.

The poem opens with daybreak like many of her other poems, articulating how light within the nuclear era is both a weapon shaped for annihilation and the sign of a new day that means the annihilation has not occurred:

> Bodies on fire
>
> the monks in orange cloth
>
> sing morning into light.[111]

The initial image of destruction, “bodies on fire,” is revised into a metaphor to contextualize the power of the monks performing their ceremonial song. This sacred act is interrupted by “B52’s” that “blow over [men’s] heads”—a reminder that this is surveilled, occupied land. The land morphs under the heat of “fierce gases forming, / the sky bending.”[112] It is not only the land itself but the whole environment, the way the air moves and how the horizon allows or disallows certain perspectives, that is transforming. “The dusty roads” are what “change / matter to energy,” the infrastructure that belies the occupation of an industry that views the matter, the “stuff” of the Black Hills, as fodder for energy. The specificity of which matter and which energy seems unimportant—only that resources can be extracted and exported.

After situating herself in this colonized tableau, Hogan focuses on the intimate scene before her: “My husband wakes. / My daughter wakes….My other daughter wakes.”[113] She reads in their bodies echoes of what she reads in the environment: “the skin containing / wind and fragile fire.”[114] The same elements that give her family life—breath and heat—are elements that have been converted into weapons. The susceptibility of the body to transformation, to be used for more violent purposes as matter converted into energy, is, however, also its source of strength. Hogan tells her daughter: “this is the land of her ancestors, / blood and heart.”[115] Similar to the opening poem, in which Hogan sees the doubleness of her daughter as being one with but also separate from the children of Hiroshima, here she imagines another transformation: “Does her hair become a mane / blowing in the electric breeze, / her eyes dilate and darken?”.[116] The question remains unanswered, but the reasoning behind it is revealed when, for the first time in the collection, Hogan offers the names for her family members: “the child named Thunder Horse, / the child named Dawn Protector / and the man / whose name would mean home in Navajo.”[117] Hogan questions the power of language: does a name have the power to shape

reality? Or does it simply shape one's perspective of reality? And how do the new conditions of the bending sky, the bodies on fire, the threat of all matter being converted into some other form, affect or become affected by this practice of naming? The consequences of these conditions are uncertain in the naming of her husband "whose name *would mean* home in Navajo" (emphasis mine). Presumably, the name left unspoken is "Hogan," their shared surname that means the traditional dwelling of the Navajo people. However, the insertion of the conditional "would" implies that this name has lost its meaning, or that the conditions that shape the significance of the name—and the networks of signs that give language meaning—has been disrupted, leaving the name unutterable. The conditional phrasing also introduces the possibility that the name would only have this meaning *in* Navajo—the language and the place. That the meaning of words transforms not simply in relation to the network of signs in which they're embedded but the places—the matter that shapes it has meaning.

Eduardo Viveiros De Castro refers to this type of super-linguistic referential structure as "cosmological deixes."[118] And Keith Basso uses the term "place-making" to describe the meaning that is conjured when we learn about the histories and social relations of a place, the imaginative world-building that transforms a location into a "place-world."[119] What Hogan is doing here is inverting this process to reveal what happens when a name is distanced from its place—it is not simply out of context, altering or obscuring meaning, but out of place. While Derrida calls haunting that which makes "time out of joint,"[120] Hogan here demonstrates the haunting that makes place "out of joint." The ghost of the name is present, but its full meaning cannot or will not be materialized under these conditions. Names, rather than being treated as portable objects, or objects that make meaning portable, are positioned within specific socio-

ecological relations. The altering of these relations does not change the name itself but what the name might refer to—what it might mean elsewhere and otherwise.

The poem grapples with this problem of change, which is not only a consequence of settler-colonialism writ large but of the material changes that are intensified by the logics of the nuclear complex. Hogan narrows her scope of vision as the poem progress: from the horizon, to the road, to her family, and finally to the "ground zero," "the center of light" in which they all stand.[121] The sun, whose position in relationship to the environment, the people, and the animals alters meaning, is undergoing a transformation in relation to itself. No longer the enduring sign of rejuvenation, growth, prosperity, the sun signifies the power to transform "matter into energy" by destroying matter with the energy source that has made living possible. Now when Hogan looks at her family bathed in light, she must read them in terms of the nuclear complex's transformative logics:

> Bombs are buried beneath us,
>
> destruction flies overhead.
>
> We are waking
>
> in the expanding light
>
> of sulphur-colored grass.[122]

Her gaze then returns to the horizon line, where instead of seeing the monks, whose bodies are on fire with the light of dawn, she sees a "red horse" who "looks like one burned / over Hiroshima."[123] Here, as the collection returns us to its historical and geographical touchpoint: the referent that now undergirds any mention of "sulphur," "light" and "bombs," the place-name that, like "Black Hills," has been redefined by the imperial and settler-colonial logics of America's radioactive nation-building project. However, it is also at this moment of connection

over shared violence that the possibility of resistance and reparation becomes possible. The poem continues:

> But look
>
> she raises her head
>
> and surges toward the bluing sky.
>
> Radiant morning.[124]

Whereas earlier in the poem the sky bent, obstructing the possibility of looking—of differentiating between sun as fire and sun as source of light that makes sight possible—here the line between annihilation and survival is recognized as one that has not been fully drawn, or written. The poem, in turning toward its audience, asking them to turn with it to witness the act of "bluing," locates the space of possibility for the day to differentiate itself from what came before. That while the nuclear complex draws together the sites, struggles, and histories of Hiroshima and the Black Hills, those logics are not determining. That the morning is radiant because of the sun's atomic power does not mean that its energy must be used for destructive purposes. The poem ends with an image of the "burning hills" at daybreak where "men are singing and drumming / Heartbeat."[125] The "Gathering" in the title does not merely describe an event in which people come together. Gathering is instead represented as this act of positioning and locating the names, places, and precedents that together form the network that gives matter meaning. Resisting the extractive logics that see resources in terms of their ability to be controlled and converted, rendered solely in terms of their portable value, "gathering" demonstrates the materiality of context that makes meaning possible. While some of the conditions gathered together here will take on new meanings, will lose meaning, or will be made

unutterable, the act of gathering is what allows for the survival of a language, a culture, a place, a poem.

As the radioactive nation-building project justifies recolonization under a new name, Indigenous writers were connecting this process to the historical displacement and disappearance of Native cultures and peoples, demonstrating how nuclear weapons and energy furthered, rather than freed them from, oppression and exploitation. Furthermore, these poets show how the dispossessive extraction of the nuclear complex does not even serve the atomic settlers who further its project. As Ulrich Beck argues, "under the roof of modernization risks, *perpetrator and victim* sooner or later become *identical.* In the worst, unthinkable case, a nuclear world war, this is evident; it also destroys the aggressor."[126] Whether you're the "father" of the atomic bomb or a worker in the "secret city," the extractive and colonizing logics of the nuclear complex violate everyone's boundaries and borders. And yet, while this violence is widespread, these poets crucially demonstrate how it has not only been concentrated on Indigenous peoples, but how violence against Indigenous peoples has made possible this radioactive settler-colonialism.

As Paula Allen Gunn writes in her introduction to Hogan's *Daughters, I Love You*: "Certainly the issue is one for all of us, but it is perhaps most especially of concern to American Indians, who daily, for five hundred years, have lived in the face of imminent disappearance—of their children and of their race."[127] The figures that mediate this similarity and difference, this together yet separate experience of the violence of the nuclear complex, offer frameworks desperately needed in contemporary conversations about climate change as a totalizing yet differentiated experience. In contemporary discourse surrounding climate change and clean energy, "energy justice" is considered a relatively new term and movement.[128] And while it is useful in thinking toward how the misnomer of "clean" energy does not necessarily indicate

"just" energy, rendering it as a contemporary concept that grows out of climate change movements delinks the historical processes of both energy and justice, which are tied together through the lived experienced of Indigenous peoples resisting colonization and re-colonization. Similar to extinction, colonization is not a past event that occurred once, separating the pre-colonized from the post-colonized world. Rather, it is an ongoing, reoccurring process that must continue to extract and expand to survive. Indigenous poets demonstrate how purportedly "clean" sources of nuclear energy as well as the colonizing violence of nuclear weapons are intertwined in a longer history of occupation and extraction that only leads to the destruction of the nation it is purportedly trying to sustain. The poets I have examined here explore key sites for the production of the atomic frontier which, regardless of whether it is on Shoshone and Paiute land in the Southwest or Lakota Sioux land further north, utilizes settler-colonial tactics of discovery, occupation, and exploitation to reproduce settler-colonial logics of the Western frontier and dispossess present and future inhabitants of their land. In doing so, these writers offer forms of resistance and response to the logics of disappearance and dispossession, reconfiguring what decolonization looks like when the toxic legacy of the nuclear complex cannot be remediated but may yet be survived.

Chapter Three: Nuclear Power & Anti-Nuclear Empowerment: The Power of Survival in Audre Lorde's and Adrienne Rich's Poetry

> *Nuclear madness is the expression—fused with lethal technology— of what happens when one-half of a species literally builds its civilization on the bodies of the other half.*
> *—Adrienne Rich (1979)*[1]

> *We know—especially those of us who are women of color—that the police can kick our asses on the street and our lives would be over as quickly as if a bomb had gone off.*
> *—The Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement (1982)*[2]

Where does women's power come from? This question, rather than an abstract musing on individual rights and the social order, becomes newly material when the women's liberation movement intersects with the anti-nuclear movement in the 1970's to reveal the tension between power and empowerment. During this time, dozens of anti-nuclear women's groups emerged to protest what they saw as a pointedly patriarchal nuclear complex: WAND (Women Against Nuclear Development), LUNA (Lesbians United in Non-nuclear Action), DONT (Dykes Opposed to Nuclear Technology), SONG (Spinsters Opposed to Nuclear Genocide), DANCE (Dykes Against Nukes Concerned with Energy), Mothers and Future Mothers Against Radiation, Women for a Nuclear-Free Future, Solar Sisters, and many others organized against patriarchal and nuclear violence.[3] One group, "The Necessary Bread Affinity Group" was spearheaded by feminist writers Cherríe Moraga, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke and Jan Clausen, with solidarity support by Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Grace Paley, Gloria T. Hull, Sonia Alvarez and others. Their 1982 "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement" demonstrates how the anti-nuclear movement was not auxiliary to social justice concerns but a "bread-and-butter" issue that spoke directly to their survival as women.[4] Moreover, these writers understood

collective and self-expression as particularly feminist methods for surviving—that speaking, writing, and collectivizing their experiences made survival possible.

The "Disarmament Statement" represents "survival" as an unequally distributed resource. In it, the writers point out how the "lifeboat" of survival is constructed so that only a few will live while "there's a whole lot of people they ain't gonna miss" who will die.[5] While fighting for survival is not new for this group of intersectional feminists, the threats posed by nuclear power's many forms are indeed new expressions and amplifications of extant violence. Among them, the statement reads, are women of color who understand that "the police can kick our asses on the street and our lives would be over as quickly as if a bomb had gone off."[6] This group of feminists saw how the U.S. nuclear complex entrenched the white, hetero-patriarchal power that sustained oppressive social systems and therefore saw the anti-nuclear movement as an inherently intersectional, multivalent cause—one that could not be ignored. What holds their divergent coalition together, they attest, is the fact that: "none of us, none of us, were meant to survive."[7] Rather than treating nuclear power as a unifying threat that erases the distinct forms of violence they each face, or treating it as secondary to those iterations of violence, this coalition of survivors addresses how the nuclear complex amplified, reconfigured, and extended the extant systems of oppression they each navigated according to their specific social positions.

Identifying as survivors[8]—of racism, misogyny, homophobia, anti-Semitism, of the "daily threat of violence from men"[9]—pre-emptively dismantles the power of pro-nuclear and post-apocalyptic survivalist rhetoric by linking it to the ongoing violence of living in a patriarchal society. Feminists across the 1970's and 80's were naming the ways in which nuclear power extended and intensified the militaristic, capitalist, masculine logics of the social order in America and how the patriarchal social order was in turn fueling the proliferation of the nuclear

complex. This feminist mode of survival was distinctly anti-nuclear as forms of the nuclear—bombs, power plants, fallout, breast cancer—made visible the violence of patriarchal logics, representing an unconscious and hidden structure of oppression, while at the same time remaining forms to fear in and of themselves. In other words, the nuclear complex was not simply an index of patriarchy and its effects, but a structure that produced new forms of patriarchal harm and destruction to be mediated by women.

One of the most visible expressions of the nuclear complex, the atomic bomb, was both a symbol of masculine, militaristic, nation-building logics and a form that exceeded the logics of representation, a relationship that Adrienne Rich explores in her poem, "Trying to Talk with a Man." In this poem, Rich draws together the experience of encountering the military-industrial complex embodied in the bomb as well as the masculine forms of aggression and violence represented by "Man." The relationship between these encounters helps illuminate the fugitive forms of violence proliferated by each. Breast cancer, a far less visible expression of the nuclear complex, represents the intersection of environmental, racial, and gendered exploitation, a relationship demonstrated by Audre Lorde's work. By positioning breast cancer as a form of the nuclear, Lorde extends the scope of the nuclear complex to include the sites and manifestations that remain unaddressed because they primarily affect women. To be a survivor is not a static position, Lorde shows, but a constant confrontation with the new forms of violence that you "were never meant to survive," a line she first writes in her poem, "Litany for Survival" and a figuration that the writers of the "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement" draw on to identify as survivors of the nuclear complex as well as racism, misogyny, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and the "daily threat of violence from men."[10] The ongoing repetition and circulation of her

figuration of survival demonstrates how Lorde's theories of collective empowerment were not only *of* the nuclear age but were shaping how women responded to its ongoing violence.

This chapter explores how these two key poets in the women's liberation movement—Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich—inform and are informed by the intersecting anti-nuclear movement. Their figurations of women's empowerment are shaped through their engagement with sources of power, especially the militaristic and energetic forms of nuclear power. The work they published during the women's liberation movement is framed by the rapidly changing environmental conditions of the 1970's and 80's, which saw the rise of mainstream environmentalism, a global oil crisis, and the rise and fall of nuclear energy. The formal logics of their poetry mediate the external logics of these transitions of power and reveal them to be central to the work of women's empowerment. Women were not in need of more education about nuclear power, as the nuclear industry argued when it saw that the majority of women disapproved of nuclear energy;[11] rather, women were already experts in the "necessary bread" of survival and used this expertise to theorize, distribute, and produce new methods for surviving and forms of survival within and beyond the patriarchal nuclear complex. Whereas Lorde's work gains complexity as it is circulated amongst feminists, anti-nuclear activists, and other advocates long after its first publication, demonstrating the relationship between environmental racism, patriarchy, and nuclear power in doing so, Rich's work was flattened into a positive depiction of women's power, even as Rich herself was critiquing feminist methods and excavating her own ideologies of power through her pivotal feminist poems. Reading the social forms of Lorde and Rich's poems—how they shaped feminist and anti-nuclear thought and action, how they circulated to create new relationships and alliances—reveals a more complex depiction of these two quintessentially feminist writers, as they both draw on their lived experiences within the

nuclear complex to complicate a straightforward formula of women's empowerment leading to liberation.

In her essay "The Erotic as Power," first delivered in 1978 at the Conference on the History of Women at Mt. Holyoke College, Lorde argues that oppression proliferates itself by feeding on the oppressed population's *potential* energy, by corrupting even the possibility for power which, in the case of women "has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information."[12] Women, she argues, have been taught to fear this intimate and shared "resource"; instead, they are "psychically milked"—this energy extracted as a "life-giving substance for their master"—demonstrating how patriarchal structures of power depend upon women's energy while at the same time disavowing women's power.[13] Both Lorde and Rich represent women's power as a resource that remains lodged underground, buried within "unexpressed and unrecognized feeling"[14] that, over the course of time, becomes not only "the unspoken" but "unspeakable."[15] In figuring women's power as a resource to be extracted and an unconscious to be manifested, Rich and Lorde articulate the difficulty of accessing this power in a way that does not simply reproduce the extractive logics of patriarchy. However, to not attempt to extract or reveal this power is to stay in "collusion with silence" as Rich says, which in turn means to stay in collusion with the patriarchal order that uses this silence against you. However, in "coming to language out of silence,"[16] women threaten that order. Survival, within this framework, is a collective action that both makes articulation possible and is made possible by articulation. In discussing how she grappled with mortality during her first breast cancer diagnosis, Lorde explains how she only then realized that her silences up to that point were driven by fear; however, in seeing death as "the final silence" that will remain unchanged whether or not she speaks up, she says that she discovered the "source of power within" that

enabled her to finally "[transform] silence into language and action."[17] In other words, in acknowledging she will *not* survive, she is able to touch that reserve within herself, which is transformed into power through expression. As expression, this power lives a collective, social life—empowering others to do the same, articulating new forms of relation, and creating new avenues for survival.

Lorde and Rich's focus on mediation at the material level—what transforms energy into power—and the formal level—what transforms "silence into language and action"[18]—establishes a framework for relating poetic, social, and ecological formations during this historical moment of transition. Both poets interrogate the material relations through which "power" is produced. For Lorde, it is doubting that the "master's tools" can ever dismantle "the master's house"; for Rich, it is knowledge that every poem is written "the oppressor's language."[19] It is by reconfiguring the relationship between power and empowerment, language and representation, that Lorde and Rich create forms that resist and complicate these structures of oppression. To understand this process in Lorde's work, I trace survival's social form by studying how a single poetic line accretes meaning and produces new imaginaries through its repetition and shared expression. To understand this process in Rich's work, I examine how she redefines the limits of representation in her poetics, reconfiguring the signifying power of the symbolic and the materiality of the literal. Lorde's theorization of power is inherently more hopeful, as it defies the structures and conditions that were not built for her survival, whereas Rich's work expresses deeper skepticism of accessing and deploying power that is not, on some level, dependent on exploitative extraction. Both approaches articulate power's complex relationship to poetics and reveal the multiple and hidden contradictions of energy production that the nuclear complex both

proliferates and depends upon, including how it both depends upon and suppresses women's power.

Finally, to demonstrate the influence of Rich and Lorde's work on the broader historical debates concerning feminist empowerment and nuclear power, this chapter explores the energetic figures and figurations that propelled the women's liberation movement through the tumultuous 1970's and into the era of Reagan conservativism and Cold War escalation in the 1980's. I focus on answering three central questions: How did the logics of nuclear power shape how the women's liberation movement figured empowerment? What "nuclear forms" were feminist poets creating to demonstrate the increasingly uneven effects of America's radioactive nation building project? And how did Lorde and Rich's poems reconfigure the relationship between the symbolic and material registers of representation in order to demonstrate the nuclear complex's many forms?

The New Nuclear Woman

This historical intersection of the anti-nuclear movement and women's liberation movement reveals the tension between power as an expression of energy and empowerment as a method towards freedom. The liberatory promises of nuclear energy were baked into its social form from the day that President Eisenhower announced he would turn "Atoms for War" into "Atoms for Peace."[20] Nuclear energy, itself the byproduct of nuclear weapons, was brandished by the state as the ultimate path to securing national and personal freedom. Nuclear energy would allow America to reduce its dependency on foreign resources and citizens to free up the labor power they previously dedicated to paying for or producing energy (washing one's dishes by hand versus having a dishwasher) and invest that newly won surplus elsewhere. So plentiful

and clean was nuclear energy that it promised to solve America's energy and equity crises with a flip of the same switch. As commercial nuclear reactors were being built throughout the 1960's and 70's, the message of peaceful atoms became inseparable from prosperous atoms. Utilities, government officials, and nuclear engineers alike repeated a mantra of their own—that nuclear energy was *too cheap to meter*. This of course, would not stop utilities from metering and profiting from nuclear energy (though the many failures of nuclear infrastructure transformed reactors into toxic, stranded assets[21]), but it promoted the logic that abundant energy led to economic prosperity and in turn, social equality, for all who were involved.

This messaging was pointedly directed at women, who were viewed as key stakeholders in the debate over when and how to use nuclear energy. In the 1960's, utility companies addressed women as energy-intensive consumers whose increased desire to have *more*—power, freedom, goods—required a new source of energy. A 1966 10-minute marketing reel called "The Atom and Eve" from the Yankee Connecticut Atomic Power Company features "Eve," a white women clothed in a billowing blue dress, energetically buzzing around her "electrical Garden of Eden": decorating a Christmas tree, serving cocktails, going to the salon, and even using a typewriter at work.[22] Nuclear energy, the film implies, is not only the key to freeing women from the drudgery of domestic labor and allowing them to pursue their own interests, but also to sustaining a comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Toward the end of the film, after white male experts assure the audience that they would be "checking and double checking" the safety of the proposed nuclear power plant, the film returns to Eve, who is pirouetting around a room full of appliances, some of which are suspended in mid-air. As she twirls from stove to refrigerator, gently caressing them, the narrator assures viewers that, "as Eve's needs increase" the power company will provide for her, before concluding with their take-home message: "Ample electric

power: so that the Eves of every age can live their lives fruitfully in their electrical Gardens of Eden." The camera then pans from Eve to a toddler sitting in a pool of light while playing with lightbulbs—proof that Atom has successfully met Eve's substantial "needs" and has simultaneously solved the problem of productive and reproductive labor power.

By the 1970's, corporations had learned to adapt this type of "domestic goddess" messaging to the burgeoning women's liberation movement, employing the "astroturfing" tactics that are still used by the fossil fuel industry today. In 1975, the "New Energy Women" (NEW) group was formed, sponsored by the Atomic Industrial Forum and consisting primarily of women working in the nuclear industry. This pro-nuclear group modeled its efforts after the actions of anti-nuclear groups. As Betsy Getaz writes in her 1977 article in *Women,* NEW adopted a "grassroots style of 'educating' women" at teas and gatherings "not unlike Tupperware parties" to teach women that their precarious rights depended on energy and that their power was confined to their role as consumers.[23] Getaz explains: "The message is clear: 'Only if you are a better homemaker (with more electric appliances) can you get out of the house to earn your own money."[24] NEW's program manager, Renae Cook, boasted of the program's success in this regard. In 1982 she argues: "Work saving, energy using inventions have done more to shape women's destiny than suffragettes and liberationists."[25] It was power, her argument suggests, not empowerment, that women needed to be free.

In October 1979, just a few months after Three-Mile Island's partial meltdown, the suffering Bechtel Corporation sponsored a "National Energy Education Day" (NEED) after public opinion polls showed a sharp decline in women's support of nuclear power. [26] In a survey conducted by *The New York Times* following the accident, only 36% of women, compared to 56% of men, agreed they should continue to build nuclear power plants.[27] This was not the first

indication of women's skepticism of nuclear power; polls undertaken by the Carter administration indicated as early as 1975 that women "were harder to convince than men that nuclear power was safe."[28] The NEED campaign in 1979 was the industry's final attempt to galvanize women as pro-nuclear advocates as the nationwide anti-nuclear movement reached its pinnacle. Susan Jaffe, who covered this campaign for *Ms.,* explains how NEED representatives used "a line of argument almost identical to that of feminists in the antinuclear movement"[29]—in short, they argued that nuclear issues *were* woman's issues, but rather than threatening their future, nuclear power was enabling it. The NEED representatives touted women's intelligence, their desire for science-based facts, and reminded women of their tenuous, energy-intensive freedom: "We've had abundant energy in this country, which has allowed women to enter the work force—and to leave the washing and the dishes…But without sufficient energy to keep more jobs coming…women are not going to make it."[30] This logic capitalizes upon women's precarious social positions, warning that the hard-won gains of feminists would dry up if nuclear power did. One participant in the Nuclear Energy Education Day on October 18, 1979, Dr. Estelle Ramey, said that she "didn't care where the energy came from…but knew that women needed it to continue to be liberated."[31] Women needed energy to be free, the argument went, and the freest form of energy was nuclear power.

Lin Nelson, in her 1984 article on how the nuclear industry won over women in the 1970's, considers how this correlation between energy and liberation not only affects women but people of color. She explains how power companies capitalized upon the uncertainty of the 1970's to win over oppressed groups: "In a period of economic crisis, nuclear propaganda announces that increasing nuclear energy will pull blacks and women out of economic subjugation…that were it not for nuclear power, their lives would be miserable (or more

miserable)."[32] These companies also used tokenism to their advantage—using select women and people of color as spokespersons for the industry. NEW spokeswomen argued that nuclear power granted women "freedom to explore our own potential."[33] This brand of pro-nuclear feminism repositioned feminism within a neoliberal framework, reminding women, especially women of color, that their power was not inherent but contingent upon their position as consumers, which was in turn dependent on their position in the domestic sphere.

As energy companies developed marketing campaigns to parrot the emancipatory goals of feminists, so too did feminist groups develop arguments to demonstrate not only why nuclear power was a feminist issue but how women could produce alternative networks of power and empowerment that did not rely on the nuclear complex. These arguments, though sometimes revalorizing the white, heterosexual values championed by conservative pro-nuclear groups, more frequently revealed how opposing the nuclear complex produced an energetic coalition amidst the rapidly splintering factions of the women's liberation movement. Groups like SONG (Spinsters Opposed to Nuclear Genocide) pointedly opposed the heteronormative version of futurity represented by Mothers and Future Mothers Against Radiation, for example, by imagining a collective future whose value was not necessarily dependent on the survival of one's own children. These groups also utilized a diverse set of tactics to match their target. While Mothers and Future Mothers planned a Mother's Day consciousness-raising picnic and occupied PG & E's offices to protest the Diablo Canyon Nuclear plant,[34] SONG reconfigured domestic tropes by visiting military recruitment centers in the 1980's to perform "peace 'exercises' to a Jane Fonda workout tape" that included "knead[ing] bread on the desks of the recruiters" and leaving "baked miniature loaves with the message 'no bombs' etched in the tops."[35] WAND, which published *Ain't No Where We Can Run: A Handbook for Women on the Nuclear*

Mentality, stressed that their goal was not to recruit more women into the anti-nuclear movement, but to "address the issues which nuclear development brings so clearly to the surface—exploitation, oppression, manipulation, deceit, and the power of men over women."[36] The diversity of tactics and viewpoints that coalesced to oppose nuclear power's many forms reveals that the relationship between women, women's rights, and the nuclear complex was not merely a relationship manufactured by marketing firms but one with historical roots and future repercussions.

However, many women's groups were not sold on their involvement in the anti-nuclear movement, or at least not on the logic of nuclear power as a pointedly feminist issue. One representative debate took place in the months after Three-Mile Island (TMI) between the editorial board of *Off Our Backs,* a radical feminist magazine that described its position as "not anti-men but pro-women"[37] and *Meeting Ground,* an anti-separatist radical feminist magazine. *Off Our Backs* announced the creation of an "Anti-Nuclear Feminist Task Force" and argued that TMI demonstrated the disproportionate effects of the nuclear complex on women.[38] The task force argues that "energy," not just nuclear energy, "is a feminist issue" and that women, in their role as "caretakes and nurturers," understand the relationship between the "exploitation and domination of Mother Earth" and the "the violent exploitation to which women ourselves are subjected." This oppression, they add, is evidenced by "myth, language and history." *Meeting Ground,* however, argued that positioning energy as a feminist issue "watered down" the women's movement, citing this intersectional work as one of the central reasons that women's liberation was "close to dead."[39] The editors, in direct response to *Off Our Backs,* argue: "Nuclear power is <u>not</u> a <u>feminist</u> issue" but a "<u>people's issue</u>" (*emphasis original*).[40] Furthermore, they critiqued the association of women with the earth, arguing "the earth has no

gender" and women do not "have a special relationship with 'her.'" They conclude: "we reject the segregation and reactionary separatism inherent in the phoney slogan that "Nuclear Power Is a Feminist Issue" (sic).[41] While nuclear power affects women, they argue, framing it as a feminist issue discounts the far-reaching effects of the nuclear complex and dilutes the distinct focus of feminism.

These debates continued into 1980's, with some advocates refining the claims made by *Off Our Backs* while also moving away from essentialist categorizations of women and their alignment with the earth. A piece in *Womanews* in 1981 synthesizes the two arguments above to reinforce why nuclear power and nuclear weapons are in fact feminist issues. However, it is not because "women are nurturers," but because "[nuclear weapons] pose dreadful threats to all life on this planet; because they originate from and perpetuate militaristic power; and because the military…reflects and reinforces white male authority over the quality and very possibility of our lives as women."[42] At the same time, the 1980's saw conservative, working class women join the anti-nuclear movement; while they did not necessarily join forces with radical feminists, many of their reasons for fighting nuclear power aligned with feminist arguments. These women, as Natasha Zaretsky argues in *Radiation Nation,* read nuclear power through the values of the pro-life movement as, following TMI, they saw nuclear energy's threat to the lives of their present and future children as part of the Reagan-era republican anti-abortion agenda. She writes: "The figure of the unborn routinely shuttle[d] between the pro-life and anti-nuclear movements" as "anti-nuclear activists often portrayed the human fetus as the industry's most vulnerable and defenseless victim."[43] Just as self-proclaimed liberal feminists embraced nuclear energy as a means to liberation, conservative women rejected it as a threat to their values and religious freedoms. And so, while a pro- or anti- nuclear position does not necessarily correlate to a liberal

or conservative political agenda, women's increased involvement in the debate over nuclear energy demonstrates the necessary relationship between power and empowerment as well as the set of energetic contradictions undergirding the women's liberation movement in Cold War America.

These campaigns, debates, and demonstrations reveal the insufficiency of characterizing women or feminists as essentially pro- or anti-nuclear. They also reveal the impossibility of representing the nuclear complex without connecting it to other systems of oppression and violence. While apocalyptic rhetoric might render nuclear war as singularly unprecedented, many feminists were exploring the hidden and ongoing expressions of the nuclear complex that emerged from and sustained patriarchal logics. The complex relationship between nuclear power and women's empowerment continued to evolve in tandem across the 1970's, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes colliding with each other in meaningful ways. The "New Nuclear Woman" on one hand was the woman whose body could be read as a symptom of the nuclear complex's violence and on the other was the image of an active, informed, and involved citizen. As a male engineer addressing one of the NEED in-home "energy coffees" told his audience: "Women have to be just as knowledgeable as men. That's why I'm here" (he also told them that they could touch a radioactive fuel rod without harming themselves).[44] And so, while the nuclear industry attempted to marry women's empowerment with nuclear power, demonstrating how they were mutually beneficial, feminists were untangling the myths of empowerment's relationship to extractive forms of energy. Rather than accepting the image of an electrical Eden in which women could *choose* what kind of Eve they wanted to be—a consumer's paradise where choice was equivalent to equality—feminists were consolidating their divergent positions

by focusing on how they were survivors escaping this repackaged form of containment and oppression.[45]

So where does this intersection of nuclear power and women's empowerment leave women's liberation? If the same logics of energy-dependent freedom and power-generating feminism were being used to defend and attack the same structures, how were women negotiating these contradictions and finding new forms for their pursuit of liberation? The overdetermined history of "power" in women's and civil rights movements, its relationship to energy, and the discourse surrounding women's empowerment had compounded to constrain the feminist movement's ability to create a shared position on *nuclear* power—a schism that the nuclear industry cultivated and exploited. And so, while the neoliberal logics of the nuclear industry insisted that women needed access to cheap nuclear power in order to maintain the "equality" and "freedom" gained by the women's liberation movement, poet-activists like Lorde and Rich were demonstrating the violent effects of the white-hetero-patriarchal nuclear complex that women were not intended to survive. This is why tending to specific formations of power, its literal, historical, and figurative valences, becomes so important to feminists who were attempting to work through these contradictions. Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich's poetry helps redefine the coordinates of the anti-nuclear feminist movement by cutting a path through its ideological impasse of power and empowerment by offering alternative frameworks for relating survival, power, and energy.

"We Were Never Meant to Survive"

In a 1982, the same year of the "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," Lorde speaks about survival's social form in a speech celebrating Malcolm X:

> Survival is not a theory… Insight must illuminate the particulars of our lives: who labors to make the [b]read we waste, or the energy it takes to make nuclear poisons which will not biodegrade for one thousand years; or who goes blind assembling the microtransistors in our inexpensive calculators?[46]

"Survival," for Lorde, is not simply the act of living through a singular trauma, but an ongoing struggle that must be repeatedly addressed and enacted through collective action. Lorde's poetry is the vehicle that articulates and coheres the social relations of particular women to continue making this survival possible. As her figuration of survival is taken up within the anti-nuclear feminist movement, it produces a new structure of thought and relation for women to understand this nexus of survival, empowerment, and nuclear power, demonstrating the power of poetry's social form.

As Margaret Ronda and Lindsay Turner explain, attending to poetry's social form allows us to move past strictly formalist readings of poetry and attend to "what happens *around* a poem or poetic text" and ask: "What kinds of social activity might a poem engender or enact?" or "How might a poem reverberate in (and beyond) a particular social context?"[47] In tracing how Lorde's line "we were never meant to survive," reverberates and accretes meaning *because* of its social life, it is possible to see how a poem forges relations and produces frameworks for imagining how to survive, especially when facing this new expression of violence represented and enabled by nuclear power. This method of reading form as the *demonstration of relationships* frees the so-called political poem from being read as merely rhetorical and ideological and instead allows us to understand it as an object that shapes and is shaped by its

material and discursive circulation. In turn, the poetics of demonstration helps reframe how we understand poetry's role in facilitating and sustaining social justice movements**.** I use the term *demonstration poems* to account for poems, whether parts or wholes, that seek to intervene in the social relations through which they emerge and by which they are reproduced. Rather than preserving the sanctity of the poem as a complete, discrete whole, and reading its formal properties through that originary lens, a poetics of demonstration allows us to consider how the people and places that reconfigure aspects of a poem are integral parts through which the ever-expanding poetic form can be read. In turn, we can define form as that which demonstrates relationships, both those on and off the page, as well as the dynamic relationship between these iterations. The conditions that "we were never meant to survive" then, are many and overlapping: Lorde demonstrates the ongoing work of surviving cancer, surviving racism, surviving sexism, surviving nationalism. Lorde's network of survival articulates new coordinates for relating energy and emancipation, power and empowerment. It also offers alternatives to the white survivalist narratives that were generated in response to the newly apocalyptic threats of nuclear war and environmental destruction, undermining fantastic visions of the future with her starkly realist claim.

In a 1977 Lesbians and Literature panel at the MLA conference, Lorde describes just how intimate her experience of survival was in the three-week period between the diagnosis of a tumor in her breast and the biopsy that said it was benign. During these three weeks of uncertainty, she experienced "the agony of an involuntary reorganization of [her] entire life."[48] She attributes her survival to a collective of women and the power produced by their shared acts of expression, a social articulation: "The women who sustained me through that period were black and white, old and young, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, and we all shared a war against

the tyrannies of silence."[49] However less than a year later there would be another biopsy, this time malignant. The talk she gave at MLA would later become the first essay in her 1980 memoir *The Cancer Journals,* and her poem "Litany for Survival," written before both of these texts, would seed the theory of survival she continues to develop throughout these acute challenges to her personal survival.

It is Lorde's experience of breast cancer that makes visible in her own life the extent of the nuclear complex's reach. Just as the nuclear becomes a symbol for the structures of patriarchy and misogyny, breast cancer becomes the intimate experience through which Lorde experiences the ever-expanding, impersonal network of the nuclear complex. Feminist critic Angela Hume discusses how Lorde linked many forms of ecological harm (such as the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo) to her breast cancer, reading both her body and situation as expressions of environmental racism: "for Lorde, the stark message for her as a Black lesbian with cancer was that she was never meant to survive."[50] In the portion of her work that I attend to here, I consider how Lorde situates her breast cancer within a nuclear complex that proliferates through the existing structures of racism and patriarchy. In refusing to stay silent and refusing to be isolated, she makes personal and political the otherwise evasive, intangible aspects of a structure that can almost never be tied to its effects, especially the afterlives of toxic byproducts that are buried, stored, or simply accepted as necessary risks. In doing so, she shows how seemingly "random" and causeless illnesses like cancer are in fact traceable to larger intersecting networks of harm which women, especially Black women, were never meant to survive.

It is through this personal experience of the impersonal nuclear complex that Lorde generates figures and forms that express the contradictory logics governing the relationship between individual and collective survival. The "nuclear" is a floating signifier, standing in for

the innumerable forms of oppression, violence, and injustice that have and continue to threaten her survival. While Lorde is concerned with nuclear power, she is not merely anti-nuclear. The nuclear complex's harms are always contextualized in a list that links them to sexist, anti-Black, capitalist, and patriarchal structures. While these structures existed long before nuclear power did, Lorde's intersectional positioning of nuclear power suggests that it could not exist without these structures of oppression. The nuclear thus takes on new forms and significance though her poetic work—inflections that are then routed back through her activism, community orientation, and engagement with social life. While the logics of the nuclear complex render the nation as a whole under which all individuals are equally subject to future harm, Lorde's work demonstrates how women, especially women of color, were already personally experiencing this future harm. Reading breast cancer as an expression of the nuclear complex and its uneven effects, for example, proves the level of destruction that was calculated as necessary to further America's nation-building project.

Lorde deploys survival as a form of collective relation that counters the state's logics of survivalism—a nationalistic effort that requires individual sacrifice on behalf of the "whole." As such, she undermines the new age of Civil Defense that emerges with President Carter and intensifies under Reagan's reescalation of the nuclear arms race in the 1980's. The campaign to sell nuclear war as manageable and survivable was a centerpiece of the Reagan nuclear imaginary, transforming formerly "unthinkable" apocalyptic scenarios into not only possible but probable ones. The "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement" signed by Lorde opens by pointing out how the state's rationing of survival will work: "we know they believe there's only a small group of people worth saving…We are talking of a nuclear war that some people think is 'survivable.'"[51] The shift in the nuclear complex's logic of survival—from nuclear war as

totalizing to nuclear war as manageable—makes visible its already unevenly distributed effects. In claiming the "we were never meant to survive," throughout her poetry and prose, Lorde exposes how the logic of this nuclear survivalism not only *does not* protect women and people of color, but how it is an intensification of a system that has never meant for them to survive. Survival, then, is not a condition enabled by the state's protection, but an action that has been sustained by collective power in spite of the state's violence. Configuring survival as a truly collective endeavor, rather than a nationalistic one that uses collectivity as a mechanism to suppress and exclude, reconfigures survival as a form both of and beyond the nuclear complex.

Circulating Survival

The statement "We were never meant to survive" first appears in print as a line in Lorde's poetry collection *Black Unicorn* (1978) and is soon transformed into a refrain that circulates to generate solidarity across Black, lesbian, and feminist communities. In tracing how this poetic line lives transforms through its many repetitions, it is possible to see how Lorde's work informs and shapes a feminist rendering of nuclear power and environmental racism as interlocking issues. Each time this line is repeated—elsewhere as a sentence, as a shout, as evidence—its scope of reference grows, as the conditions, events, and structures that this "we" was not supposed to survive continue to accumulate. After its initial appearance in "A Litany for Survival," Lorde transforms its scope of reference by including it in *The Cancer Journals,* demonstrating how breast cancer is both an expression and symptom of the nuclear complex and its attendant forms of oppression that she was not meant to survive. A few years later, she again recalibrates this line when she directs it in a letter toward friend and poet Pat Parker during her own battle with breast cancer. The concept of "survival" takes on a new meaning in relation to

breast cancer, as Lorde resists the static state of the cancer *survivor* and instead insists upon the ongoing collective work of *surviving*. Reading her own body as a mediator of the environment and linking the radiation of breast cancer treatment with the radiating afterlives of nuclear power, Lorde's embodied poetics demonstrates the relations between women, in particular Black women, and the systems and conditions that do not intend for them to survive.

Before Lorde writes this critical, soon-to-be iterative line, however, she explores tactics for surviving constructions of Blackness in the white imaginary in her 1974 collection, *New York Head Shop and Museum.* Her poem "The Brown Menace or Poem to the Survival of Roaches," redeploys white supremacy's figuration of racialized "others" as a singular collective—"The Brown Menace"—to both occupy and fracture that relationship of otherness from within. In the poem, however, she does not occupy the persona of a multitude of roaches; rather, she tactically occupies the white imaginary's construction of Blackness, which in this form is expressed as this collective of roaches. This is a non-human persona poem not because Lorde dons a roach's "voice" and perspective, but because she occupies the role that whiteness has created for herself and the other racialized subjects included in this collective ("the Brown Menace" has been used throughout history to dehumanize Black, Latinx, and Asian people) in order to respond to, and ultimately destroy, this very imaginary. This poem, then, has the form akin to a Trojan horse, as the threated hidden within is revealed by the poem's end. By the time the trick is revealed, Lorde destroys the enemy who has invited the ruse willingly into the "…most deeply cherished nightmare / scuttling through the painted cracks / you create to admit me"[52] by locking them within their own violent imaginary.

Lorde, then, is playing in this poem: with white fear, white imagination, white desire, developing a tactical form of resistance to the structures that have never meant for her survival. The poem ends by turning the persona inside-out, destroying its "detestable shape":

> you learn to honor me
>
> by imitation
>
> as I alter—
>
> through your greedy preoccupations
>
> through your kitchen wars
>
> and your poisonous refusal—
>
> to survive.
>
> To survive.
>
> Survive.[53]

Up to this point in the poem, the "I" and "me" arguably refer to the speaker occupying the position of the singular-collective roach while the "you" represents the human figure whose property is being invaded. At this turn of alteration, however, we see the "you" exposed as the occupier rather than the occupant. The "You" is singular-collective of whiteness that is greedy, invasive, poisonous, while the "I" is the subject who has learned to alter to survive. Importantly, Lorde is not simply embracing the racist image of "the Brown Menace" to rob it of its power, nor is she trying to reclaim it, rather she is exposing her own power to manipulate the white imagination that otherwise poses as that which controls the logics, forms, and structures that determine reality. The poem fakes its occupation of the persona to lure the white imaginary into thinking it has been proven correct only to trap it there within its smallness—its "greedy occupations…kitchen wars"—while she slips out the backdoor: to survive. The poem

demonstrates the constant transformations that Lorde undergoes in order to survive—destroying any superficial postmodern critique of "unified subjects" or "identity-centered poems" and showing how even when she *does* deploy the image of herself that fits into a white imaginary, she does this strategically and with intention. As Keith Leonard writes in his article that positions Lorde's work as threading the difference between the unified subject of the lyric and the alienated subject in postmodern poetics, "Lorde's lyric practice highlights self-contradictory wrinkles in the logic of identity politics by juxtaposing the claim to assert identity transparently on the one hand with her self-conscious critique of that language of transparency as hegemonic and exclusionary on the other."[54] If one is lulled into reading Lorde as if she were simply consolidating her identity or empowering others to do the same, it is almost certain that they are occupying the trap Lorde has laid in their "poisonous refusal."

After this poem, where Lorde demonstrates the necessary transformations of survival and how poetic form can tactically imagine the destruction and deconstruction of the imaginaries that threaten that survival, she explores how poetic form can extend into social formations, articulating and enabling new relations. This poetic foray into survival tactics, unsurprisingly then, continues to warp the expected relations between singular and the collective, the "I" and "We," strategically narrowing and reframing who is included in the "we" who was never meant to survive. In "A Litany for Survival," then, the religious form of the litany is transformed into a statement of political power—a call-and-response whose ongoing repetition reconfigures the positions of the speaker and the audience as well as the individual and collective. Lorde transforms the litany's tradition of supplication, making it instead a cyclical address to those too afraid to respond but who are listening and waiting and hoping to survive. Her litany is not "of" survival but "for" it. This small distinction makes the litany a tool of change as well as a

dedication to survival. Lorde deploys the litany as a form that might gather together women who believe themselves to be outside of or apart from any collective, consolidating power that has been buried or repressed. It is because of this collective formation that the refrain generates power rather than solidifying powerlessness, as demonstrated in opening invocation of the poem, which addresses those whose lives, loves, and futures are constantly under attack. The poem is for: "those of us who live at the shoreline / standing upon the constant edges of decision," the women who do not have access to the privilege of "choice," or who cannot love each other openly, in broad daylight, but instead must love "in the hours between dawns." To be on constant alert is to be deprived of the future, unable to plan for tomorrow because survival is so knitted to the urgency of now.

These women, then, are "seeking a now that can breed / futures / like bread in our children's mouths.[55] In order to survive, women must harness the energy of the present—the "now" that nourishes. This analogy, which draws together "breed" and "bread" as near homonyms, reveals the relationship between futurity as bare reproduction under a patriarchal and capitalist regime and futurity as the flourishing of relations beyond the present. "Breed" casts reproduction in terms of its most basic animal function, a term historically used to dehumanize women and people of color, while the "bread" that will serve as the energy to sustain "our children" envisions survival as an intimate and shared condition. In this complex analogy, the origin of energy, of surviving into the future, is the bread that sustains "our children." The structure of this figuration, then, does not reinforce the violent history of "breed," which when deployed by patriarchal, capitalist structures depicts women's bodies as vessels for biological reproduction. Rather it seeks to transform "breed" into "bread," the basic source of energy that can sustain and nourish the future generation and generations.

In the next stanza, the inclusive invocation "for those of us" repeats, this time cast against an explicit "they" who threatens their survival through tactics of fear, manipulation, and force. Here, the patriarchal structure of force is materialized through a military-nuclear complex that targets women and mothers:

> For those of us
>
> …
>
> learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
>
> for by this weapon
>
> this illusion of some safety to be found
>
> the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
>
> …
>
> We were never meant to survive.[56]

The violent actors shrouded in metonym—the "heavy-footed"—aim to suppress the "we" physically and psychologically. This inflicted fear is set against "mother's milk," another intimate and essential form of sustenance, which has been transformed into an object of fear. As we will see developed further in *The Cancer Journals,* the relationship between a woman's body and the environment was a central concern for Lorde. She read the expressions of racism, sexism, homophobia, ecological disaster, and nuclear fallout through the symptoms of her body and as evidence of the structures at work against her survival. Breast milk, which had become an index of the unstoppable reach of nuclear power, as studies beginning in the 1950's showed how it contained traces of radioactive fallout,[57] reveals how even the assumed "purity" of the body's private site of production is shaped by socio-ecological conditions. Apocalyptic violence here is not an external threat from a hostile nation but a sustained system of harm that has become

internalized physically and psychologically, one that Lorde and the women she is addressing were never intended to survive. The repetition of this stark claim, however, demonstrates that some formation of this *we* does in fact live on. Lorde's stark acknowledgement of the conditions built against her survival contradicts the optimistic survival stories of post-apocalyptic futurism. The structure of the litany, the invocation that solicits a response, configures this declaration of survival as a collective condition rather than an individual struggle. And it is because of this collectivity that this declaration of survival can go on living as long as they are "those of us" who can speak it.

In the third stanza, the litany turns from invocation to declaration, naming the effects of this ongoing oppression, which has created conditions of scarcity and competition that figure the future as something to fight over and fear. Returning to the liminal space of the opening stanza, the poem proceeds:

> And when the sun rises we are afraid
> it might not remain
> when the sun sets we are afraid
> it might not rise in the morning.[58]

The front-loaded repetition of these lines demonstrates the recurring fear tied to the tenuous survival of each day. To occupy the position of those who were never meant to survive produces a temporality of uncertainty in which past success does not guarantee future success. Unable to accumulate, build, or depend upon even the most stalwart symbol of renewal and progress—that despite what we humans do, the sun will still rise in the morning—reflects the complete destabilization of living for those who are constantly fixed on surviving. Fears of the future, of hunger, of love, of loneliness, crowd the "we" such that any action inspires fear—even the one

promised by the "heavy-footed" to grant them security: "but when we are silent / we are still afraid." Fear of not surviving, of not being able to live into the future, pervades all conditions, all time, all space. Their bodies imprinted with it and poisoned by it. Lorde's litany does not deny the reality of these conditions and the fear it inspires. Instead of saying it is foolish to be afraid or pretending that they can defeat the conditions that inspire this fear, Lorde's logical conclusion confronts the illogic of this position head-on and deploys the fear itself as a form that can be used against those who have produced it. The poem concludes:

> So it is better to speak
>
> remembering
>
> we were never meant to survive.[59]

By acknowledging the structural conditions that make survival impossible, rather than believing the false promises of future safety that cajole women into silent complicity, women might turn this fear into power through expression and naming. Rather than saying "we will not survive," Lorde points to the conditions that shape these conditions of unsurvivability: there is a "they" who has constructed a system that does not take their lives into account. While speaking out may not change this fact, it does serve as proof that, as long as this line is repeated, the "we" *has* in fact survived, as survival here is figured as a collective condition. This recalcitrant survival may not alter the conditions that inspire fear, but it does change the relationship of the women to these conditions and to the narratives that attempt to diminish their importance and suppress their ability to live. In reminding herself and others that they were "never meant to survive," she also reminds them that, reading that line now, they are still surviving. This intimate address doubles as political protest by gathering together the collective power of women whose acts of resistance include the very act of being alive.

Lorde's stark acknowledgement of the conditions built against her survival contradicts the optimistic survival stories of post-apocalyptic futurism, especially those that circulated in the Reagan-era turn to the potential for a "limited" and "survivable" nuclear war. During this time, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which was created by President Carter and strengthened under Reagan, created a "Crisis Relocation Plan" to save 80% of American citizens in the event of a nuclear attack, thus making "nuclear war survivable, thinkable, manageable."[60] The "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," however, argues that a city like Washington D.C., whose population is 80% Black, only has "post-nuclear holocaust plans [to] insure the survival of the white, male elite"—the White House and its network of privilege.[61]

Lorde's theory of survival makes the unimaginable imaginable—not in order to manage it, but to transform it. In other words: what happens to the power of apocalyptic narratives to shape behavior through fear and false assurances when one acknowledges they were never meant to survive to begin with? That the emergency preparedness plan was not written for them? The acknowledgement, Lorde demonstrates, is radically liberating. Rather than building a narrative of emancipation that depends upon accumulation, exploitation, or complicity, Lorde's stark realism of surviving *in spite of* becomes a rallying cry for action that echoes across her work and that of other feminists, especially Black, lesbian feminists. To say that "we were never meant to survive" is evidence that the "we" is still surviving despite the "They" and their fear tactics and war games. The structure of the litany, the invocation that solicits a response, configures this declaration of survival as a collective condition rather than an individual struggle. And it is because of this collectivity that this declaration of survival can go on living as long as they are "those of us" who can speak it.

Two years after its publication in *Black Unicorn,* Lorde transforms the line "we were never meant to survive" through her memoir *The Cancer Journals,* which situates breast cancer as an expression and symptom of the nuclear complex and its attendant forms of oppression. *The Cancer Journals* theorizes how environmental, social, and political structures construct and configure the experience of living with breast cancer, positioning cancer as a weapon of *mass-gendered-destruction* that manifests in the culminating violence of ecological and social injustice expressed through her body. While feminist magazines discussing nuclear power in the 1970's and 80's cited cancer as one of the disproportionate effects borne by women,[62] Lorde expanded the network of harm in which breast cancer was situated. She reads her breast cancer as sign and symptom of the broader destructive logics of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism, which amplify and are amplified by the nuclear complex. As Lana Lin argues, "for her, sexism and racism are not only correlated but are conceived of as pathological, in the sense of a social disorder or malfunction."[63] Survival, then, was not simply a matter of surviving breast cancer as an individual, but a restructuring of these co-constitutive systems of oppression, of which breast cancer was one symptom of many. In demonstrating how these systems of oppression are related, she reframes the feminist mediation of personal and political and makes palpable the faceless structures of oppression represented as the "They" in "Litany for Survival."

Reanimating the commitment to speaking against silence and fear as expressed in "Litany," *The Cancer Journals* positions its claim for survival within the context of the simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility of Black women and demonstrates how even within feminist groups, this type of present-absence renders Black women as targets. Lorde writes: "For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings."[64] The "we" here

represents Black women first and foremost before recalibrating to include all women: "And neither were most of you here today, black or not."[65] The narrowing specificity of the "we" that Lorde addresses as a collective reflects Black women's skepticism of the women's movement political efficacy, as women of color were often elided by its claims. The founding of the National Black Feminist Organization in 1973 and the Combahee River Collective in 1974 marked a growing concern among Black feminists that the broader women's movement did not represent their historical or current experiences of oppression.[66] And so, while breast cancer might appear to serve as a unifying cause around which all women could rally, Black feminists like Lorde sought to differentiate the experiences of Black women so that their perspectives were not subsumed by the demands of white feminism. In doing so, she articulates how breast cancer functions not only as an illness and medical event but as a racialized, gendered, and environmental phenomenon, one that becomes symptomatic of the nuclear complex.

Cancer, in Lorde's formulation of survival, is rendered as a symptom of systemic injustice, including the often-undetectable contamination caused by fallout (the atmospheric, global vector of the nuclear age), and runoff (the localized, community specific vector of contamination). As such, Lorde demonstrates how cancer is a form of the nuclear that manifests the ways in which the global and local effects of America's radioactive nation-building project continue to threaten the survival of women even after weapons testing goes underground and nuclear power plants are decommissioned. This form thrives because it is so difficult to link to one particular cause or event, working instead by way of accumulation and dispersion. Lorde was skeptical of the treatments offered by a medical establishment that was still predominately run by white men—what she called the "straight medical profession"[67]—especially the use of radiation a form of treatment. If radiation could cause cancer, Lorde wondered, how could it heal

it? In the chapter titled "Breast Cancer: A Black Lesbian Experience," Lorde explains: "I could not choose the option of radiation and chemotherapy because I felt strongly that everything I had read about them suggested that they were in and of themselves carcinogenic."[68] Unable to trust that the treatment options had her best interest at heart in a system that was not built for her survival, Lorde read her body and gathered the experiences of other women to make informed decisions about her health. Stacey Alaimo, in her new materialist reading of Lorde's memoir, notes that rather than essentializing her body or gender, Lorde's "insistence on the actuality of her own flesh" should be read as a "bodily immersion within power structures that have real material effects."[69] In reading her body as a symptom of this network of contamination while also positioning the medical establishment within a white-patriarchal-hetero system of knowledge production, Lorde develops an embodied feminist framework that renders survival as social condition and rejects the isolating, anti-feminist, and individualistic rhetoric of illness and disease.

If survival is in fact social condition rather than an individual pursuit, Lorde's work demonstrates the need for collective action. The constant threat of violence, amplified through the nuclear complex and newly intimate through the experience of a cancer diagnosis, emboldened Lorde even further to insist on the need for collectivity. The "we" who was "never meant to survive," Lorde writes in *The Cancer Journals*, "can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned…and we will still be no less afraid."[70] Lorde situates the "poisoned" earth and "distorted" children as the two primary indices for nuclear harm. Fear of birth defects and uncertainty about the quality of air, food, water (and breast milk) in relation to radioactivity galvanized a woman-led, anti-nuclear movement, especially after the near-meltdown at Three-

Mile Island in 1978. However, as Zaretsky writes in *Radiation Nation,* these figures were also deployed by the state to invoke new forms of nationalism at a time when it was being questioned and undermined by fear of misinformation and conspiracy. Zaretsky argues that the "widely reproduced photographs of pregnant women and children camping out at a mass care center implied that the state was tending to its most vulnerable citizens….A photograph of an African American toddler sleeping peacefully under a Civil Defense–issued blanket seemed to suggest that the state had risen to the occasion."[71] Lorde's insistence on a collectively *unprotected* "we," however, contradicts this nationalist nuclear imaginary. Rather, she positions the effects of environmental and nuclear violence—cancer, polluted earth, harmed children—as linked expressions of a historically specific intersection of gender and race, not as a unique event that the national as a whole will together survive. In this new iteration, the repeated refrain "we were never meant to survive" demonstrates how women were caring for each other in spite of the state, in spite of the structures that constantly threatened to not only make life unlivable, but unsurvivable.

Lorde, who frequently described herself as a "Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet" read America's structures of oppression as war tactics. In donning the identity of a warrior, she acknowledged that that America was not only fighting a global Cold War but a domestic "hot" one. Invoking her own embodied harm as evidence of this war without severing it from its socio-ecological conditions, Lorde tells her readers: "my scars are an honorable reminder that I may be a casualty in the cosmic war against radiation, animal fat, air pollution, McDonald's hamburgers and Red Dye No. 2, but the fight is still going on, and I am still a part of it."[72] Cancer, in this configuration is both a symptom and effect of America's radioactive nation-building project as well as the interlinked forms of oppression perpetuated by a patriarchal, capitalist, neocolonial

system. And survival is not simply the ability to live into the future but a material condition shaped through the constant onslaught of violence she and women like her experienced on a daily basis and fought against to make the future worth living for. This "cosmic war" has even exceeded the control of those who first waged it. Like a chain reaction out of control, these structures of violence reproduce themselves: "a mechanized and inhuman civilization that is destroying our earth and those who live upon it."[73] No one is safe from this destruction, Lorde suggests, though some will survive longer and better than others. As a warrior and survivor, Lorde declares her role to be "fighting the spread of radiation, racism, woman-slaughter, chemical invasion of our food, pollution of our environment, the abuse and psychic destruction of our young."[74] Each of these forms of harm is linked to the other. Just as Lorde reconfigured survival as collective action, she consolidates the disparate effects of the patriarchal-white-nuclear complex as symptoms of the same entrenched structure.

Lorde produces a new kind of intersectionality by drawing together otherwise disparate expressions of violence into a form that demonstrates the relation between them. As Lana Lin writes, Lorde's "insistence upon claiming herself to be Black, lesbian, mother, daughter, poet, warrior was both an embrace of multiple, intersectional identities and a refusal of singular, normative, categories."[75] By thinking across identities defined by social positions, Lorde also thinks ecologically through the various relationships that shape and are shaped by these circumstances. Other Black feminists build off of this new structure of thinking, positioning their own theories about the nuclear complex's relationship to their survival through the logic that Lorde establishes. For example, in her article about how feminist writers were engaging the "nuclear abyss," Barbara Smith reads America's radioactive nation-building project as the logical outcome of "a political system historically hostile to human life."[76] This threat to survival

is not new; she argues: "Unlike white folks with racial, class, sexual, and heterosexual privilege for whom a nuclear disaster might well be the only threat they would ever encounter…we are painfully aware, as Black Lesbian feminist poet Audre Lorde writes: 'we were never meant to survive.'" [77] The apocalyptic threat of nuclear war is not altogether new, but rather the latest—and perhaps most "democratic" in terms of its undiscerning aim—tool of destruction. Lorde's figuration of survival as an ongoing struggle against historical and structural forms of violence articulates the important differences that are otherwise washed over in the universalizing discourse of nuclear war.

Several years later, Lorde again reconfigures her collectivizing refrain, "we were never meant to survive," in a personal letter to Pat Parker. In 1988, Lorde's long-time friend and fellow poet wrote to her describing her struggles after a mastectomy and her decision to pursue chemotherapy for treatment.[78] In Parker's letter, and in Lorde's response, both women render the inexpressible terrain of harm and uncertainty through forms of the nuclear. Parker writes to Lorde:

> There are so many thoughts, fears, and emotions moving within me that I feel like a nuclear reactor out of control….All this time, I have been thinking that I have survived this system, have managed to place in a controllable state and I see this disease as a clear message that I have failed. I'm sure that I let too much of the anger turn inward…I have tried to write it manageable, to play sports it manageable, to drink it manageable, to love it manageable."[79]

Nearly a decade after the partial meltdown at Three-Mile Island and just two years after the Chernobyl reactor meltdown, Parker's figuration of her own body as a reactor that cannot be controlled reveals how the discourse of managed risk has shaped her view of the relationship

between her body and the environment. Risk, as Ulrich Beck explains, is socially distributed such that those who profited from the production of risk are affected by it the least.[80] It is impossible that Parker could make "it manageable" on her own. Her failure is not indicative of her individual strength but symptomatic of a system that is built to fail certain people in order to succeed for others. Her inability to alter these conditions produced the anger that is figured here as the radioactive fuel that cannot be cooled. Its pressure builds and builds until the containment structures meant to manage it fail. This rhetoric of containment in turn fails Parker. In rendering her own body as the mechanism of failure, she falls prey to the false consciousness of risk management that proliferates throughout the atomic age. This is especially true when that management is individualized in the bodies of citizens during a crisis, as certain bodies are always designated as being more expendable than others. Parker's rendering of herself as a nuclear reactor in meltdown demonstrates how she has internalized the civil-defense-era ethos that suggests that in the event of crisis, it is one's own personal responsibility to defend, deflect, manage one's body and well-being. And, following that logic, it is due to her own human error, not the system in which she is entrenched, that she is in crisis. Lorde, however, responds to Parker by rejecting this logic and seeks instead to console Parker by reminding her that this system makes certain actions impossible—that a "controlled state" never existed in the first place and that the destructive effects of the nuclear age are always already present in Black women's bodies who were "never meant to survive."

Lorde's response, sent a month later, begins by reminding Parker that any informed decision a woman makes about her own body is the right one. Following this affirmation of agency, she rejects Parker's logic that her breast cancer is a result of any personal failure or action. She writes:

> BULLSHIT on it's our anger that caused our cancers! How much strontium-90 and racism have you absorbed today? I feel it's my anger that has helped keep me alive…WE WERE NEVER MEANT TO SURVIVE so under the circumstances, girlfriend, I think we've done pretty well.[81]

Here, radiation and racism are figured as all-encompassing, ever-persistent elements that Lorde and Parker "absorb" simply by existing. More than systemic, they're atmospheric. They persist generationally, settling into genes and bones to harm a future that is already made unlivable. Strontium-90, like the reactor in meltdown, had become a symbol of the failures of America's radioactive nation-building project and the untold costs of war on future generations. Detected even in baby teeth, strontium-90 revealed how the domestic sphere and atmosphere both absorbed the byproducts of nuclear war.[82] By invoking it here, in the same breath as racism, Lorde reconfigures Parker's image of the uncontrolled reactor by locating it within a system of historical inequity that permeates even the most intimate spaces. Here, fallout and reactors are parts of the larger whole that perpetuates racial and gendered oppression, forming a system in which she and Parker specifically "were never meant to survive."[83] Lorde's all-caps reminder of her now well-rehearsed and widely repeated claim communicates the exasperating, self-evident truth of this statement. Each time this statement is repeated, it proves the resistance and survival of those to whom it refers: despite *all this,* Parker and Lorde, are surviving.

Through her repetition and transformation of this poetic line, Lorde demonstrates the social form of poetry, which organizes and articulates relations, and how this collectivizing expression in turn renders survival as ongoing work rather than a static condition. Her figuration of survival contradicts the prevailing state-sponsored imaginary that renders survival as a nationalist and individualized pursuit, one that each citizen shares in equally. In insisting that

America does not intend for women to survive, especially Black lesbian women, Lorde connects the otherwise disparate parts of patriarchy, environmentalism, and gender in the context of the atomic age. As Willamette Brown writes in her pivotal 1983 tract *Black Women and the Peace Movement,* "One contribution of Black and white women's leadership to the peace movement has been to show how private personal violence is of a piece with nuclear and military violence."[84] Lorde works to show how survival involves the layering of the intimate and embodied onto the collective and shared, as she reconfigures the call-and-response of the litany form into ever more intimate shared forms of address.

Reading Lorde's figuration of survival, which cut through the narrowing discourses of empowerment, power, and survivalism to bridge the gap between the anti-nuclear and women's movements, reveals how poet-activists were reading the nuclear complex as an expression and amplification of multiple forms of oppression, a nexus that drew together a diverse set of actors into what we would now call an intersectional environmental justice movement. Just as the ever-accreting forms of the nuclear spill over the edges of their containment structures, so do the conditions that "we" were supposed to survive, as each repetition of Lorde's figuration builds yet another connection between embodied experience and environmental risk. The poetics of demonstration helps us understand poetry's ability to organize, reconfigure, and coordinate new social relations to bring about more just futures. The ongoing repetition of Lorde's figuration of survival demonstrates how this "we" continues to sustain itself to this day, a collective voice that outlives any attempt to extinguish the individual lives of those not meant to survive.

Extraction and Excavation

Leila Rupp, in her 1978 article in *Women: A Journal of Liberation* titled "Women, Power, & History," questions the liberal definitions of power that claim it is an "individual ability" and "inner source of strength," recovering instead a definition that speaks to its relationship to energy and work: power is being able "to do or effect something."[85] To illustrate her point, she turns to Adrienne Rich's now well-known poem "Power," which engages the history and historiography of women's power through the figure of Marie Curie, the woman scientist who discovered and subsequently died from radioactivity. The poem's frequently quoted, and frequently misinterpreted, final stanza appears to answer the question of where a women's power comes from:

> She died   a famous woman   denying
> her wounds
> denying
> her wounds   came   from the same source as her power.[86]

For the purposes of her argument, Rupp interprets the poem as a cautionary tale, with Marie Curie as the representation of what women should not emulate. And it is not wrong to read Rich's poetry allegorically—her channeling of myth and symbol demand we rethink the reach of representation, both on the scale of what stands in for abstract concepts like power but also in terms of who is politically represented by her work. While Rich relied upon symbolic representation as a central form through which the personal became political, she was critical of symbolic gestures and token political representation. As Hilary Holladay writes in her recent biography, *The Power of Adrienne Rich,* Rich feared that some of her own success in the male-dominated poetry world could be attributed to tokenism and was distrustful of institutional use of

symbols while dependent on them in her poetics.[87] In her poetry, especially "Power," which positions itself as representative of the deeper structures at work in mediating the distribution of power, we see a negotiation of the literal and figurative valences of language, which Rich is at once deeply invested in and deeply critical of. This negotiation exposes the extent to which symbolic change can also be material change and how metaphor can reorganize not only semantic relations but social relations.

Like Lorde, Adrienne Rich's work was central to feminist thought and the women's liberation movement. Her poetry collections *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) and *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978) also served as bookends for a powerful personal and social transformation in Rich's life that take place through a type of feminist awakening. And while both collections are rightly read through their defining contributions to radical feminism, they are less frequently read according to how their critique of patriarchal logics afforded a new understanding of ecological destruction. In fact, some critics of the feminist poetry being written at this time cited the couching of the environmental within the patriarchal as problematic—that the former should be understood on its own terms, beyond its relationship to patriarchy. Jan Clausen, in her extensive review of poetry's centrality to the women's liberation movement writes: "Nuclear war threatens to obliterate all of us. So does the only slightly more nebulous specter of irreversible ecological imbalance. Yet feminist poetry (and theory) usually mentions these terrors only obliquely, or as some kind of metaphor for generalized patriarchal destructiveness.[88] Echoing the arguments of feminists who demanded nuclear power was a human issue, not a feminist one, Clausen finds feminist poetry's aversion to naming nuclear and ecological violence as such to be symptomatic of its repression of power's "negative connotations." She argues that some women writers have confronted this negativity not by

excavating it but by repressing it and then positing women's power as its opposite: "inherently good, constructive, non-competitive, nurturing."[89] In linking feminist poetry's repression of power's double edge to its avoidance of the totalities of nuclear and ecological destruction, Clausen suggest there is a necessary relationship between forms of energy, power, empowerment, and liberation.

In turning to Rich's feminist poems that feature forms of the nuclear most prominently, I explore how Rich confronts the contradictions surrounding women's power and empowerment through the literal and figurative representations of nuclear power and its effects. In doing so, I complicate readings that may position her work as an expression of the ideological purity that would position women's power as an unequivocal "good," as the nuclear complex reveals the impossibility of separating one's personal actions from larger structural inequities, even if those actions seek to resist and dismantle those structures. The anthropocenic "problem of scale," which seeks to address disproportionate effect humans have had on the earth according to a geological scale, is refracted through feminism's mediation of the political through the personal, as women's power is figured as both that which must depart from existing systems of energy and empowerment while also remaining necessarily imbricated in them. In exploring the relationship between energy extraction and empowerment, literally and figuratively, Rich's work questions the methods required to survive. Can women "survive"—nuclear bombs, radiation, historical erasure, patriarchy—without relying on extractive practices that are inherently exploitative? Reading her poems through their configurations of literal and figurative sources of power disallows an easy feminist reading of her work and reveals the difficulty she confronts in imagining a commons in which women do not simply reproduce hetero-patriarchal structures. And so while Lorde's assertion of survival reveals how the nuclear complex depends upon and

sustains broader systems of oppression, cutting through the overdetermined imaginaries of power and empowerment in doing so, Rich attempts to develop a feminist theory of power by dwelling on its literal and figurative valences in order to offer a path to empowerment and survival that does not also reproduce patriarchal forms of extraction. In other words, if more energy does not lead to women being "more free," how much energy do they need to survive, and what sources can they draw from to build power?

Adrienne Rich was not a central player in the anti-nuclear movement in so far as she was not a spokesperson for the movement but rather a critic of how it sometimes reinforced the ideologies perpetuated by the nuclear complex. As she moved toward radical feminist and then radical lesbian feminist politics over the course of the 1970's, she critiqued how "heterosexist and sexist" the majority of ecological and anti-nuclear movements were and supported the formation of "lesbian 'affinity groups'" within these movements.[90] Because she confronted America's nuclear complex primarily through its patriarchal structure, her figurations of empowerment and energy work to expose the effects of this oppressive relationship. For example, her 1979 article in *New Women's Times,* explains how the extraction of women's energy and the exploitation of their labor is imbricated in capitalist forms of energy extraction. She writes: "Nuclear madness is the expression—fused with lethal technology— of what happens when one-half of a species literally builds its civilization on the bodies of the other half"; that, just as there are "acceptable levels" of radiation and waste, this system has designated "acceptable levels of woman-waste and womandestruction."[91] Her work thus becomes an important index of how the abstract theorizations of power were materialized through specific forms of energy, which in turn manifested the complex relationship between energy extraction and women's liberation.

In using forms of the nuclear—namely, radiation and nuclear weapons—to organize the formal logics of "Trying to Talk with a Man" and "Power," the opening poems in her two most prominent feminist poetry collections, Rich demonstrates how nuclear power precipitated new frameworks for addressing the dynamic relationship between energy and emancipation. It is because of the contradictory nature of forms of the nuclear—the radioactivity that makes it both dangerous and useful, the threat of destruction that makes its symbolic power as important as its physical power—that these two poems confront their own imbrication in social relations that are defined by energy extraction, even as they seek to offer alternative forms of relation. Each of these poems grapples differently with how representing the nuclear complex actually reconfigures the limits of figuration: nuclear bombs and radiation both represent something crucial about how the patriarchy works but also resist being positioned as "mere" symbols of this structure. Formally, both poems also explore how literal conditions are transformed into symbolic representations and how these symbols are then "de-figured" into the literal conditions they represent, while a fugitive excess of meaning remains after this exchange. Through this process, Rich develops a feminist theory of power that resists patriarchal extraction while also acknowledging its unavoidable effects, even on poetic form. The contradictions embedded in forms of nuclear power complicate an otherwise straightforward reading of Rich as a feminist poet who "empowers" women. In tending to these contradictions, and how they shape Rich's poetry, a more complex relationship between energy and liberation emerges.

Rich's 1973 collection *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972* embodies the women's movement creed that the personal is political. As she writes of her own work, her intention is "breaking down the artificial barriers between private and public, between Vietnam and the lover's bed, between the deepest images we carry out of our dreams and the most daylight events

'out in the world.'"[92] *Diving* breaks down these barriers by digging into them to find the root source of their division. The title poem, for example, portrays a diver in the depths of the ocean who came to explore "the wreck and not the story of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth."[93] In excavating the repressed and historical forms of power that women have already generated and yet have been denied access to, she also generates a new logic for the women's movement, one that touches at the crux where power meets empowerment: the symbolic is material. However before wading into the ocean and diving beneath the surface for the origin of allegory and myth, the book wrestles with the surface, the wrecked space of the desert. The poem "Trying to Talk with a Man," opens the collection by exploring the different modes of representation that make the personal political as well as the means by which representation becomes literal. And as she demonstrates throughout this collection, one cannot understand how the personal becomes the political or the symbolic material without tending to mediation.

This poem is often read through the dissolution of Rich's marriage to Alfred Conrad and his suicide in 1970.[94] The failed attempt at communication in the title referencing their relationship while he was alive and after his death—the "ghost town" in the poem both figurative and physical. The title demonstrates how the poem will wrestle with its own constraints—its ability to mediate material and symbolic forms of power. The poem oscillates between nuclear bombs as symbolic weapons and nuclear bombs as physical weapons, both of which demonstrate certain aspects of power and its ability to shape material conditions. As Joseph Masco argues in *Nuclear Borderlands*, the power of nuclear weapons comes from their symbolic power as well as material destruction, as they functioned as the ultimate sign of dominance in the geopolitical landscape of the Cold War.[95] And so, while the poem treats the atomic bomb's power symbolically to represent the couple's relational conflict, the bomb's symbolic valence is also

reconfigured through its treatment as a material manifestation of symbolic power. In tracking Rich's configuration of this form of the nuclear, we see how "the Bomb" as a global symbol of patriarchal aggression is made personal as a representation of one couple's relationship, and how that relationship in turn represents the broader political landscape of the nuclear complex. Though the poem begins by suggesting the "bombs" are literal, while also inviting the inference of "the Bomb," it ends by invoking the atomic bomb as a symbol that represents the couple's destruction—the splitting of that which was once one.

"Trying to Talk" opens with two one-line stanzas: "Out in this desert we are testing bombs, // that's why we came here."[96] On a semantic level, these lines express literal conditions. The statement is more or less historically accurate if one interprets the "we" here as a public pronoun, a representation of the nation in which a more private "we" is necessarily imbricated. The nuclear complex went to "the desert," most frequently the "Nevada Test Site," to deploy atomic bombs and study their effects above and below ground. The "we" here has not yet been circumscribed into a couple, as happens later in the poem. Christopher Spaide, in an article exploring Rich's use of the lyric "we," argues that this poem deploys two iterations of this collective pronoun: "public and private: the military-scientific complex of 'our' nuclear superpower, and the narrower 'we' of husband and wife."[97] Notably, the title generalizes the other member in this couple as the allegorical "Man" who oscillates between representing system and spouse throughout the poem, though in both cases a type of authority that must be confronted. As the "we" oscillates between public to private, so does the "bomb," sometimes representing the literal object of the atomic bomb and somethings serving as the signifying vehicle for the couple's relationship, which itself serves as a representation of the forms of power structuring the nuclear complex and the nuclear family. With each of these relationships,

persons, and objects standing at times for themselves but always pointing to their larger symbolic valences, the personal is shown to always be political not merely in an interpersonal sense but in the sense that individuals are culpable in the actions of the nuclear complex.

The fusion of the personal and political in "we," then, is further complicated by the literal and symbolic valences of the bomb. The poem does not need to say they are testing "atomic bombs" because in the imaginaries generated by the nuclear complex, "bomb" always already stands in for "atomic bomb," a metonym that consequently became de-figured into literal representation through its overuse. This work of de-figuration represents how the nuclear complex proliferates by strategically repressing the spectacle of the nuclear to render it mundane. Attempts to normalize nuclear power—through programs that sought peaceful uses for it, that linked it to America's geopolitical position, or that delinked its real effects through false analogy (i.e. calling the deployment of a nuclear weapon on American soil a "test" as if it does not count as a real bombing)—meant that nuclear power tended to occupy both an intensified figurative register and a diminished literal one. As Ulrich Beck writes, the state has a history of trivializing nuclear risk as "apocalyptic catastrophe is euphemized for public consumption."[98] Jessica Hurley offers the "nuclear mundane" as a term that names how the nuclear has become infrastructural, reaching "into every aspect of everyday life" which, while at times rendering it beneath notice, also makes it "something that can be named and challenged."[99] Both modes of representation allow it to escape notice as *atomic* or *nuclear* became mere modifiers—figures of speech that could be used to describe any extreme state—while related forms like *radiation* and *reactors* proliferated to become a part of the background of American life. Rich's poem marks this de-figured status of nuclear weapons while at the same time deploying them as an all-encompassing symbol for her interpersonal relationship. By transforming the relationship between figurative

and literal modes, the poem's formal logic demonstrates the process that can lead to either the reproduction or complication of these problematic extremes when representing the nuclear complex.

It is through poetic form's ability to organize the limits of the symbolic register that Rich is able to explore what lies beneath and behind these nuclear symbols and events. She extends the redefinition of these limits to historical context itself, as the poem challenges its commitment to literal and historical conditions by adjusting the temporal boundaries of the events described within the poem. Because the poem was written eight years after the Partial Test Ban Treaty (1963), which prohibited the detonation of nuclear bombs above ground and underwater, the poem's logic demands that the reader either consider the poem as having made a mistake in its historical treatment or reconceive of what the mechanisms of nuclear testing entail. Rich, in a 2005 interview, discusses "Trying to Talk" as a poem centrally concerned with nuclear power, suggesting she was well-aware of its historical contours and was unlikely to have disregarded its conditions in the present when she wrote the poem. When discussing the poem she explains, "it's the desert where nuclear bombs are being experimentally exploded," and that in addition to discussing "the danger of nuclear war, of radiation" she also wants to talk about how "the human relationship" is "in danger." [100] This interest in exploring the different manifestations of "danger" as it relates to the atomic bomb, coupled with the following stanza's transition to an underground terrain, suggests that Rich intentionally extends the boundaries of the event of nuclear testing to explore the spaces and relationships that atomic bombs shape long after they are detonated. Rather than positioning these explosions as past events, she represents them as part of an ongoing, unending complex that resists the very diminishment and repression that the misnomer of "nuclear test" is supposed to facilitate. In doing so, Rich complicates the figuration of the

atomic test bomb and deconstructs its problematic representation in the nuclear imaginary (refusing, for example, the oversaturated symbol of the mushroom cloud as the sole marker of its effects). This refiguration creates an alternative framework for exploring the hidden and unconscious valences of its danger, destruction, and power while also changing the stakes of survival—one need not only survive the detonation, but the atmospheric, stratigraphic, enduring effects of its fallout.

Following this reconfigured historical statement, the poem's terrain travels from the surface to underground—a representation of the nuclear unconscious as well as the literal site of the continued atomic explosions after the Partial Test Ban Treaty. The poem continues: "Sometimes I feel an underground river / forcing its way between deformed cliffs" that moves "into this condemned scenery."[101] Rather than remain in these depths, as "Diving into the Wreck," does, the poem complicates the relationship between surface and depth by oscillating between literal and figurative registers: the appearance of things on the surface set against the hidden and inaccessible networks that those appearances either shroud or belie. As the opening poem for the collection, this toggling between what appears and what is hidden signals a more complicated view of allegory and myth, in which the goal as a reader is not to read objects only for what they represent elsewhere, but to hold together the literal and metaphorical valences of those objects.

When the fifth stanza returns to the public "we," the desert, like the bomb, becomes the vehicle for the couple's understanding of their own relationship. Similarly, as the desert is deployed alternately as the literal setting and as a symbolic cipher for their experience of lack, isolation, and silence, the logic of this transformation snags when it is confronted with the historical conditions of the nuclear complex of which the couple is a part. After a stanza filled

with memories of “bakery windows…love-letters…suicide notes” and “afternoons on the riverbank,”[102] the desert at first represents the empty inverse of this litany. However, the next stanza demonstrates the layered failure of that personal imaginary and a public imaginary: “Coming out to this desert / we meant to change the face of.”[103] Written like a directive that at once expresses its own failure (“we meant to” but did not succeed), the “we” that was previously tapering into the exclusiveness of a personal relationship is again repositioned to represent their status as participants in a failed radioactive nation-building project. As Traci Brynne Voyles argues in *Wastelanding,* negative connotations of the desert as barren and empty are “constitutive of the white masculine settler subject” and the attendant settler environmental imaginaries that prefer “verdant” landscapes as the proper site of “wilderness” and potential productivity.[104] The colonizing force of the mission “to change the face of” layered on top of already colonized representation of the desert as an abandoned, desolate place, demonstrates the accumulating logics of a radioactive nation building project, whose effects cannot be contained within a fallout zone or moment in history, but continue to shape the material conditions and imaginative possibilities of the future. As the couple travels further into their narrowly constructed version of this environment, their own silences and the silences of the desert become confused: they are “surrounded by a silence // that sounds like the silence of the place / except that it came with us.”[105] Silence, like the desert, becomes a presence rather than an absence, an active, shaping force rather than a backdrop for a human drama to unfold. Each time the poem attempts to deploy a symbol, its stubborn referent asserts its depths; and each time the poem attempts to speak of surface—literal conditions—figurative associations complicate its narrow scope. The poem’s own logics of representation make it so that Rich cannot appropriate the entire scope of the atomic bomb, the desert, or the nuclear complex as objects in the allegory for her personal

relationship; rather these sites of conflict continually reassert their real history and materiality, which positions the private "we" of the couple into the broader "we" of the radioactive nation-building project.

This confusion of literal and symbolic representation reaches a crescendo near the end of the poem, when the "Man" becomes the desert, or rather, the desert becomes embedded in the man.

> Your dry heat feels like power
>
> your eyes are stars of a different magnitude
>
> ………………………………
>
> talking of the danger
>
> as if it were not ourselves
>
> as if we were testing anything else.[106]

The desert becomes the figure through which the man's power becomes visible to the speaker. His "dry heat" feels to her "like power" and his "eyes are stars." The desert is not personified here but rather the man is transformed into the desert through the process of *ecomorphism,* in which someone or something is represented through the qualities of an ecological phenomenon or place. Ashton Nichols argues that this ecocentric figuration "is the antithesis of anthropomorphism" as it allows humans to see their activity "in terms of our connectedness to nonhuman life."[107] While the couple "meant to change the face of" the desert, the desert instead changed the face of the man. On one level, this transformation demonstrates the unintended consequences of their nation-building, terraforming mission. On another level, it demonstrates the confusion between literal and figurative meaning. Rather than seeking to purify the relationship between nature and culture, symbol and referent, Rich presses into these confusions

of representation even further. Just as the effort to keep separate the public and private "we" implodes over the course of the poem, the boundaries between inner and outer, surface and depth, literal and figurative are revealed to be intentionally constructed as separate in order to maintain certain power structures—in this case, one that serves the patriarchal nuclear complex. And it is not *dissolving* these boundaries but *reconfiguring* them that the poem demonstrates as its method of resistance.

The poem concludes then by interrogating its own use of literal and figurative language as well as that of the couple who, throughout the poem, are trying and failing to communicate. It is over halfway through the poem when the speaker transitions from speaking as an individual and as part of a "we" to addressing the "you," the Man, with whom she is purportedly trying to talk. It is in relation to her own power that she directly addresses him: "Out here I feel more helpless / with you than without you."[108] That this is the moment the "we" splits into the direct address of a "you" signals that it is power that mediates when and how this "we" can act as a collective and what actions they can take. This turn to the address the "Man" signals a turn toward directness itself, as the things they are talking about and the space they are occupying become urgently present. While a moment ago they were "talk[ing] of people caring for each other / in emergencies," now the "you" looks at the speaker "like an emergency." While a moment ago "we" were driving through the desert, now the man can only be understood as part of the desert, in relation to its heat and stars.

As the poem's formal logics imbricate the figurative and literal, public and private, it approaches the form of a metaphoric conceit in reverse where, instead of beginning with a strong metaphor that accretes figurative meaning, the figurative meaning accumulates over the course of the poem to assert the centrality of the controlling metaphor ("as if we were testing anything

else”). However, while the poem gestures toward this conceit—that the matter of testing the atomic bomb in this poem might be read solely as a metaphor for the couple’s relationship—the public “we” enters one last time to refuse this easy collapse of figurative and literal meaning. The poem instead concludes with the speaker refusing the signifying relationship offered by the man. He is “talking of the danger” in terms of equipment, logistics, outside forces while she sees the network in which they are entrenched: “as if it were not ourselves / as if we were testing anything else.” The man suppresses the relationship between the political and the personal, the literal and the figurative, even as he undergoes his own ecomorphic transformation, eroding the boundary between self and system. The speaker, however, links particulars to structures, returning each sign to its figurative capacities without dismissing its historical and literal conditions. The final comparison of relationship to bomb is couched within negative and conditional language—“as if it were not” an admission that recognizes the failure of reducing the bomb into a mere symbol of interpersonal relations. Instead, the return to the opening image of the bomb and its requisite dangers emphasizes how the power relations that structure the personal “we” of the nuclear family are intractable from the public, national “we” of the nuclear complex in which they participate.

The poem’s formal logics, which move between figurative and literal registers, reveal the relationship between personal and political to be unstable. The personal is political and the political is personal, each representative of the other, but mediated through different forms of power. In choosing the atomic bomb, the ultimate symbol of power, as the organizing logic of this poem and her relationship with “a Man,” Rich demonstrates how the couple’s relationship reflects the broader logics of a patriarchal nation-building project and how this nuclear complex is in turn constructed through the conditions created in the patriarchal structure of the nuclear

family. The poem's form, then, enables the intersection of the speaker's double address, revealing the failures and fissures in the work of producing and communicating meaning. To talk with a "Man" is to occupy the harmful tropes of the barren desert, the ghost town, the silence that is empty of meaning. To try to communicate with a "Man" is to ignore the figurative life of signs, their capacity to point to and represent more than just themselves, the network of life teeming beneath the surface. This is the power of the patriarchy manifested in its political and personal scales: to depend upon symbols to further the project of oppression while at the same time repressing their significance. To produce a powerful feminist form, then, is not simply to repeat the logics of patriarchal representation, but to forge a method that relates the symbolic and literal, the personal and political, in the same network of meaning so that one's experiences never become "merely" symbolic but also are never diminished as insignificant.

Similar to Lorde, Rich's methods of representation demonstrate how the work of excavation, of bringing to light what is hidden, manifesting what is repressed, is not in and of itself a healing action. More knowledge is not more power if one is still working within the bounds of the structure that determines the limits of this power. Rather than creating a simple line between power and empowerment, Rich's poem exposes how both personal and public expressions of power can reproduce the very harm they might be attempting to mitigate. The poem, then, "is trying" to demonstrate how to resist the manipulation and consolidation of literal and figurative registers of meaning that facilitate the repression of the past or enable the diminishment of spectacular violence into the mundane. It is by breaking apart and reconfiguring how and when the literal and figurative align that she renegotiates the terms through which this structure of violence was built. In contrast, the Man's framing of the bomb's danger demonstrates how patriarchal structures of meaning rely upon and yet repress the material effects

of symbolic meaning, as the power of this meaning is tied to both the imagined capacities of its deployment and the material power its presence represents. Rich's framing reconfigures not only the relationship of figurative to literal, but the capacities of figuration to mediate surface and depth, personal and public, human and ecosystem. To survive in this desertification of meaning requires a remediation of these systems and the imaginaries they proliferate and depend upon.

Rich's meditations on power and its relationship to the nuclear complex continue in *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978), a book that employs the methods that defined the women's movement while also exposing their limitations. In it, Rich recovers the silenced histories of women, celebrates the power of woman-centered love, and imagines a future shaped by women. One of Rich's most popular poems from the collection, "Power," which was being cited in feminist magazines as early as 1974,[109] has become emblematic of both Rich's career as a radical feminist writer and the struggles of the women's movement. The closing stanza of the poem, as cited previously in this chapter, continues to be recited as if its meaning were self-evident: that a woman's power comes from her wounds. [110] And if you read Adrienne Rich's "Power" solely for its ideological content, you might end up with this common interpretation of the poem's invocation of scientist Marie Curie in its closing lines: That the claim "she died…denying / her wounds   came   from the same source as her power" means that if only Curie had *acknowledged* her wounds, she might have harnessed her own power. In other words, that women's wounds could be the source of their power rather than oppression if only they embraced them. This logic, rather than liberating, is in fact the feminist appendage of the liberal humanist ideology that claims inclusion and recognition solve historical, structural, and material trauma and exclusion. The idea that women can be empowered simply by using their own historical exclusion as a source of energy to fuel their emancipation enables the proliferation of

ineffectual changes to the construction of humanism that depends in part upon the subjugation of women.

While Rich certainly wrote poems that drew on her personal experiences, including the hurtful and vulnerable parts of her past, there is an important difference between turning "wounds into power" and naming their shared source. As with "Trying to Talk with a Man," Rich returns us to the sites and forms of mediation: what changes an energy source into power that wounds or power that empowers? Similar to how "Trying to Talk" deploys the material-symbolic registers of the atomic bomb to represent how the personal is mediated through the political and political through the personal, "Power" furthers this formulation by demonstrating how these social relations are historically shaped. She draws on the material and symbolic power of the nuclear complex to represent this entangled set of relations. And, as in "Trying to Talk," this negotiation of literal and figurative frames the work that follows as she seeks to interrogate myth, archetype, and symbol by relating them to historical conditions and particular experiences so as to avoid reifying them as *merely* figurative representations that are standing in for something larger or more significant.

Power's structural logics—including its sources and forms—shape Rich's poetry and prose. Her 1976 essay, "Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women" explicates a common theme in her poetry: that women's power cannot come from patriarchal structures because women's empowerment depends upon the disruption and reconfiguration of these structures. In the essay, she contextualizes shared power within larger feminist concerns regarding women's unpaid domestic labor, offering an alternative to the narrative that increased energy production will free women from the domestic sphere. Rather that attaching women's empowerment to their position as consumers, or suggesting they model their bid for

empowerment after patriarchal practices of extraction, Rich envisions feminist empowerment as a process that disrupts the extant flows of energy that power patriarchal structures and reconfigures the relationship between energy and power. She argues that when women try to join these extant structures and "earn" equality, "we split ourselves off from the common life of women and deny our female heritage and identity in our work, we lose touch with our real powers and with the essential condition for all fully realized work: community."[111] These "real powers" are built through a common language and shared resources. In short, Rich's figuration of power, energy, and natural resources emerge from a vision of a feminist commons in an era when the commons were being privatized and power individualized not simply for the benefit of a capitalist society but a patriarchal one. She argues: "women in patriarchy have been withheld from building a common world, except in enclaves, or through coded messages."[112] These "coded messages" transform the capacities of figuration by creating new relationships between what and who is being represented and through what forms. And so where "Trying to Talk with a Man" demonstrates the process of building and modifying and deploying these "coded" messages, "Power" exposes the limits of this feminist method as it must confront its own use of extractive practices that seek to both recover and narrate "messages" from the past. The result of this deconstruction is not a formulaic guide for how women can use their wounds to build power or re-write history, but rather an arrival at unanswerable questions: are all extractive methods necessarily exploitative? Is even the act of recovering women's stories an inherently violent form of appropriation that uses another's life and labor to fuel one's own? And if so, will women's survival always depend on the sacrifice of other women or is a collaborative feminist commons truly possible?

The Dream of a Common Language continues the critique of power that Rich begins in *Diving into The Wreck* by reading power through the history of capitalist and patriarchal exploitation of women's labor and women's bodies. As with *Diving,* Rich's figurations of history employ a depth model: diving into the unconscious, digging into the past. Both the unconscious and history are figured as material sites that require excavation to be accessed. The form of the "Power" follows this accumulating logic, with one single-line stanza growing into a quatrain and the quatrain doubling into an octet until the poem returns in conclusion to a quatrain. The poem's form, then, is stratigraphic, a process of discovery that is also an excavation. Again, drawing on the contradictory forms of the nuclear, Rich considers the costs and consequences of the energy that produces power, both figurative and literal. What forms of power depend upon the exploitation, of both self and other? Can power be generated through collaborative, rather than competitive means? Is there a way to hold power in common, to share our resources, when our social relations are shaped by economic structures that privatize and individualize? The poem does not answer these questions, but rather explores the relationship between extraction and excavation, both modeling and critiquing a form that mines its own history to fuel the present.

The poem begins with a fractured fragment, employing interline spaces that demonstrate the work that is required to get below the surface and expose what has been buried or repressed: "Living   in the earth-deposits   of our history."[113] What exists on the surface is "History," the male-dominated story of power relations. To discover "our history," women's stories, one must rupture that surface. What lies below is not inert but "Living." A feminist practice of recovery is figured here *not* as the gentle work of excavation—the archeologist carefully sifting the soil for valuable artifacts—but a forceful extraction that requires damaging the very living that one seeks to access. Throughout the poem, as the fractures continue to form, the image of a positive,

generative, feminist commons is deconstructed and replaced with a forceful feminist fight for truth. As we will see, the tension between whether this force reproduces patriarchal logics or dismantles them shapes the poem's final, unresolvable contradiction.

Following the poem's single-line stanza, the first full stanza is also shaped by interline fractures. The quatrain describes a "backhoe" uncovering a bottle of medicine that was perhaps a "cure for fever   or melancholy   a tonic / for living on this earth."[114] The distinction between "living in" and "living on," "earth-deposits" and "earth" fractures the form further, as historiography is challenged by the gaps in the record that cannot, ultimately, be recovered. Mediation is figured as material: the act of recovering "our history" or extracting what is "living in the earth-deposits" changes those stories and objects. There is no clean translation of the past into the present, especially when that narrative has been intentionally disrupted or discarded. Rather, the act of mediation is in part the cause of this rupture—to recover is to wound.

The central octet of the poem nearly sutures its fractures together as it returns to the surface, the present, and the written record. Most of the gaps in the record have been papered over, a narrative tying together the pieces into "historical fact," and relocated to the margins of the poem, shaping the stanza such that the line lengths decrease then increase with the shortest line in the middle: "she had purified":

> Today I was reading about Marie Curie
>
> she must have known she suffered   from radiation sickness
>
> her body bombarded for years   by the element
>
> she had purified
>
> It seems she denied to the end
>
> the source of the cataracts on her eyes

the cracked and suppurating skin   of her finger-ends

til she could not longer hold.   a test-tube or a pencil[115]

However, some marks of the production of this historical narrative remain visible in the poetic rendering of this story. Rather than reading behind or through the text to intuit double meanings or hidden valences, the poetic form invites us to examine what is within the story, each fracture an opening to further excavation. For example, the speculative syntax of the previous stanza—the cure could be for "fever   or melancholy"—hardens toward surety in this version of history—"she must have known" she was getting sick. From the perspective of the present, when the narrative of the past has been constructed and granted the appearance of totality with cause and effect neatly bundled, Curie's ignorance seems unimaginable. Rich as historiographer-poet, then, must decide how to reconcile the stories of Curie with the re-storying of Curie that she is undertaking. In deciding to represent Curie as one who is in willful denial, rather than a woman who is uniformed or ignorant of her work, Rich shapes the trajectory of the allegory that the poem is both constructing and destroying. Evidence of this choice is reflected in the poem's transformation from speculation to conditional surety. The poem reads: "she *must have known"* and "it *seems*" not "she knew" and "she denied." Her methods more humanist than scientific, Rich leaves room for the possibility of doubt, acknowledging that she as a woman reaching across time cannot know for certain what Curie knew.

While Rich is setting the stage in this central stanza to transform Curie from historical person into allegorical representation, it is important for the poem's excavating process to pause here in the realm of the literal. To move directly to the figurative realm, to view Curie only for what she represents rather than who she was as a person, would be to perform the same violence of extraction that the poem ultimately rejects. In imagining "the suppurating skin   on her finger

ends," for example, Rich commits to record the real, physical pain that Curie experienced as a result of her labor. Her labor that laid the foundation of radiological science, her research that represents the energy of her life's work. Rich, who suffered from chronic pain as a result of rheumatoid arthritis, steps further into the mind of Curie in the closing line of the stanza as she imagines the moment when Curie "could no longer hold a test-tube or a pencil." The instruments of their work, the tools though which they shape of the world, suddenly ungraspable.

The frequently quoted final stanza appears to complete the transformation of Curie as a historical person into a symbol with the apparent moral of her cautionary tale:

> She died a famous woman denying
>
> her wounds
>
> denying
>
> her wounds came from the same source as her power.

Here Rich moves from her speculative then conditionally sure syntax to certainty. She asserts: "she died…denying." No longer Marie Curie in specific but "a famous woman," Curie's death cannot help but transform her into a symbol—the structure of the poem demands it. This is where we see extraction meet excavation, as the process of recovery and uncovering meets the limitations it was previously trying to critique and correct. We have travelled deep into the poem, arriving not at its end but its rock-bottom—the foundation upon which it was built, which is the patriarchal structure that Rich is attempting to deconstruct. This structure days that the story of an ordinary woman would not be worth the labor. The story of an ordinary woman would not survive the rupturing work of mediation. It is only a "famous woman" hardened into symbol that can survive the extraction. In her efforts to recover Curie—what she stood for, what she had become, and how she became what she represented—Rich demonstrates the material constraints

of historiography, of recovering the past. What is portable across time? The complexities of a woman who was unsure or unwilling or unable to confront the structural and literal forms of power that both oppressed and liberated her? No—what survives in this current patriarchal narrative are symbols—tokens of women who had power and were wounded by it.

At the crux of the question of where women's power comes from, how it is shared, distributed, renewed, is a question of form. What forms does power take and what forms does it make? Rich, despite her opposition and revision, is still imbricated in patriarchal structures of power, just as Curie was. In performing her work, she finds herself extracting the story of another woman's work. The story of her life is what remains of her life—it is the form the energy of her labor now takes as her discoveries and hardships shape the future. Rich doubles down on the contradiction using extractive practices to critique the extraction of women's labor in the closing line of the poem, which points to the mediating source between wounds and power. She does not equate women's wounds with power, reinforcing a narrative that chains women to suffering. Rather she points to their shared source, suggesting that both wounds and power are forms that manifest the same hidden structure. The unstable, radioactive radium, whose decay is what allows us to see more deeply into bodies, to peer into what was once unknown, figures this structure as both dynamic and destructive. The question left unanswered in this deconstruction of extraction, then, is: are there any empowering forms of power that can come from these "earth-deposits" of history, or is all power extractive and exploitative, dependent on using one's self or others to fuel one's fame and success?

In her 1977 essay "Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman," Rich argues for the materiality of language and the force of symbol. She argues that poetry's creation of new language and forms is what makes material transformation possible. For women specifically,

language is a “material resource” that women can collectively “repossess,” and is “as real, as tangible in our lives as streets, pipelines, telephone switchboards, microwaves, radioactivity, cloning laboratories, nuclear power stations.”[116] Language is the infrastructure that mediates power. It exposes the logics that shape the production and distribution of power. The shared source of wound and power is language. Rich continues: “as long as our language is inadequate, our vision remains formless, our thinking and feeling are still running in the old cycles, our process may be ‘revolutionary’ but not transformative.” The *Dream* of a “common language” makes possible the vision for a collective future. To ensure that empowerment does not reproduce the violent logics of the power-hungry patriarchal-nuclear complex, Rich suggests, women must create new methods and forms for empowerment in order to survive the rupturing work of excavation and recovery.

Lorde and Rich recognized the dangers of making women’s survival and empowerment contingent upon white, hetero-patriarchal forms of power, freedom, and individual rights. They read their own lives and the lives of the women around them as evidence for how symbols could be transmuted into empty gestures and historical conditions could be suppressed or amplified according to the needs of the patriarchal nuclear complex. This system intensified logics that excluded and oppressed women while at the same time binding women’s autonomy and equality to the availability of energy and their power as consumers. Rich and Lorde worked to transform this extractive and exploitative framework of power by reconfiguring the relationship between energy and equity, power and empowerment. By addressing the literal and figurative relationships between energy and power and how survival’s social form generates and maintains new possibilities for collectivity and expression, their poems expose how the oppression of women is imbricated in the patriarchal nuclear complex, and that to dismantle one requires the

destruction of the other. While the circulation of Lorde's line demonstrates the social life of a poem as it is recontextualized and taken up by other modes and movements, Rich's poems reflect within their own forms how to disrupt the status quo of the social order that depends on a certain relationship between literal and figurative meaning to reproduce a patriarchal imaginary—one that is imbricated in a pro-nuclear imaginary. Their attention to how the nuclear complex disproportionately harms women reconfigures Cold War era survivalist imaginaries, the personal's relationship to the political, and the generating forces of collective action by reconfiguring how material and historical conditions influence these ideologies and frameworks. The answer to the question "Where does women's power come from," then, was not found in locating a precise source or resource, but in creating and sustaining mediating forms that might reconfigure and redistribute the energy that becomes power, and the work of this transformation, empowering.

Chapter Four: Atomic Afrofuturism: June Jordan and Amiri Baraka's Anti-Apocalyptic Futures

It's after the end of the world
Don't you know that yet?

—*Sun Ra,* Space Is the Place (1974)

THERE
ARE
BLACK PEOPLE
IN THE
FUTURE

—Alisha Wormsley's contribution to the Last Billboard Project in Pittsburgh (2018), which was prematurely removed due to complaints from residents.

The dedication page for June Jordan's 1985 poetry collection, *Living Room,* reads: "to the children of Atlanta and to the children of Lebanon," followed by a column of italicized words, thin as a wisp of smoke.[1] It is more mantra than poem, more poem than dedication:

dreams
arms
doors
air

ash

dreams
arms
doors
air

The sparse, symmetrical text holds at its center the material index of destruction and ending: "ash." With little context, each single-word line leaves room for multiple interpretations: "Arms," a word that means weapons and the body part that might be severed by them; "doors" are both barriers and points of entry; "dreams" and "air" are the imaginative and elemental

necessities for making life possible but also the necessities to which these children might not have access. History repeats, it seems, at home and abroad, though Jordan leaves open the possibility for future change: "ash," the signifier of apocalyptic aftermath, already exists, but need not be made again. Instead of "ash," what follows "air" are the poems that make room for living, not dying. Out of ashes of the past, Jordan's poems construct a space to live and breathe.

Connecting wars abroad and at home during the Cold War was a common tactic for activists and writers to disrupt the Soviet / American binary and demonstrate the violent reach of American imperialism. In a 1983 essay, "Black Folks on Nicaragua: 'Leave Those Folks Alone,'" Jordan writes: "Wasn't it Black children who led the struggle and faced the dogs and nightsticks in Selma, just as fourteen year old Sandinistas faced down tanks supplied by the U.S.?"[2]. Building networks of solidarity across national and racial identities, Jordan subverts the apocalyptic discourses that would defend military and police violence as necessary violence to preserve and protect the future for children, while excluding the children Jordan mentions here from that vision. Throughout the Cold War, Pan-African, Black Nationalist, and Third World Socialist movements worked to disrupt the centrality of America's nation-building project by resisting the primacy of the nation-state in defining identity, instead focusing on race, class, and one's relationship to colonialism as determining conditions. As Peniel E. Joseph writes in his history of post-war Black Power movements, "the rapid decolonization of African states fostered domestic and international pan-African alliances…militant organizations mirrored these developments, jointly promoting antiracism at home and human rights abroad."[3] These alliances become paramount after the murder of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba in 1961, after which poet, playwright, and political activist Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) alongside Malcom X and other Black nationalists occupied the United Nations in New York in protest. During this

demonstration, activists told reporters: "'Negroes were now 'Afro-Americans,'" symbolizing allegiance to African struggles over American interests.[4] Harlem became the hub of this political activity, as literary groups like the Harlem Writers Guild and the Black Arts Movement theorized how poetics were political and politics were poetic.

Though Jordan and Baraka differ in their political commitments and activist tactics (which even change significantly across their own careers), they share a dedication to constructing new futures for "Afro-Americans" in response to and in anticipation of apocalypse—specifically the "new" form of nuclear apocalypse that emerged during the Cold War. In fact, the specific concerns and imaginaries associated with the nuclear complex are pivotal for understanding how their political and poetic projects evolve over the first half of their careers. For Baraka, a politics and poetics informed by separatism and rupture becomes one of solidarity and recovery, as he articulates the continuum between past and future experiences of apocalypse and their relationship to America's exploitative economic system.[5] And for Jordan, what begins as a blueprint for building out the politics of social uplift through architecture becomes a linguistic project that transforms the relationship between segregation and space through a *poetics of shelter*. Together, Baraka's temporal modes and Jordan's spatial schema provide the coordinates for what I call *Atomic Afrofuturism.*

Atomic Afrofuturism is a historically specific affirmation of Black existence that was forged through new grammars, temporalities, and figurations of the future by Black writers and artists facing nuclear apocalypse. "Afrofuturism" began as genre-specific term coined by Mark Dery in relation to Samuel Delany's work and the parallels between science fiction tropes and the history of African Americans (alien abductions, ships, colonization, amnesia).[6] The need to designate *afro* within the generic term *futurism* belies that fact that unmarked visions of futurity

often exclude, and as I will demonstrate, exploit, African American futures to sustain fantasies of a white future. In short, "the future" is not a given—has never been given—for those whose history is marked by rupture, violence, and diaspora. As Mark Sinker explains, a defining tenet of "the dystopias of black SF [science fiction] is 'an acknowledgement that Apocalypse already happened'" through slavery.[7] Atomic Afrofuturism, then, contends that the conditions of the nuclear age shape this precarity in meaningful ways and that the methods that Black artists and writers generate in response offer insight into the specific structural, imaginative, and formal challenges of living in a world that is both post-apocalyptic and pre-apocalyptic. I do not contend that all representations of Black futurity during the nuclear age constitute Atomic Afrofuturism by default; rather, I establish Atomic Afrofuturism as a genealogy of cultural expressions that take as their subject the conditions of the nuclear age and in doing so offers new grammars, temporalities, and figurations to account for how the doubled and contradictory framework of apocalypse exacerbates the already precarious work of survival. Similar to Afrofuturism, which has been taken up as a genre, attitude, and aesthetic category, Atomic Afrofuturism is capacious enough to be applied to and transformed by other forms of cultural expression by Black artists in the context of the nuclear age.[8] This chapter establishes the contours of this historically specific representation of precarity and futurity by identifying how and when these contradictory conditions amalgamate under the pressures of the nuclear threat. By addressing the axes by which the future is built, Amiri Baraka and June Jordan offer meaningful reconfigurations of temporality—the relationship between past and future—and spatiality—the relationship between segregation and shelter—and in doing so, establish the structural, imaginative, and formal edges of Atomic Afrofuturism.

America's Racial & Nuclear Unconscious

In her 1982 review of Helen Caldicott's wildly popular anti-nuclear tract, *Nuclear Madness,* African American poet and novelist Alice Walker oscillates between embracing the problematic universalism of Caldicott's apocalyptic discourse and encouraging readers to strategically use white fears of blackness in order to survive.[9] Walker begins by critiquing the frictions and fractures of Black radicalism and its debates over integration and assimilation versus independence and nationalism, arguing that these concerns are at least temporarily overshadowed by the nuclear threat: "No time to quibble about survival being 'a white issue.' No time to claim you don't live here, too…Join up with folks you don't even like, if you have to, so that we may all live to fight each other again."[10] She then lists tactics for disrupting the nuclear complex, urging her readers to threaten their congressional representatives by telling them: "if they don't change, 'cullud' are going to invade their fallout shelters."[11] Written amidst renewed controversy concerning school busing and desegregation, Walker hints that integrated bomb shelters might provide an even greater motivating reason for white politicians to achieve peace than the threat of nuclear war itself.[12] She then concludes her essay with a warning that both dislodges and reaffirms the totalizing threat of nuclear weapons: "remember: the good news may be that Nature is phasing out the white man, but the bad news is that's who She thinks we all are."[13] While nuclear war may be a "white war," many others will be caught in the crosshairs of that violence.

In this brief essay, Walker highlights the tensions that arise from the place where Black power and nuclear power intersect. She alternately critiques and deploys the popular discourse that renders humans as a united species, a *human race*, under the shadow of nuclear extinction. At the same time, she expresses a belief shared by people of color around the world—that

nuclear war is a "white war" and that nuclear weapons, as Indian author Arundhati Roy claims, are "white weapons": "the very heart of whiteness."[14] This chapter will trace the complicated history of these ideas and how they manifest the relationship between America's racial unconscious and nuclear unconscious. The two are mutually reinforcing: The former structures and sustains America's radioactive nation-building project while the latter reinforces and renews the unresolved violence of America's racist foundations. By demonstrating how America's nuclear project extends its historical project of white supremacy, the writers I discuss articulate the continuity between slavery and the nuclear complex as weapons of mass destruction while also considering how nuclear-era expressions of racial violence differ in important ways.

To address America's nuclear unconscious, then, requires addressing its racial unconscious: white America's repression of slavery as the condition of possibility for America as such. Just as Joseph Masco claims that America would not be *America* without nuclear weapons, the same can be said of slavery:[15] the economic flourishing, the global exportation of culture and industry after WWII that made America *America* is rooted in the billions of stolen hours and millions of stolen lives made possible by the transatlantic slave trade. In her 1984 essay, "Women of Color and the Nuclear Holocaust," Barbara Omolade argues that the genealogy of nuclear weapons reaches back farther than Albert Einstein and Glenn Seaborg: "A direct historical line of military terrorism can be drawn from the guns used during the slave trade…to the building of nuclear arsenals by the world's current superpowers."[16] Atomic Afrofuturism offers a framework for thinking these intersecting historical conditions together in order to build new futures—not by repressing the rupture signified by slavery, but by recuperating it. By remembering the apocalypse that has already happened, Black writers reframed the popular discourse of impending nuclear apocalypse as "unimaginable" in order to imagine a *post* post-

apocalyptic future that did not depend upon the repression of the conditions that structure the racial and nuclear unconscious.

The framework of Atomic Afrofuturism reveals the places and spaces where the racial and nuclear unconscious reinforce each other to threaten Black futures. For example, the state-sponsored narrative that implied race was irrelevant when it came to the "universal" (or at least national) threat of nuclear apocalypse is reconfigured by writers like Langston Hughes to show how such rhetoric is not only racialized but racist. In his speculation on segregated bomb shelters in one of his "Simple" stories written during the early years of the Cold War, Hughes reveals how the heightened anxiety surrounding nuclear apocalypse makes racial differences even more distinct, while also demonstrating how racial hierarchies are built into the very infrastructure of America's disaster preparedness plan.[17] Similarly, June Jordan's careful mapping of how nuclear waste is carelessly driven through predominantly Black neighborhoods shows how Black Americans are disproportionately exposed to nuclear harm.[18] In addition to deconstructing claims that imply "we are all in it together" when it comes to nuclear war, Atomic Afrofuturism's positioning of America's nuclear project as a continuation of the historical project of white supremacy refutes the "ideology of the new" that is so commonly associated with the nuclear age—an ideology that, as Paul Gilroy argues, is connected to the fascist impulse to position a radically new future against the wake of destruction.[19] Rather than affirming the unprecedented or unimaginable stakes of the nuclear age, Atomic Afrofuturist work confronts apocalypse, revolution, and even the past through the forms of déjà vu, recursion, and doubleness. Portraying nuclear apocalypse as unevenly distributed rather than totalizing and atomic weapons as logical extensions of state power rather than deviations from it produces a method for imagining the future that neither represses the past nor fetishizes its destruction. By coupling this temporal

logic with the spatial distribution of racial and environmental injustice, Atomic Afrofuturist writers offer visions of the future that critique and resist state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginaries by revealing how they are shaped by America's racial and nuclear unconscious.

Black Power and Nuclear Power

The histories of Black power and nuclear power can be understood as necessarily intertwined in terms of how they relate to the production of new forms of Black futurity. I use "Black power" here to indicate not only the movement of the same name (which I capitalize as Black Power when referring to it specifically), but the many forms of racial consciousness and solidarity that proliferated across Black coalitions during the Cold War. As this chapter will discuss, Sun Ra and Langston Hughes theorized in the 1950's and 60's how forms of nuclear power, such as fallout and atomic bombs, were extensions of white supremacy that used Black lives as fuel for white futures, demonstrating how the threat of nuclear war reinforced, rather than eliminated, historical structures of racial inequality. And in the 70's and 80's, June Jordan and Amiri Baraka produced new grammars of survival and structures of shelter through their activism and poetry, revealing how the expansion of social equality in the preceding decades could not secure Black futures unless the infrastructural base of that inequality was reconfigured. And after the apparent "end" of the Black Power movement in the 1960's, African American writers found ways of extending its goals of self-determination through other means at a time when "America" believed it had settled its "race problem."[20] These counter-imaginaries capitalized upon white fears of nuclear apocalypse to produce new spaces of fugitivity and collectivity, revealing how narratives that treated the impending nuclear apocalypse as something that erased color and history due to its "universal" reach were in fact a continuation of the white

fantasy of racial reconciliation without reparations. Engaging Black power through nuclear power thus enabled Black writers to address the yet-unrealized goals of liberation, as they imagined new methods of surviving the apocalypse as well as moving beyond this framework as the sole referent for building new futures.

As Vincent Intondi notes in *African Americans Against the Bomb*, outside of his study, little attention has been paid to the ways that African Americans were imagining, discussing, and resisting nuclear war, as historians have tended to focus on other aspects of Black oppression during the Cold War.[21] And even less attention has been paid to the subtle ways that the Cold War discourses of extinction, survival, and shelter have been critiqued and reconfigured by these thinkers and writers, despite the relevance to both Black Studies and Nuclear Criticism. As critic Joshua Bennett claims, "any poetics concerned with Black social and political life in the United States…must wrestle with the specter of the end of the world," and so too must any conversation about the end of the world include the tactics and imaginaries produced by "those who have already seen the end of the world, and have managed to build new ones in its wake."[22] Viewed from this perspective, the underlying assumptions concerning apocalypse, temporality, and forms of the nuclear expressed in the canonical formations of Nuclear Criticism not only exclude Black experiences, but rely on visions of futurity and survival that are structured by anti-Blackness. These theories draw on an understanding of apocalypse as imminent rather than immanent which, while addressing the destruction of the future, do not wrestle with the long history of destroying futures upon which America is built. As Paul Gilroy argues in *Against Race,* which troubles the progress made by the Civil Rights and Third World solidarity movements, "denying the future and the right to be future-oriented became an integral part of the way White supremacism functioned during and after the slave system."[23] The lens of Atomic Afrofuturism

reveals how this temporal restriction undergirded nuclear-era visions of the future as well as its destruction and how Black writers reconfigured them.

By reading Black power through nuclear power, two key strategies emerge for achieving self-determination and racial equality beyond the boundaries of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. The first involves positioning the historical struggle for African American survival within the structural and spectacular violence generated by America's radioactive nation-building project. In doing so, the scientific discourses of species and extinction being utilized to communicate the stakes of nuclear apocalypse and the need for national unity are revealed to perpetuate the racial hierarchies and essentialist narratives that have been part of these classification systems since taxonomies like Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae*.[24] Rather than positioning visions of Black futurity as inversions of this logic, June Jordan, for one, theorizes how the grammar and syntax of "Black English," resists and reconfigures the structural violence of classification.[25] The second strategy involves disrupting the geopolitical coordinates of the First and Third World and expanding the reach of self-determination through solidarity with international communities united by their resistance to colonialism and American imperialism. For Baraka especially, who turned from Black Nationalism to Third World Socialism in the early 1970's, the key to disrupting the structures proliferated by the racial and nuclear unconscious was not to form a political or aesthetic position as a *reaction* to racism and exploitation, but to construct new social and poetic forms that could expose the shared material base of these issues.[26] By situating the goals of self-determination and equality within the context of the nuclear age, the continued threats against Black futurity become more apparent, as do Jordan and Baraka's tactics for reconfiguring Black power through nuclear power.

Black power can also be read through nuclear power in terms of its historical position during the Cold War. A year after President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" speech, which espoused a doctrine of international peace forged through the shared energy of nuclear power and the decommissioning of nuclear weapons, *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* espoused a doctrine of racial peace through integration. Eisenhower's vision not only failed, but intensified America's radioactive trajectory, as the proliferation of both nuclear weapons and nuclear power increased exponentially during the 50's and 60's. Civil Rights leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. link this period of intense militarization known as the "arms race" to the struggle for racial equality. King connects the proliferation of nuclear weapons and racial injustice through their shared foundation of white supremacy and views disarmament as central to the larger project of freedom from oppression.[27] And while the Civil Rights Movement made substantial gains for racial equality, the writers I examine demonstrate how America's radioactive nation-building project sustains structural racism through nuclear infrastructures and imaginaries. In other words, when we examine the precarity of Black lives before and after the Civil Rights Movement in the context of this nuclear complex, the oppressive structures that were thought to be dismantled or at least diminished by political and social changes are revealed to be very much intact.

"What Good Was It?": Inequality After "The Movement"

As Alice Walker argues, in the late 1960's it became a fashionable critique for "white liberals" to declare "The Movement" over and question what it had actually accomplished. She explains this phenomenon in a 1967 essay: "The Movement is dead to the white man because it no longer interests him. And it no longer interests him because he can afford to be uninterested…Negroes cannot now and will never be able to take a rest from the injustices that

plague them, for they—not the white man—are the target."[28] And while she recognizes there are structural changes yet to be addressed, the hope for the future that "the Movement" gave to African Americans was, for her, proof that it wasn't "dead": "It gave us hope for tomorrow. It called us to life. Because we live, it can never die."[29] While it was easy for white allies to "move on" from the Civil Rights Movement and analyze its shortcomings from a distance, Walker argues that even this position of critique comes from privilege. However, she also acknowledges that ongoing structural violence remains to be rectified. Atomic Afrofuturism offers a way of synthesizing this hopeful future-oriented perspective with a critical assessment of continuing inequality, neither dismissing nor valorizing the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. In doing so, it offers a lens through which to approach positions that had become over-simplified within the splintering Black liberation movements.

Amiri Baraka and June Jordan critique the Civil Rights Movement not by dismissing its successes but by showing how the infrastructures and structures of racial inequality were not simply erased in the decade between *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For Jordan, it is the police murder of Jimmy Powell, a Black teenage boy, just two weeks after the passage of the Civil Rights Act that instigates a new political and poetic direction in her work as an architect, educator, and activist. This murder highlights the contradictions inherent in America's apparent progress: racially motivated discrimination was illegal but killing was not. It also demonstrates how structural racism is not only engrained in the white imagination, but in the material structures produced by it, which in this case was the city. Jordan's participation in the Harlem Riot of 1964, the city's response to Powell's murder, propelled her reimagining of Harlem's future on a structural and infrastructural level.[30] She describes that day as an ideological crossroads borne from the physical crossroads of the streets. Jordan decides she could

either embrace her “hatred for everything and everyone white” or “use what I loved, words, for the sake of the people I loved.”[31] She chooses the latter, embracing a politics of coalition building within and across communities of color while also working strategically with white thinkers and artists to collaborate on visions of the future that did not replicate the divisions of the past.

As a form, this “crossroads” also serves as a cipher for her politics and poetics, as she addresses its many manifestations throughout her career to articulate how violence and confrontation are built-in to the built environment of cities like Harlem and Brooklyn while also imagining alternative ways of organizing relations between races and communities. Both her architectural plan with Buckminster Fuller, “Skyrise for Harlem,” which I will discuss later in this chapter, and her poetics of shelter offer new forms that can transform what she designates as “patterns of confrontation” into “the capability of endless beginnings.”[32] By mapping the coordinates of apocalypse—the ways in which threats to survival are part of the very architecture of living—she links the success of ideological goals to concrete ones. As Brian Goldstein argues in “The Search for New Forms,” the Black Power Movement had “fundamentally spatial origins and ambitions,” and was not merely a response to segregation, but an effort to build environments that would realize a “vision of the alternative future that would follow from racial self-determination.”[33] Jordan’s attention to the material and psychological underpinnings of Black precarity—how white imaginaries depend on the foreclosure of Black futures—enables her to address and imagine forms of shelter that refuse the status-quo structures of nuclear-era survival.

Amiri Baraka, who founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater and School in Harlem in 1965 following the murder of Malcolm X, also draws on the geographical underpinnings of

racial injustice to theorize a new form of Black futurity in the context of nuclear apocalypse. In one of his many manifestos written during this time, Baraka, then LeRoi Jones, explains the relationship between the structures and infrastructures of violence. In the piece "What the Arts Need Now," which appeared in *Negro Digest* in 1967, he writes: "We will have plays for city hall…Plays enabling Black People to stop bogus so-called urban renewal, which be n*g*r removal, and the repeated disarming of Carthage…In the street, at the spot where such disarming is taking place."[34] Here, plays become a means of occupation and expulsion. Aligning the destruction of the African city of Carthage by the Romans in 146BCE with New York City's urban "renewal" plans, Baraka suggests that not only should theater be happening in the streets and in the public eye, but that the streets themselves are a performative space where identities and alliances are either consolidated or destroyed. The understanding of Black theater as a means of occupation and Black art as a type of weapon is reflected throughout Baraka's writing during this period. His 1965 poem "Black Art," which can be read as the *ars poetica* of the Black Arts Movement, demands "'poems that kill.' / Assassin poems, Poems that shoot / guns."[35] Poetry and plays share an agenda of revolution and education, cultivating Black power through the physical and psychological occupation of the streets of Harlem, the anointed site of Black Nationalism in the U.S. However, when Baraka's politics transition from Black Nationalism to Third World Socialism a few years later, his focus on geographical coordinates of self-determination—a Black city, nation, world—shift to temporal coordinates, as he considers not only how to destroy the violent ideologies of "the West" and America, but imagines what that post-American world will be like.

The relationship between past destruction and future destruction explored in Baraka's 1984 play *Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical* iterates the lingering effects of the

Black Arts Movement after the "end" of Black Power. In the essay "What the Arts Need Now," Baraka concludes: "We want a post-American form. An afterwhiteness color to live and re-erect the strength of the primitive."[36] The intensified threats of nuclear war under the Reagan Administration shaped this desire to draw from the past, "the primitive," while erecting a form that could shape relations after America stopped being *America*. In this sense, nuclear war provided a space for fugitivity, though the destruction of the world could not necessarily guarantee the destruction of its unconscious. *Primitive World,* which uses instruments as weapons to defeat "Money Gods" Sado and Maso, manifests the temporal discontinuity that structures America. Which is to say, that while some people are only imagining the end of the world, others have already experienced it—a temporal segregation layered upon a spatial and social one. And so, Baraka, years after the Black Arts Movement is declared "over," continues to explore the temporal and spatial manifestations of racial segregation, developing a new form—a "post-American form"—that manifests how even the nuclear apocalypse will be experienced at different rates due to these structural conditions. In the context of the nuclear, the social relations produced by segregation and solidarity are revealed to be contingent on time as well as space, thereby expanding the spatial axis of Black Power into temporal formations contingent on grammar, syntax, and memory.

Nuclear Extinction & Black Survival

To understand how Jordan and Baraka's work become shaped explicitly and implicitly by nuclear threats, it is necessary to understand how anxieties surrounding nuclear war were mapped onto the discourse of human extinction and human survival. By doing so, the reason that Atomic Afrofuturist writers were compelled to imagine the future beyond "mere" survival

becomes apparent, as the discourses of survival and extinction were co-opted by state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginaries that strategically undermined Black power through totalizing universalities. Such exclusion through apparent inclusion emerges during the first wave of nuclear extinction anxiety, which arises after the U.S. deploys an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. As soon as President Truman made his address to America on August 6, 1945, in which he explained not only the bombing but the "new era" that nuclear energy promised in its capacity to supplement existing energy regimes, newspapers and pundits declared that the presence of this new weapon meant that it was only a matter of time until another nuclear nation emerged and threatened the U.S. with destruction. The sense that the nation as a whole was doomed caused some to blame "Science" for signing "the mammalian world's death warrant," and "deed[ing] an earth in ruins to the ants," while others began to envision a post-apocalyptic earth as "a barren waste, in which the survivors of the race will hide in caves or live among ruins."[37] This universalizing discourse collapsed race and species, implying that when faced with nuclear war, there is only one race—the human species—which may or may not survive. African American intellectuals and leaders, however, had a different view of this "shared fate," showing solidarity with the Japanese victims rather than with the whiteness of American victory. Soon after the bombing, W.E.B. Dubois described Japan as "the greatest colored nation which has risen to leadership in modern times."[38] Langston Hughes, less than ten days after America deployed the second atomic bomb on Japan, explained how whiteness forms allegiances even across enemy lines. His satirical character Simple says that America "did not want to use [atomic bombs] on white folks. Germans is white. So they wait until the war is over in Europe to try them out on colored folks. Japs is colored."[39] In this atomic-age world order, Hughes shows,

Japanese are positioned not only as non-white but sub-human, the test subjects on which America may try this new tool of mass destruction.

The international solidarity provoked by the atomic bomb predates and prefigures the Third World solidarity and the Pan-Africanism that would become so crucial to the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. As poet Calvin Hicks writes in a 1961 response to the U.S. invasion of Cuba, "Our struggles are no longer national…They are hemispheric, international…All liberation struggles of Asia, Africa and Latin America are interrelated with white supremacy and the myths of white superiority from which we suffer."[40] While the dominant nuclear rhetoric in America framed the shared risk of nuclear annihilation as the condition under which all citizens could be considered equal, African American artists looked beyond borders to imagine the ways in which they were akin to international communities that were also suffering under white supremacy or American imperialism, whether or not the atomic bomb was a direct factor in that oppression. This identification offered an alternative network of solidarity to that of the false equality produced by the threat of nuclear extinction, a phenomenon which African American artists knew would likely not be equally distributed after all. These alternative international networks also disrupted the Cold War ideology that positioned communism as a threat to freedom and Soviet-U.S. relations as the defining dynamic of the globe, which rendered ongoing anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles as mere "proxy wars." This global network of kinship forged through anti-colonial struggle and shared oppression becomes critical for June Jordan in the 1980's when she is contemplating how Black futurity is tied to the Palestinians, Nicaraguans, and Black South Africans who were also fighting for self-determination and survival. It also becomes central to Baraka's synthesis of Marxism and anti-racism, as the final scene of *Primitive World* features people of different races working together

to take down the "Money Gods" who threaten nuclear annihilation. While working to secure Black futurity, Baraka expands his strategy to disrupt the material base that sustains the exploitation of African Americans: American capitalism. And while the threat of nuclear war fades in and out of the discourse of international solidarity across the Cold War period, its origins in the response to the racialized use of nuclear weapons in 1945 reveals the importance of understanding the Black power through its resistance to nuclear power.

In the 1950's, the decade that saw 166 atmospheric tests of nuclear weapons from the U.S. alone, fears of the unseen effects of radiation and fallout supplemented fears of outright nuclear war. Even after President John F. Kennedy signed the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963, which sent nuclear testing underground, anxiety about the secret and unpalpable effects of nuclear materials continued to proliferate. During this period, studies showing the effects of radiation on children and fertility rallied anti-nuclear activists against America's nuclear complex. In 1959, Martin Luther King Jr. positions hidden and spectacular nuclear forms within the context of racial inequality: "What will be the ultimate value of having established social justice in a context where all people, Negro and White, are merely free to face destruction by strontium 90 or atomic war?".[41] In the midst of the Civil Rights movement, King articulates the limits of freedom in the context of these state-sponsored forms of violence. While he leans toward the universalizing discourse of "all people" equally subject to nuclear extinction, he subverts the way in which this ideology was typically used to construct a false sense of unity in the state-sponsored nuclear imaginary by how he portrays this possible future. Rather than stating that the threat of destruction by nuclear forms renders all people equal due to their shared risk, he reconfigures this negative construction of equality to reveal how nuclear forms structurally undermine the production of freedom for everyone. In doing so, he presents freedom

as a material reality that cannot exist as a concept outside of history but must be constructed continually along with the future. In this view, neither freedom nor the future are guaranteed, so they must be continuously built. Actively building nuclear weapons and passively accepting their lingering effects forecloses the possibility of both freedom and the future.

Writing the same year, Langston Hughes examines the challenges of building toward peace without war as a referent. In "Simple Speculates on Peace," after seeing a headline about nuclear war, Simple says, "I like peace well enough to fight for it."[42] When Simple's interlocutor tells him he must "work" for peace rather than "fight" for it, Simple claims he *would* work rather than fight "if I knew how, here, and when—also what folks to work with—because I certainly don't believe in…anatomizing folks with atom bombs, neither overcharging tuna fishes who ain't bothering nobody…Also I do not believe in filling the air up with radiation, so my children's children will not be having children."[43] Drawing together the global and local effects of radiation by alluding to the 1954 *Lucky Dragon* fishing boat incident, in which fallout from American tests severely sickened Japanese fishermen, as well the personal threat of infertility, Simple positions himself against different forms of atomic violence but does not see those threats as a common enemy that de facto unites all humans in a fight against nuclear extinction.[44] Rather, he focuses on the methods for obtaining peace, which is to say, survival: *who* he will work with as well as *when* they will work. He continues, "I believe in peace, both before a war and afterwards"; to eliminate war altogether, "you have to start before…so there will be no afterwards." Here, he reverses the logic of nuclear extinction anxiety, which focuses on an impending apocalyptic event, by addressing the past. In doing so, he positions the history of African American oppression within the global framework of war, without reducing one to the other. The paradox of this thinking is, of course, that "before" only has meaning in relation to an

event and thus always precipitates an "after." With the atomic clock "mighty near midnight," Simple declares that "you must have peace at home before you can work for peace in the world," a claim that counters the alarmist wartime discourse that seeks superficial unity under the guise of nationalism, suppressing the wars "at home" until the war abroad can be won. This paradoxical "before time" is the space in which the future can be shaped, as it configures peace and war not as static conditions but as relative positions that are sustained through certain actions. To continually work together to maintain the "before time," its referent always threatening to invade, is the only way to construct a future that is not necessarily *after* or *post-*.

The relationship between pre- and post-apocalypse was also important for Black musician, performer, and writer Sun Ra, who rendered nuclear extinction as part of an already ongoing post-apocalyptic, diasporic continuum. In his view, the apocalypse, atomic or otherwise, had already occurred for African Americans. His 1974 film, *Space Is the Place,* opens with the following refrain, sung against the black expanse of space: "It's after the end of the world / don't know you that yet?"[45] The film ends with Sun Ra leaving Earth as it explodes behind him in an atomic-like blast. His extra-terrestrial aesthetics demonstrate how the arms race and space race both have much to do with *race*, as both extend the reach of white supremacy into new territories. Similar to Langston Hughes, Sun Ra did not view nuclear weapons as fundamentally new in kind, as weapons of mass destruction have always enabled colonization and genocide. As Mark Dery demonstrates, science fiction and Afrofuturism go hand-in-hand, as genre tropes like space ships, alien abductions, and amnesia map on to the conditions of the Middle Passage; he writes: "African Americans are, in a very real sense, the descendants of alien abductees."[46] Similarly, figurations of space exploration as enabling new forms of colonization can be read in relation to American imperialism. Sun Ra's nuclear imaginary is spatial and spaceal, as he takes

control over his departure from Earth in search of a new future rather than waiting for history to repeat itself. In acknowledging that the world has already ended, rather than fearing that it might soon end, Sun Ra constructs a new future based on his own terms, a Black Nationalism turned interplanetary, finding true independence beyond the structures that govern the globe.

Near the end of the Cold War, new scientific theories shifted the outcomes of nuclear extinction but not their racially stratified foundations. In the 1980's, President Ronald Reagan re-escalated the arms race and introduced the idea of a "limited" nuclear war—one that would, apparently, prevent global destruction. However, contradicting this idea of containment were new theories of ecology that combined discoveries about the past with new formations of the future to generate both catastrophic and incremental versions of nuclear extinction. One, the theory of "nuclear winter," which is an early counterpart to extinction by global warming, predicted that particles generated by a nuclear war would produce a dark, lingering, planet-wide cloud that would cause a nearly uninhabitable ice age. Popularized by Carl Sagan, this vision of nuclear extinction allowed for more time between the blast and annihilation but was not any more promising for species-level survival. Similar to the 1950's visions of a post-apocalyptic world, in this time-delayed nuclear apocalypse, the hierarchies of species were reversed as non-mammalian others became the most likely survivors. Jonathan Schell's wildly popular essay series in the 1980's, *The Fate of the Earth,* also draws on this desolate imagery, referring to the aftermath of nuclear war as "a republic of insects and grass."[47] Alongside this theory of nuclear winter was a new theory of the most recent extinction event, which concluded that an asteroid caused the elimination of the dinosaurs. Luis and Walter Alvarez proposed this theory in their 1980 article "Extraterrestrial Cause for the Cretaceous-Tertiary Extinction," and it soon merged with that of the nuclear winter to offer a vision of nuclear extinction in which the bomb became

the asteroid and, as Natasha Zaretsky argues, positioned humans as both the victims and the villains: "In the event of a nuclear winter, humans would simultaneously be the asteroid and the dinosaur."[48] Together, these scientific theories multiplied the figures and temporalities of the nuclear imaginary—a dark cloud and a mushroom cloud, a delayed annihilation and an instant one—but did not erase its racist foundations.

While these scientific theories and national defense strategies appear on the surface to have little connection to race, by reading Langston Hughes's pre-Civil Rights satirical fiction alongside Amiri Baraka's post-Civil Rights poetic musical, we can see how even these apparently neutral theories of extinction carry within them a racialized hierarchy that remains intact, despite the gains in racial equality in the interim. Baraka reveals how, latent in this imaginary of "insects and grass," is the fear of Black survival, as the dehumanization and insectification of racial others is a common oppressive tactic of white supremacy that continues the objectifying logics of chattel slavery.[49] In *Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical,* when the Money Gods, the perpetrators of a nuclear assault on the planet, realize that a few people have survived, they are quickly reassured when they see who the survivors are: "Hey, it's only n*gg*rs! No people. Ha, you scared me for a second. The Ants survive."[50] The Black survivors are rendered as subhuman, and thus below the threshold of life "worth" extinguishing. Through this subversion, Baraka suggests that a form of strategic inconsequentialism might be possible in this post-apocalyptic space. To be beneath the notice of the "asteroid," offers the potential for fugitivity, resistance, and even future-making. Baraka's rendering of life after extinction also reveals how even a nuclear bomb cannot destroy America's racial hierarchies, so foundational are they to its national character, and that post-apocalyptic and post-racial are not necessarily entwined.

Thirty years prior to *Primitive World*, Langston Hughes offers a similar critique, though he was writing during a period when structures of racial segregation and violence were much closer to the surface. His character, Simple, imagines a future in which Black skin is preferred over white: "Supposing, I mean, them atomic bombs…would not burn, scorch, and sizzle colored folks at all…Everybody would want to be colored."[51] This evolutionary reversal of constructed racial hierarchies produces a provocative imaginary that, taken to its logical extreme, reveals how even in this scenario of survival, the bodies of Black people are still rendered in terms of how they might protect the lives of white people. Rather than this feat of survival signaling an inherent racial superiority, as eugenic distortions of evolutionary theory do to undergird white supremacy, Hughes imagines how "colored" skin would become a prized commodity in this apocalyptic scenario, a return to the exchange value set by the slave market. Instead of exploiting Black labor, Hughes's apocalyptic scenario consider how Black skin becomes a shield for white people from their own white weapons to ensure white survival. In short, Hughes demonstrates how even if African Americans survive the apocalypse (again), their future is not only not guaranteed, but that the apocalypse would not offer a new world order but rather a return to the one that continues to persist—America's racial unconscious unaffected by atomic bombs. Writing from two different ends of the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement, Hughes and Baraka both show how the fears of nuclear extinction exacerbate the already ongoing threats to Black futurity rather than dismantling or overshadowing them. The oscillation between exclusion, dehumanization, and Black resiliency explored in these scenes manifests the contradictory logic embedded in discourses of nuclear extinction. Survival in and of itself, then, is not the end goal of Afrofuturism, as even when Black lives are preserved, a Black future is not guaranteed.

It is against this backdrop of nuclear extinction and global destruction as well as the successes and shortcomings of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 60's and 70's, that Atomic Afrofuturism emerges as a way to manifest and deconstruct the nuclear and racial unconscious together.[52] As Paul Williams writes, for African Americans, "Nuclear fear hasn't replaced racial terror, which continues alongside of it."[53] Whereas white visions of the future treated the possibility of nuclear extinction as a novel and unprecedented threat, African American artists positioned it as merely a new form of white oppression, situating nuclear apocalypse on a continuum of violence that began with the apocalypse of slavery. Atomic Afrofuturism thus manifests the ways in which various nuclear forms shaped Black futurity as well as how Black artists were generating new theories of nuclear apocalypse by attending its underlying racial formations. However, these contributions have, on the whole, remained separate from the canonical accounts of Nuclear Criticism; similarly, accounts of post-WWII Black freedom movements have not adequately considered the importance of the relationship between nuclear power and Black power. In what follows, I will address these elisions by reading Baraka and Jordan's politics and poetics of future-making in the context of the nuclear age, demonstrating how their Atomic Afrofuturist grammars and designs offer alternative ways of relating past to future (temporality) and segregation to shelter (spatiality).

Amiri Baraka's Anti-Nuclear Criticism

The *New York Times's* 1984 review of Amiri Baraka's *Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical* inadvertently expresses a key shortcoming of Nuclear Criticism. The review claims:

> It is Mr. Murray's music, not Mr. Baraka's script, that makes 'Primitive World' worth seeing. In fact, the best way to take this 'antinuclear musical' is as a lengthy but brisk

> prologue to a final half-hour of Mr. Murray's latest compositions….Lest anyone miss the point, the final song is a sing-along: 'No to Death, Yes to Life'.[54]

The reviewer's failure to understand why this affirmation of life might in fact be radical rather than redundant reveals the privilege of one whose future is presumed rather than precarious. Similarly, Nuclear Criticism and its focus on the totalizing effects of nuclear war—its "remainderless destruction," as Jacques Derrida calls it—does not adequately account for those who have already experienced the end of the world. [55] As Ken Ruthven argues in his comprehensive review of Nuclear Criticism, Derrida's careful insistence on "total" nuclear war as distinct from a "limited" one in his 1984 essay, "No Apocalypse, Not Now," "appears to have been an unconscious internalization of the very nuclearism his essay castigates,"[56] which is to say, the logic of the Reagan administration. In the same manner, his desire to delineate between "conventional" war and total nuclear war elides the lived experiences of the Japanese, for whom Hiroshima and Nagasaki were indeed totalizing events. Derrida reasons: "Nuclear war has no precedent. It has never occurred, itself; it is a non-event. The explosion of American bombs in 1945 ended a 'classical,' conventional war; it did not set off a nuclear war."[57] Though Derrida acknowledges the terror of the first atomic bombings, his desire to bracket them from the unprecedented timeframe and temporality of the nuclear age repeats the type of racial erasure that Hughes and DuBois critique when they argue that even a nuclear bomb could not obliterate the global color line. Furthermore, the need to suppress Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the preceding atomic "test" bombs in order to make an argument for nuclear war's singularity contributes to the repression of nuclear war's relationship to white supremacy. These elisions, unconscious or otherwise, are repeated in the perspectives represented in the 1984 special issue of *Diacritics* on Nuclear Criticism, which focuses on the unimaginability of nuclear apocalypse

and the grammar of extinction and does not address the relationship between race and these theoretical interventions. While not included in the colloquium or the special issue, the very year that Nuclear Criticism was being proposed as a field, Amiri Baraka was offering a nuclear treatise of his own—an *anti-nuclear* jazz musical. Reading Baraka's musical as both anti-nuclear and anti-Nuclear Criticism does not negate the important formulations offered by this field but supplements them with the perspective of the apocalypse as immanent, not imminent.

In 1990, when Nuclear Criticism seemed itself on the verge of extinction, Richard Klein argued for its preservation: "If it could grasp the structure and the implications of this new future, Nuclear Criticism might perhaps begin to operate…grammatically in a new future tense."[58] However, it is not simply a new future tense that will help Nuclear Criticism regain its relevance, but an acknowledgement of the alternative futures that were already being imagined throughout the atomic age. Baraka's *Primitive World,* for example, imagines the future through the process of "anamnesis," which is the uncanny act of *remembering* the future. For Baraka, the end of the world can be remembered because it has already happened through slavery. Baraka's musical manifests the disparate temporalities of a world where some people are living after the apocalypse while others are still anticipating it. In the musical, two Black musicians, called Man and Woman, are living in the aftermath of nuclear war while at the same time a statesman named Ham and two "Money Gods" are plotting this very war.[59] For the first half of the musical, the audience does not know these two situations are occurring in different temporalities: rather, it is assumed that the entire drama is unfolding in a post-apocalyptic world where a few survivors remain. It is the form of the musical that allows for these two disparate situations to transpire simultaneously, thereby representing how people in the "same" world might be living both before and after its end. In *Primitive World*, this use of anamnesis produces what I call the *future*

compulsive tense, a mode that reconstructs the past by remembering the future and reconstructs the future by remembering the past. Compulsive, here, acknowledges the necessity of revisiting the past to recuperate what has been lost through apocalyptic rupture while leaving room for repetition to compel new versions of the future. The future compulsive tense rewrites the future at stake, rather than merely readjusting its already present structures.

This future compulsive tense cannot be used in a sentence. It can only be expressed through the performance of temporal discontinuity, the clash between text and context. This inexpressibility is not unique to the future compulsive tense but continuous with the fact that for English speakers, there *is* no future tense, technically. While one can change a verb from present to past—I am, I was—one must rely on an auxiliary verb such as "will" to project into the future—I *will* be. The future always already dependent on will. The inherent supplementarity of the future tense is perhaps what makes it so central to Nuclear Criticism's theorizations of apocalypse. In "No Apocalypse, Not Now," Derrida claims that total nuclear war can only be expressed by the future perfect tense, beginning his essay with the enigmatic statement that: "At the beginning there *will have been* speed."[60] In the future perfect tense, one projects oneself doubly: once into the far future, then again into the near future, which then becomes the object of reflection for that far-future self. This double projection is treated as necessary due to the new temporal conditions of the atomic age wherein, critic Ken Ruthven explains, "there will be no space between the beginning and the end in which a present tense can operate, nothing beyond the end to require speculating about in a future tense, and nobody left around to do the speculating."[61] The future perfect tense operates on the assumption that, were it not for nuclear war, the subject would already have a stake in this future. Even a future nullified by nuclear war

remains a space in which one might imaginatively project and reflect upon one's existence and extinction.

The future compulsive tense, however, operates according to an inverse logic, as the future is not an empty space to be filled, but one that must be built. Baraka shows how the future compulsive tense is forged by those already inhabiting the uninhabitable, post-apocalyptic future. The future compulsive tense of Atomic Afrofuturism *emerges* from the space between the end and the beginning as a way out of this post-apocalyptic no-man's land. This tense cannot be used in a sentence because it exceeds the conventional structures of grammar, even with the supplement of the future tense, as it can only be made intelligible within the context of a past ruptured by slavery that forecloses African Americans futures.

One way to articulate the dispossession of the future wrought by slavery is the erasure of subjectivity, which can be represented by the elision of personal and possessive pronouns. In what feminist critic Hortense Spillers calls the "oceanic suspension" of the Middle Passage, *I, me, mine* and the capacity of being-for-oneself are reduced to the objectified condition of being-for-others. [62] In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," she writes: "the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming being for the captor."[63] In grammatical terms: the subject is unmoored from the predicate, unable to act reflexively. The trauma of this objectification, its literal "marking and branding," lives on through intergenerational trauma in which Black subjects are always "marked" as such ("I am a marked woman,"[64] her essay begins) and thereby excluded from the unmarked "I" of subjectivity.[65] The figuration of the white unmarked subject, Spillers argues, continues to structure the grammar that erases African identity and forecloses Black futures. Spillers demonstrates how grammar functions as the "symbolic order" that suppresses Blackness even as it grants coherence to whiteness: "if I were not here,"

she writes, “I would have to be invented.”[66] To speak of one’s future, she suggests, one must first be able to speak of oneself. To say: *I, myself, exist.*

In addition to determining the relationship between subjects and objects, American grammar structures *what* and *who* gets to mean or have meaning. In his study on the aesthetics of the Black radical tradition, *In the Break,* Fred Moten explores the history of Blackness in terms of expression and dispossession. Moten argues that jazz, blues, and other modes of Black performance constitute “phonic substances” that are in excess of syntax and grammar and thereby disrupt the Enlightenment linguistic project of unmarked subjectivity and expression.[67] He draws on Frederick Douglass’s representation of his Aunt Hester's scream in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* to show how this violent event could not be reduced to or incorporated into the logic of grammar.[68] Baraka’s future compulsive tense provides a structure for such phonic substances, as it organizes the surplus of expression that cannot be reduced to fit the constraints of a standard future or future perfect tense. This future compulsive tense emerges from the rhythms that disrupt and reconstruct rather than merely reproduce the temporal structures that seek to diminish them.

Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical imagines what this compulsive future might literally sound like, deploying the syncopated rhythms of jazz to disrupt the unmarked grammar of the future. The musical begins with an intentionally confusing premise that occludes the fact that the drama is unfolding, at the same “time,” both *before* and *after* nuclear apocalypse. The audience has no way of knowing this until halfway through the play, as the only hint of its strange temporal condition appears in the figurative language of the opening stage directions, to which a live audience does not have access. In reference to the Black musician named Man, who is said to be playing music that punctuates the speech of the statesman Ham, who is on the

opposite side of the stage, the direction notes: "But, of course, they are not in the same place—they are separated by time and understanding."[69] And so, as the play unfolds, the narrative leads the audience to believe that nuclear war has already occurred, leaving a few survivors behind (Man and Woman as well as Ham and the two Money Gods, Sado and Maso). It is not until halfway through the play that it is possible to know that Man and Woman are already living after the end of the world while Ham and the Money Gods are still plotting it. This disjunction forms a temporal aporia in which the anticipated event—nuclear apocalypse—has both already and not yet occurred. The musical thus formally enacts how the future is not equally articulated, but a tense shaped by a context in which some are living after the end of the world while others are simultaneously dreading (or planning) it. The friction between these disparate temporalities produces the conditions for the future compulsive tense, which is generated in the grammatical interstices between past and future.

While one might read this musical as a hybrid of drama, jazz, and poetry, it is less a compilation of different genres and more "parts of the same expression, different pieces of a whole," Baraka explains.[70] He continues: "Poetry…was and must be a musical form. It is speech *musicked.* It…must reach where speech begins, as sound, and bring sound into full focus as highly rhythmic communication. High Speech"[71] Like Moten's "phonic substances," the spectrum of expression that comprises speech, poetry, and music cannot be ordered according to a grammatical structure that apportions a hierarchy of meaning to sense and sound. Nor can this "poetrymusic," as Baraka calls it, be separated from African American experiences, though this is precisely what the *New York Times* review attempts to do by praising *Primitive World's* music and criticizing the script that unabashedly affirms Black life. Just as Moten connects the articulation of Aunt Hester's scream to Douglass's project of undermining Enlightenment

models of subjectivity, the history of oppression and exploitation of African Americans cannot be severed from cultural production.

Indeed, one of Baraka's primary critiques throughout his writing on jazz and blues was the corporate appropriation of Black music, which not only attempts to empty the genre of its history, but to re-write that history according to what he calls "white chauvinism." The Reagan-era conservative revival spurs this revisionary history: "Since the music cannot be 'inferiorized' out of existence, the next best move is to *claim* it!"[72] This failed attempt to diminish and extinguish African American music can be understood as both an extension and tool of the wider project of extinguishing Black life in America, whether through the gradual violence of structural racism or more immediate forms of state violence against Black citizens. Baraka's choice to stage this anti-nuclear drama as a musical foregrounds the relationship between Black life, culture, and survival as the nexus of African American cultural production, which reaches a new level of precarity in this final Cold War iteration of the nuclear threat. Music, then, is as instrumental in shaping the dramatic structure of *Primitive World* as it is in recovering the past and generating the future. It is, after all, the power of the song produced by the jazz ensemble at the musical's end that causes the destruction of the Money Gods and their "white chauvinism" and allows the musicians to say, "YES TO LIFE!"[73]

Before song can save the world, however, the protagonists, Man and Woman, must meet, repair, and recall. The musical begins and unfolds in what appears to be linear, homogenous time as "Man," who resides in a shack that is "a mixture of future and primitive beginnings," unsuccessfully tries to fix his broken saxophone.[74] It becomes clear that Man's memory is linked to his 'horn,' as he is unable to remember who Woman is when she knocks on his door, even though they were lovers before the world ended. Woman proceeds to fix his instrument and then

joins him on the piano to play a duet. It is only after this musical consummation that they are able to begin the process of memory retrieval, with Woman taking on the role of a psychologist who asks Man questions and then offers context for his broken memories. Man's memory of the end of the world is expressed through fragmented images, as though a dream: "A wave of lost souls. The Blinding / Light. A world full of screams. / Oceans of Fire."[75] Here, the unintelligible scream or "phonic substance" marks the violence of nuclear war as well the Middle Passage, as fire and water work together to convey this long history of apocalypse. Elsewhere in the musical, this conflation occurs again, such as when Man imagines the Money Gods approaching "In Boats. A horse. / The Whip. He's…galloping."[76] The past is folded into the present, which is later revealed to be a memory of the future. As Man's memory becomes clearer, Woman adds context to his fragments, revealing that what has already happened occurs in the future and what occurs in the future is already a memory. This recursion is the condition of the future compulsive tense, which cannot be contained by the grammatical structures offered by a future perfect tense.

As Woman continues to provide a structure for Man's memories, the audience realizes that these are not merely memories of the past, but recollections of the future as Man describes hearing "the murderers' voices whining / over radios,"[77] referencing an event that is about to be staged by the Money Gods and Ham. At this moment, the stage direction indicates that the Money Gods are approaching the podium of the press conference in order to initiate the end of the world. Before they are able to "cancel" the world, however, Man continues to recount the future, asking Woman: "Then what did I do?" She replies:

> What you're doing
>
> now, what
>
> we're doing

now

Reconstruct till fresh winds

blow your brain

clear again.[78]

Lapsing into heavily enjambed verse, her reply is both descriptive and imperative, as she links past, present, and future in a recursive loop. What Man did after the world ended is this very act of reconstructing the past, an act that leads to life rather than death as he does not blow his brain *out* but *clear* through music. She continues:

At that moment

you go back

to the Fire

The mad night

they blew up

the world.[79]

Here, the end of the world is addressed as an event that has already happened and will happen again in the future. At *that* moment, the referent for that which is both past and future, Man returns, compulsively, to the fire—a symbol of humanity's "future and primitive beginnings."

After this return to the past, Woman explains:

Then you wander out

into

the dark

trying to find the old world

like a Zombie.[80]

Without the context of the play, this scene might seem like repetition without difference—an endless loop of trying to recover the ruptured past without being able to move into the future. However, this is because the future compulsive tense cannot be articulated through the syntax of a single line or sentence, but instead emerges from the friction between context and text. When this ongoing reconstruction is set against the backdrop of the discontinuous temporality of the apocalypse, the power of this compulsion becomes apparent. In fact, this ability to remember the future by drawing on the past might very well offer a way out of the antimony that Mark Dery names for Afrofuturism—namely, "Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?".[81] With the future compulsive tense, Man is able to shape his future by re-membering it, piecing together the fragments produced by apocalyptic rupture. His future is one of survival, of surviving, which he can remember because he has already done so time and again. Similar to Langston Hughes's paradoxical "before time," the space before war in which violence might be transformed into peace, this re-membered space of the future is one that actively shapes the past. By invoking a history of survival, the future can be remembered as a time that is survived into, repeatedly, while also leaving open the possibility for change through the active shaping of memory and remembering.

Man's ability to remember the future not only reframes the past as an ongoing event but reconfigures the future by reconstructing the speech of those plotting to end the world. It is Man's anamnesis, his memory of the future, that first informs the audience of the Money Gods' true plot. Man recounts that the Money Gods "said there'd be / no future / That the world / had been cancelled" right before they approach the podium on stage to make this very statement.[82] Thus, the statement that would signify the deployment of nuclear weapons and the supposed end

of the world is first uttered by Man, making the Money Gods' shocking announcement a repetition of what he has already said. Man thus diffuses the statement's performative power while also proving its ultimate failure, suggesting that one who has already experienced the apocalypse might be able to recover the future from the hands that threaten to destroy it once more. Man's ability to re-present this future future-ending declaration compels him forward despite this compulsive return to the past, as Man and Woman together produce a new future that cannot be uttered in any single moment, but only through the clash between the end of a world and beginning of a new one.

Baraka's future compulsive tense expresses the ongoing moment where, as Moten writes, "shriek turns speech turns song" and offers a way forward into the future that does not rely upon abandoning or repeating the past.[83] Rather, by reversing the terms of Afrofuturism's antinomy—recovering the ruptured past in order to generate a new future—Baraka offers a method for reconstructing the past by remembering the future and reconstructing the future by remembering the past. And though the shadow of nuclear apocalypse during the Cold War obscured from view its uneven effects as well as the lived experiences of those already living after the apocalypse, Baraka demonstrates how this shadow also provided a space in which Black futures could grow and change and undermine the grammar that had been deployed to dispossess African Americans. Rather than focusing on the unimaginability of nuclear apocalypse, as Nuclear Criticism has tended to, Baraka's version of Atomic Afrofuturism incorporates white supremacy's new weapon of mass destruction into an already ongoing struggle to survive into the future. The new future generated by *Primitive World* compulsively stitches past to future, its syntax unintelligible outside the lived experiences and shared dialogue of those who already know: *It's after the end of the world.*

June Jordan's Blueprint for Building Up Black Futures

Recording her experience of the Harlem Riots in July 1964 following the police murder of Jimmy Powell, Jordan reports a scene not represented by the frontpage headline of the *New York Times,* which read: "Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt: Negroes Loot Stores, Taunt Whites—Police Shoot in Air."[84] Here, the focus is entirely on the violent control of Black opposition to police violence rather than the murder that provoked the action. Jordan offers a narrative that shows how the police transform Harlem's demonstration of solidarity and public mourning into a warzone: "The territory was clearly invaded…it was an "unreal scene of full-scale war with no one but enemies in view." After police open fire in the street, Jordan describes how she tries to seek shelter in a phone booth before fleeing from the emergent state violence: "I doubled over and raced…down 7th Ave. I was ready to vomit from fear…I was angry now…I wanted to know what the hell had provoked the deadly barrage"[85] As she ran through the ensuing chaos of broken glass, chants for Malcom X, and bullets, she found a friend and spent the rest of the night delivering medical aid to those wounded in the demonstrations.

Jordan's intimate experience with this violent containment and invasion of shelter leaves an indelible mark on her life and work. Her poetics emerge from this collective action, praxis preceding theory, and in turn generates new coalitions. Just a few weeks after the demonstrations, Jordan writes to eco-utopian designer Buckminster Fuller about the basic elements of shelter and the contrast between urban and rural spaces. After flying over New Hampshire, she observes how: "With just a tent and a few matches," one "could convert a randomly selected green space into human shelter." However, "by contrast, any view of Harlem will indicate…people whose surroundings suggest that survival is a mysterious and even pointless phenomenon." In short, neither the labor nor resources were available to construct a

shelter for living. She adds: "[In Harlem], Keeping warm is a matter of locating the absentee landlord rather than an independent expedition to gather wood for a fire."[86] While it may at first appear that Jordan is enforcing the dichotomy between country and city that Raymond Williams argues is based on the suppression of labor relations, Jordan's goal isn't to uphold the rural as inherently more inhabitable than the urban, but to demonstrate how Harlem has been cut out of even that country-city relationship. It has become a third space that cannot flourish even by exploiting the resources and labor of the country to become "self-generating." Jordan's proposal to rectify this lack of resources and shelter is "Skyrise for Harlem": what she describes as "a new reality" that will alter "the nature of quotidian existence" for the community of Harlem.[87]

I cite this proposal and its emergence from Jordan's participation in the Harlem Riots of 1964 as the origin of her *poetics of shelter.* Though Skyrise was never built, it developed for Jordan an attention to the infrastructure of the city—the ways in which it threatened annihilation or allowed for survival.[88] Whom to shelter and how to shelter become the defining coordinates of her work and emerge as counter-imaginaries to the overdetermined concept of fallout shelters in the nuclear era. Shelter, in its original ecological valence, is a site of refuge, primarily from the weather. It is the barest protection required to sustain life. All creatures find, construct, and inhabit these spaces. To destroy shelter is to displace, threaten, or extinguish the life therein**.** In the eyes of the state, shelter is coupled with subject recognition, as the law determines whose life is worth protecting and whose is already marked for death based on hierarchies of personhood. And in the context of post-WWII economic prosperity, private fallout shelters, as Laura McEnaney argues in *Civil Defense Begins at Home,* "symbolized the superiority of a society of autonomous, property-owning individuals and strong families who had the capability and the choice to shelter themselves."[89] Furthermore, defending one's shelter from unwanted guests

became seen by some as an intrinsic right, similar to the logic of "stand-your-ground" laws today. While the external threat of nuclear war was deployed as a rallying cry for national unity, in reality, survival was a limited resource already distributed according to the internal logics of civil, social, and economic inequality. For the state, unity was not collectivity: it was an ideology that depended upon the privatization of survival.[90]

Jordan's architectural and poetic projects resignify shelter and its function in the nuclear imaginary by exposing how it is racially, economically, and environmentally differentiated. Shelter, for her, is not a static object constructed by the state or privately in the yard of one's home, but a collective community action that must be constantly produced. Throughout her work, Jordan asks: What is the shape of shelter? What spaces can protect against the logics of annihilation expressed by the police, the state, and the nuclear complex? Her drive to imagine physical and ecological structures of shelter derive from her experience during the Harlem Riots, where she saw how state logics of containment perpetuated rather than redressed the originary violence. In reconfiguring what she calls the "physical patterns of inevitability" and "confrontation" that "result from the gridiron layout of city blocks,"[91] Jordan changes the relationship between the terms of annihilation, survival, and shelter.[92] And it is from this work on physical spaces that new poetic spaces emerge. These forms imagine new ways of being in the world: rooms for living that are not built with the privatized logics of the state but through the collective action of demonstration. As such, her poetics demonstrates the hidden structures of the nuclear complex and its relationship to racialized violence and imagines alternative forms and formations of living and surviving together.

Before discussing how these poetic spaces take form in her 1985 poetry collection *Living Room,* the emergent logic of shelter in her 1965 architectural plan and its relationship to the

historical project of urban development must be explored. In “Skyrise for Harlem,” June Jordan and Buckminster Fuller imagined what it would mean to materialize the politics of social uplift. For African American lives to rise up, they wagered, their living environment needed to as well. In the utopian city planning proposal for a “New Harlem,” Jordan argues that Skyrise’s fifteen conical towers 100-floors high would “rescue a quarter million lives by completely transforming their environment” and produce an “integrated transformation of a ghetto.”[93] Contrary to a “redevelopment” project, which Jordan (in agreement with Baraka) considers a “pretext for permanent expulsion of Negro populations,” New Harlem is a “deliberately designed” living space built above the existing Harlem, repairing the past while simultaneously building new futures.[94] Public housing, she explains, is too frequently built in “spasmodic response to past and present crises”[95]—a tourniquet for already overcrowded and underfunded districts. “Skyrise for Harlem,” which would literally elevate the city Alain Locke dubbed the “race capital” of the world to the same level as Morningside Heights (which was going to great lengths to separate itself from Harlem and its residents),[96] would generate for the majority Black population “not only a future but a destiny.”[97] Rather than finding a destiny in outer space, as Sun Ra proposes, this destiny was in the sky. And similar to the critique that Amiri Baraka’s “Yes to Life,” received, it is perhaps not surprising that Jordan and Fuller’s utopian plan for Harlem was retitled by *Esquire’s* editors as “Instant Slum Clearance” without their permission. While this early work on what we might call *built futures* does not explicitly position itself within a nuclear imaginary, Jordan’s later work examines the vulnerability of Black communities to the nuclear complex and allows a reading of her career as dedicated to building shelters against weapons of mass destruction.

June Jordan's philosophy of proactive design as opposed to retroactive repair reframes what Dery views as the central challenge for Afrofuturism—that in addressing the apocalyptic rupture of slavery and its effects, African Americans struggle to imagine new futures[98]—by spatializing this temporal problem. By proposing that African Americans literally build the future they want to inhabit, Jordan creates space for that redress and imagining to materialize. The problem was not being *unable* to address both past and future, but rather not having *the room* to do so. And while "Skyrise" was never built, Jordan's attention to the relationship between psychological and physical well-being, aesthetic forms, and material conditions, continued to shape her attitude toward building up Black futures, a poetics of shelter that is reflected throughout her career as a poet, teacher, and activist. This poetics of shelter is Jordan's version of Atomic Afrofuturism, which counters the state-sponsored discourse of bomb shelters and disaster preparedness by acknowledging that disaster has already occurred and that the flourishing (not merely the survival) of African Americans requires structural and infrastructural change. Her 1985 poetry collection, *Living Room,* written nearly twenty years after "Skyrise for Harlem," serves as the poetic extension of this utopian vision of shelter. In it, Jordan constructs not only common places for dwelling, but room for living, as her design extends higher than the skyline of New York City, stretching across the globe in solidarity with other anti-imperial and anticolonial struggles during the final years of the Cold War. By reconfiguring shelter as a space produced through collective action rather than one provided by the state or privately constructed, Jordan offers a new blueprint for building up Black futures.

Jordan claims that "where we are physically is enmeshed with our deepest consciousness of self. There is no evading architecture, no meaningful denial of our position."[99] The question of "where we are" is thus inseparable from *where we've been* and *where we're going* and speaks to

the spatial and temporal formations of racial segregation in post-war America. Adding to the argument regarding the Black Power Movement's spatial origins,[100] Samuel Zipp, in examining New York's Cold War urban renewal projects, argues that this "spatial vision" was "not simply oppositional but…proactive—a fact exemplified by its direct and indirect influence on the built environment in subsequent years."[101] From the color line to the redline, the figurative and physical separation of bodies based on skin color was so entrenched that even after key desegregation and antidiscrimination laws were passed like the Fair Housing Act in 1968, racial discrimination continued to organize social life, etched as it was into the very architecture of the city. And when it came to the infrastructure of nuclear preparedness, the racial divisions built in the 1950's had not been dismantled by the 1980's. Patrick Sharp shows how during the first wave of nuclear extinction anxiety in the 1950's civil defense officials allotted their attention according to who they thought would survive an atomic bomb: "with large numbers of blacks and poor people likely to be wiped out in the initial blast, officials focused their planning and propaganda on the politically expedient imagery of the white suburban family."[102] In this racialized nuclear imaginary, the post-nuclear family, like the nuclear one, was white. And so, while white suburban families were instructed to build their own private shelters or shelter "safely" in their homes, those in public housing and urban centers, particularly people of color, were instructed to somehow flee the target-prone city or crowd into public shelters. These structures remained in place throughout the Cold War period, despite the advances in racial equality in the intervening years. Jordan's vision for Skyrise, however, resists the preparedness logic of sheltering underground, instead lifting Harlem and its citizens up into the sky.

Langston Hughes has also critiqued the unequally distributed "resource" of preparedness, as he imagines how even in the context of nuclear emergency, segregation would ensure the

protection of white people over Black. His character Simple comments: "If I was in Mississippi, I would be Jim Crowed out of bomb shelters….Down there they will have some kind of voting test, else loyalty test, in which they will find some way of flunking Negroes out."[103] This scenario does not simply conjure a shelter that is segregated yet shared ("separate but equal") but rather demonstrates how segregation is a material division that will determine who can take shelter and who cannot; in short, who will live and who will die. Though Jordan's vision for building Black futures addresses more incipient forms of violence and oppression, both she and Hughes demonstrate how survival is not only structural but infrastructural.

In her letter to Buckminster Fuller proposing the Skyrise project, Jordan explains: "I would wish us to indicate the determining relationship between architectonic reality and physical well-being" in order to create a "an idea or theory of place in terms of human being…a particular space that is open-receptive and communicant yet sheltering particular life."[104] The repetition of "particular" and the use of the singular "being" rather than "human beings," clarifies what, exactly, Jordan believes this "determining relationship" to be: to make room for living is to make room for Being. A poetics of shelter is not only physical but ontological. The drive to segregate or redevelop and relocate Black communities is an attempt to extinguish Black life. And so to construct living room is to make possible Black Being in a nation structured by anti-Blackness. The universalizing discourse of human beings and their shared threat of extinction, as we have seen, always already excludes the "particular life" Jordan insists on sheltering. To build a poetics of shelter is to intercede in the history of white violence against Black lives, which have been distributed, bought, sold, kidnapped, moved, evicted, and segregated from the structures that might provide not just survival but flourishing. This theory of place, then, is a theory of life.

This relationship between the infrastructure of the city and its perpetuation of structural violence first takes literary form in Jordan's 1971 novel, *His Own Where,* in which the teenage protagonist, Buddy, loses his father when a car clips him on a street corner. In the opening chapter, Buddy explains to his girlfriend why street corners perpetuate precarity: "You see them signs. The curb-your-dog signs. But the people be like slaves. Don't need no signs. Just do it. Curb-the-People. Step right up, then down, then up. Then out. Into it. Into the traffic, baby. You be crucify like Jesus at the crossing. Traffic like D.O.A. for corners. Danger on Arrival."[105] Here "curb" becomes a structural and infrastructural form: it is that which keeps dogs and people in check, shaping their behavior through means of restraint, and that which marks the boundary between pedestrian and car, though it does not necessarily protect the former from the latter. As Adrienne Brown argues in her book on the relationship between racial perception and the advent of the skyscraper, "all architectures are, inevitably racial architectures, producing and maintaining site-specific phenomenologies of race."[106] And so, Jordan's solution to the racialized formation of the crossroads, the intersection, the curb, is to include as many "curvilinear features" as possible into her redesign of Harlem. This infrastructural change, in her logic, would influence physical and emotional well-being, as it allows residents: "to overcome physical patterns of inevitability…the impossibility…of surprise" which "result from the gridiron layout of city blocks."[107] And though Jordan's career moves away from physically altering the built environment and toward figuratively addressing how environments are built, she continues to attend to the relationship between repeated patterns, structural formations, and imaginative spaces in her work on linguistics and poetics to consider how certain forms and formations offer new types of imaginaries and figurations. While the relationship between the built environment, annihilation, survival, and shelter in her work do not become explicitly linked to nuclear forms

until the 1980's, reading this work as implicitly responding the layered threat of nuclear annihilation reveals the ways in which America's nuclear unconscious sustains and is sustained by its racial unconscious.

Essential to constructing a poetics of shelter is addressing the foundation of that building: language. For Jordan, survival depends upon linguistic self-determination, as she argues in her discussion of "Black English": "We will not survive unless we realize that we remain jeopardized, as a people, by a fully conscious political system to annihilate whoever / whatever does not emulate its mainstream vocabulary, values, deceit, arrogance, and killer mentality."[108] The slash between "whoever" and "whatever" acknowledges the legacy of objectification of Black life, historically through chattel slavery, politically through the denial of civil rights, and socially through the ongoing discrimination against African Americans. It represents how these systems work together against the "particular life" Jordan wants to shelter. This "fully conscious" annihilation works alongside the unconscious one, exerting pressure on the symbolic and material levels to either assimilate or extinguish all forms of life that do not already conform to its logic. The image of annihilation draws on the discourse of nuclear weapons—the potential of "white weapons" literal and figurative to wipe out entire people groups. Rather than focusing on the spectacle of nuclear war, however, Jordan tends to the structural ways in which Black lives are already being threatened and pushed toward extinction. In doing so, she positions nuclear weapons on a continuum of weapons of mass destruction.[109]

In her 1985 essay, "Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan," Jordan extrapolates on the grammatical rules of Black English that she and her students developed. She explains: "our language is a system constructed by people constantly needing to insist that we exist, that we are present" because "our culture has been constantly threatened by

annihilation."[110] For this reason, Black English refuses the passive voice and utilizes the present indicative. This insistence on presence and the "living and active participation of at least two human beings" enables the imagining of possible futures by constantly affirming the life of the present.[111] Rather than the threat of annihilation producing the necessity of only speaking in the future perfect tense, as Nuclear Criticism maintains, Jordan acknowledges the ongoing threat of extinction as the reason for which African Americans must affirm presence and connect actions to living subjects to construct the future. Jordan also demonstrates how this affirmation of presence manifests the repressed networks of power that inflict violence. She writes: "you cannot say, 'Black English is being eliminated.' You must say, instead, 'White people eliminating Black English'."[112] Similar to how Baraka's future compulsive tense depends upon context for legibility—refusing a universal speaker or listener detached from history—Jordan's version of Black English centers the relationship between living, speaking subjects as the basis for building a sentence that constructs the future. Black English has been shaped by its response to the threat of annihilation, accounting for the apocalypse in its very structure. It therefore already responds to the apparently new conditions of the nuclear age; the end of the world, Jordan shows, has always shaped the language and lives of African Americans.

It is not until her 1985 poetry collection *Living Room* that Jordan explicitly connects these structural and infrastructural methods of building up Black futures to the specific threat of nuclear apocalypse. *Living Room,* Jordan's revolutionary, satirical, earnest, locally specific and globally reaching collection of poetry, was published nearly twenty years after "Skyrise for Harlem." While Skyrise resists the external logics of the nuclear age obliquely, *Living Room*, written in the midst of President Reagan's re-escalation of the nuclear war, confronts it head-on. In it, she constructs room for living by refusing the logic undergirding nuclear preparedness and

defense strategies, which propose proliferation as a means of ensuring peace. President's Reagan's "Star Wars" speech in 1983 epitomizes this contradictory logic: "I know that all of you want peace, and so do I. I know too that many of you seriously believe that a nuclear freeze would further the cause of peace. But a freeze now would make us less, not more, secure and would raise, not reduce, the risk of war."[113] She also demonstrates, again, how nuclear weapons are not unique, but rather new *forms* of weapons of mass destruction that have been used against minority groups throughout history. Her solidarity with anticolonial struggles across the globe reflects W.E.B.'s Dubois's alliance with the Japanese victims of the atomic bomb and challenges the geopolitical divisions set by the American-Soviet dyad of the Cold War. Furthermore, she connects the oppression experienced by groups in Palestine, Nicaragua, and South Africa with the ongoing struggle for African American survival, which is structurally and at times pointedly threatened by the nuclear complex in the wider context and history of white supremacy.

The collection's seven-part opening poem, "From Sea to Shining Sea," demonstrates how building shelter against the nuclear era logics of segregated annihilation and white supremacy means disrupting what has been deemed natural by the state and dismantling the infrastructures the perpetuate containment and precarity. The poem reconfigures the utopian view of America expressed by "America the Beautiful" to reveal the many forms of violence upon which that false consciousness is constructed. In Jordan's counter-imaginary, the nuclear unconscious is made up of forms of the nuclear that are inseparable from forms of white supremacy. The poem begins with a meditation on the structure of "natural order" as a form that relies upon a strategically constructed representation of nature to grant it legitimacy. As the poem unfolds, we come to understand this natural order to be a white supremacist structure enforced by violence, one that redoubles with the nuclear-era logics of annihilation. Here Jordan deploys the figure of

the pomegranate with all its Persephonic and Edenic connotations to demonstrate the contradictory logics of this "natural order."

Mimicking the passive voice that Jordan elsewhere critiques as a tactic of white annihilation in the fraught grammar of political discourse, the poem opens:

> Natural order is being restored
> Natural order means you take a pomegranate
> that encapsulated plastic looking orb complete
> with its little top / a childproof cap that you can
> neither twist nor turn
> and you keep the pomegranate stacked inside a wobbly
> pyramid composed by 103 additional pomegranates
> next to a sign saying 89 cents
> each
>
> Natural order is being restored
> Natural order does not mean a pomegranate
> split open to the seeds sucked by the tongue and lips
> while teeth release the succulent sounds
> of its voluptuous disintegration.[114]

The "natural order" is presented here as an ideology of restoration, of containing the chaotic violence let loose by those who now want to manage it. This order is structural and mostly hidden, such that it can only be described through its form, through the relationship between its parts that structure its logic. Here, Jordan manifests its true form: a commodified pile of

pomegranates-turned-grenades, ready to explode at the slightest touch—nature, weaponized. By contrast, in the next stanza, the ecological form of the pomegranate is determined to be against the form of this natural order. The destruction of this order and the pomegranate's logic of "voluptuous disintegration" will return at the end of the poem. Before we arrive there, however, the intervening sections of the poem describe why *this* was a "bad time" to be against the natural order.

Throughout the poem, the refrain "This was not a good time" is repeated and expanded upon. This refrain expands the urgent temporal boundaries of the arms race into an extended meditation on the numerous ongoing threats to life that are diminished in the face of the spectacular global threat of nuclear war**:** "*This was not a good time to be gay,*" reads one line, before describing how a shooter used his "Israeli / submachine gun" to target gay Americans.[115] "*This was not a good time to be Black*," reads another, before linking the anti-busing law passed by the Senate with the acquittal of Klan and American Nazi members.[116] The list continues: "*This was not a good time to be old…This was not a good time to be young…to be a pomegranate ripening on a tree…to be a child…to be without a job…to have a job…to be a woman.*"[117] Each stanza becomes both exemplary and quotidian, as it is merely one example among many others that prove the statement: *This was not a good time*.

Jordan then spatializes these temporal concerns, juxtaposing a triad of what can be considered sacrifice zones: communities on the periphery that house different forms of the nuclear complex. She observes:

This was not a good time to live in Queens

Trucks carrying explosive nuclear wastes will

exit from the Long Island Expressway and then

travel through the residential streets of Queens

en route to the 59th Street Bridge, and so on.[118]

Written in a flat affect, as if merely giving directions to a passer-by, this description of the transportation of radioactive materials reveals the nuclear to be part of the infrastructure of living, rather than an external, future threat. The "residential streets" reveal the extent to which nuclear forms have infiltrated even the most intimate domestic spaces. This nearly mundane occurrence of nuclear risk is juxtaposed with more spectacular forms of violence in Arkansas:

This was not a good time to live in Arkansas

Occasional explosions caused by mystery

nuclear missiles have been cited

as cause for local alarm, among

other things.[119]

Jordan refers here to an incident in 1980 in rural Arkansas, in which a Titan missile with a nuclear warhead had an explosive fuel leak, killing one airman and wounded dozens of others. The emphasis on "local," rather than national or global alarm, reveals how even the spectacular form of the missile remains beneath the notice of the world stage when it is located in a community already designated as a sacrifice zone. These contradictions and connections articulate how the nuclear complex supports and is supported by other forms of violence.

The final space in this nuclear triad is North Dakota:

This was not a good time to live in Grand Forks North Dakota

> Given the presence of a United States nuclear
>
> missile base in Grand Forks North Dakota
>
> the non-military residents of the area feel
>
> that they are living only a day by day distance
>
> from certain
>
> annihilation, etcetera.[120]

Again speaking to the real conditions of the nuclear complex, Jordan references another incident in 1980 during which a B52 equipped with a nuclear warhead caught fire at an airbase which itself was built on top of nuclear missile silos sunk into the land. Years later, Dr. Roger Batzel, then-director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, testified that if the wind was blowing in a different direction, the incident may very well have led to a thermonuclear explosion worse than Chernobyl.[121] In this case, the temporal anticipation of apocalypse is fused with proximate location, as the level of risk one assumes within the nuclear complex fuses time and space—the "day by day distance." Dispelling notions that nuclear annihilation will happen all at once to everyone, this measurement reveals the contradictions embedded in the logic of Civil Defense, whose literature measured one's likelihood of survival according to how far away one lived from the epicenter of the bomb while at the same time proposing there were efforts one could make to protect oneself even within that perimeter. In reality, one's survival was calculated by how close they happened to be from the bomb or the accident and there was no real difference that precautions could make if one lived within that zone. Thus, this "annihilation, etcetera" is the "natural" logic that structures the nuclear complex. To build any type of shelter against this threat is fruitless so long as it is contained within that precarious form structured by ever-expanding violence

The repetition of what I will call *elliptical referents* throughout the poem—"and the like," "among other things," and "etcetera"—represent the ever-expanding chain of violence linked to these specific events and locales while also displacing and compressing that violence. Disrupting the nuclear-era logics that depend upon containment, this structure of reference resists a unified representation of the nuclear complex, which would necessarily depend upon suppressing aspects of its proliferating violence, and instead demonstrates the contradictions immanent within the form of its "natural order." Furthermore, by pairing these deferring referential phrases with "This," a referent that indicates proximity by pointing to itself and the event that precipitated the statement "*this was not a good time,"* each event is linked to the next in a self-referential network of meaning that demonstrates the impossibility of closure and containment. And so, while each "this," in the refrain "*This* was not a good time," supplements the previous articulation of violence, the concluding "etceteras" imply these conditions are ongoing, multiple, and too pervasive to articulate. An interminable litany of violence. The poem's work is to turn these elliptical referents into direct action in order to shelter against the ongoing and spectacular forms of "annihilation, etc." To do so, the poem must alter the form of the natural order. It must turn the past tense into a built future without disavowing the ongoing violence that makes every time a bad time at a time "like this." However, this poetics of shelter is not peaceful. Like the forest that cannot regenerate without burning, Jordan builds shelter according to ecological structures of destruction.

This transformation occurs in the poem's penultimate section: "This was not a good time to be against / the natural order // —Wait a minute—".[122] The syntactical interruption breaks the spell of this litany and the repetition of elliptical referents, opening up space for a minute that might expand into an hour, a day, even a future. Whereas the nuclear-era logics deployed to

force national unity emphasize the lack of time between explosion and apocalypse, Jordan intervenes in this logic that promises no future. Here the formal logics of the pomegranate appear again, echoing the opening of the poem, while the referent of the pomegranate is replaced by the demonstrative "I." Instead of the pomegranate, it is the "I" that is split open, the seeds of its explosive potential consumed to propel embodied action: "Sucked by the tongue and the lips….I am turning under the trees" and leaving a trail of blood from the pomegranate's bright and "voluptuous disintegration." The "I" charges forward, referring to itself and its present actions as it burrows, demonstrates, and inhabits country and city. The grounding "I am" statements that affirm presence and action—"I am turning…I am trailing…I am walking"—echo Jordan's account of her experience in the Harlem Riots, linking us back to the specific event that spurred her poetics.[123] Demonstration, which means to prove, exhibit, and resist, becomes a trope within the poem itself, as Jordan demonstrates the very acts she is performing in the ongoing present tense.

Jordan transforms that which the state had co-opted as a tool of destruction by ingesting and dis-integrating it. In doing so, she collapses the distance between the cause and effects of violence, demonstrating with her own body how the source of this unending chain of harm is rooted in the form of the "natural order." Propelled by the energy released within her, she moves through the streets and rivers to set loose the precarious pile of pomegranates into a messy and fractious action of coming together: "This is a good time / This is the best time / This is the only time to come together."[124] Restructuring the past-tense negation of "This was not a good time" Jordan holds open that minute of hesitation as the space of possibility. The "natural order" is a social formation enforced by the state that endangers rather than preserves those within it. Here, Jordan demonstrates how one frees that hierarchical pyramid of order into disorder. No longer

for sale, the pomegranates are released back into their ecological form, which carries within it the form of collectivity. The many seeds contained within the shelter of the pomegranate that must exceed that form in order to continue to generate new forms of flourishing. The figuration of the pomegranate as seed bomb here seems to contradict the impulse of shelter, of building to prevent annihilation. However, it is through this act that is both destructive and generative that Jordan's poetics of shelter can be understood as dismantling the logics that reproduce precarity rather than shelter for the communities marked as sacrifice zones. She transforms these zones into living rooms, shelter that doesn't merely ensure the barest level of survival but in fact provides room for living by exposing and reconfiguring the unconscious that sustains them. The "natural order" maintains the shape of white supremacy, the equation of expendable lives, the patterns of confrontation. And the pro-nuclear imaginary positions shelter as that which protects the self against the environment, as if shelter and environment were separate. However, Jordan fuses these structures together, revealing how the capacity to shelter life is imminent within the ecological structures that determine the relationship between parts in a system characterized by change and disruption rather than order.

Living Room not only produces structures for collective action within a single poem but builds across poems to demonstrate how this work of future building must extend outward beyond any notion of form as a container. One way to read *Living Room* as a whole is to view the elliptical referents in "Sea to Shining Sea"—the et ceteras and so ons—as being expanded elsewhere in the collection. For example, one poem titled "Directions for Carrying Explosive Nuclear Wastes through Metropolitan New York," builds off the line in "Sea to Shining Sea" that reads: "en route to the 59th Street Bridge." It expands the stanza's elliptical referent "and so on" by continuing to describe the route through her neighborhood, demonstrating the unevenly

distributed risks of the nuclear age and their alignment with segregation.[125] The poem's bureaucratic tone and imperative mood banalizes the nuclear threat.[126] Similar to connections built throughout "Sea to Shining Sea," this approach reveals how the threat of the nuclear complex is part of the "natural order" for those living in sacrifice zones, rather than an external or exceptional threat.

Contrary to "Sea to Shining Sea," however, "Directions" almost completely suppresses figurative language, a parody of the overly calm bureaucratic tone of civil defense pamphlets instructing citizens on how to use a Geiger counter or fireproof their roof. The use of plain language here also reveals how the aura of secrecy and security surrounding America's nuclear complex is a façade; the fact that this transportation route of radioactive materials is common knowledge challenges the paradigm of nuclear security. The section of the poem titled "Special Note to Drivers," reveals the human basis of the seemingly inhuman and infallible nuclear complex. It is the accumulation of these "special" directions and the small contradictions that arise from the attempt to account for every possible future scenario that produce the dramatic effect of the poem. By juxtaposing opposing directions, such as "Check rearview mirror and sideview mirror / incessantly" and "Keep eyes on road," or coupling parameters that appear at once logical and illogical, like "Do not brake suddenly or / otherwise," the poem foregrounds the impossible logic of a system that never fails or "fails safe."[127] These contrary directions are further refined through limitations on when it would be a "good time" to transport this waste through New York: "Do not drive in the rain. / Do not drive in the snow. / Do not drive in the dark."[128] This highly refined, specialized, and contradictory set of directions demonstrates the irrationality built into the infrastructure of the nuclear complex.

The discourse of civil defense contends that as long as everyone follows directions, no one will get hurt. Directions are a method of containment and a means by which the state disavows responsibility. If the system fails, it is due to individual human error—in this case, the driver would likely be blamed. Jordan's move to hyperbolic figurative language at the very end of the poem reveals how it is the nuclear complex that is at fault. The poem concludes by addressing the driver of the radioactive waste: "Think about your mother / and look out for the crazies."[129] In the eyes of the state, the pejorative phrase "the crazies" refers to those protesting the shipment of radioactive waste through their neighborhood. However, through the poem's ironic reversal of the logic of containment, we come to understand how it is the nuclear complex that cannot be contained. The idea that it might be a "good time" or a good idea to truck nuclear waste through the narrow streets of densely populated areas is that which is without reason. The poem's strategic suppression and revelation of the figurative demonstrates how such directions are always a performance that relies upon the suppression of the system's immanent contradictions, revealing how safety and security are deployed to control communities rather than shelter them from harm.

The poem demonstrates the contradiction between these performances from an ultra-local perspective, which further undermines a global or national unity determined by the nuclear threat. Here it is not a country or even a state being threatened by the nuclear complex, but a specific route through the city, a specific driver who may or may not drive well depending on whether he or she is thinking of their mother (and depending on the relationship between the driver and the mother). The tension between local and national control over nuclear forms demonstrates the hyperlocal and situated conditions of this atomic network, rendering the nuclear unconscious as a toxic commons that is unevenly distributed. As I argued in the chapter

"Decolonizing the Atomic Frontier," Indigenous communities bear a disproportionate burden of the nation's uranium mines, proposed waste sites, and atomic bomb test sites. Despite the position of the nuclear complex as a national defense or a global threat, the unevenly distributed effects of the nuclear's many forms are felt locally. This disconnect between local and global is yet another condition that structures the nuclear unconscious, the material and psychological repository that undergirds America's nation-building project despite its many contradictions. This is why the state-sponsored pro-nuclear imaginary relies so heavily on the imagery of weapons and the national threat of nuclear war: to obscure the fact that not only has this threat been realized through other forms, but that it is primarily local in its effects. Jordan's representation of nuclear waste as a local and urban threat reframes the city as a site that suffers from ongoing violence rather than awaiting a future disaster—the narrative employed by the logic surrounding bomb shelters and evacuation zones. An extension of already existing systems of oppression, this nuclear form becomes banal, provincial, and legal.

Jordan furthers this point by satirizing the "legality" of the nuclear threat in the poem "Song of the Law Abiding Citizen," which links poverty with vulnerability and demonstrates how laws, too, shelter some people at the cost of others. This poem probes the logic of programs that are intended to promote equality in an unequal world, such as food assistance. The speaker, who has mistakenly received more food stamps than he should have sends them "back to the President (and his beautiful wife)" even though he "can't pay the rent."[130] The speaker's attempt to function as a "law-abiding citizen," which in this case means both to correct the government's mistake while also subjecting oneself to the threat of eviction, is coupled with the unequally distributed risks that accompany this legal framework. A nonchalance pervades the tone of this poem when it describes this situation: "Trucks cruisin' down the avenue / carrying nuclear

garbage right next to you / and it's legal."[131] Whereas keeping food stamps that were accidentally allotted could be considered illegal, a truck carrying nuclear waste, which is also prone to accidents, is legal. The "song" continues:

> it's radioaction ridin' like a regal
>
> load of jewels
>
> past the bars the cruel
>
> school house and the church and if
>
> the trucks wipeout or crash
>
> or even lurch too hard around a corner
>
> we will just be goners
>
> and it's legal.[132]

The rhyme between legal / regal heightens the distance between the entities that sanction this activity and the citizens that are subjected to and subjugated by it. The foregone conclusion that "we will just be goners" shows how certain deaths are not only trivialized but structurally permitted within the law. Jordan here extends the concept of "social death" within the context of the nuclear threat, demonstrating how slavery's lawful killing of African Americans can be carried out through many forms—that even were an accident to occur, it would be no accident.[133] Rather, the death of those living in lower-income communities, which for Jordan in New York is equated with majority Black communities like Harlem, is an expected outcome of the radioactive nation-building project because it is a product of America and the laws that, from the outset, have diminished the value of Black lives. That one can follow the law but receive no shelter from it, and in fact be directly harmed by it, demonstrates how the concentrated violence of the nuclear age is an extension of other forms of oppression, segregation, and inequality. Neither the

state nor the law will protect Harlem and its inhabitants. Instead, that shelter must be constructed by the community itself.

Jordan's anti-nuclear poems in *Living Room* are interwoven with meditations on global and local struggles for living. By drawing together poems about toxic drinking water, Guatemalan revolution, America's space program, fried chicken, and milk tainted by Strontium-90, Jordan demonstrates the web of structural violence that makes sheltering Black life and building up Black futures nearly impossible. However, through solidarity with communities across the globe as well as in her own backyard, she demonstrates how new spaces for living can rise above engrained infrastructures of violence. As she writes of Skyrise for Harlem, "the architecture of experience deeply determines an incalculable number and variety of habits—i.e. the nature of quotidian existence."[134] By reconfiguring the material conditions of living through built environments and poetic form, Jordan imagines a future that shelters Black life and expands the room for living to communities that suffer from similar forms of oppression and violence in their own countries.

At an anti-nuclear rally in 1982, Alice Walker makes a case for the unending destruction brought about by whiteness and the possibility of species suicide for the sake preserving the future. She writes: "it would be good, perhaps, to put an end to the species in any case, rather than let the white man continue to subjugate it, and continue to let their lust dominate, exploit and despoil not just our planet, but the rest of the universe, which is their clear and oft-stated intention."[135] She ultimately rejects this temptation, however, because "just as the sun shines on the godly and ungodly alike, so does nuclear radiation."[136] This reasoning reverses the white nuclear discourse that implies that equality derives from shared risk of nuclear annihilation—that "we" are all in it together. Rather, it recognizes the inherent inequality of those who will be

affected by this violence—that some are perhaps deserving of it and some are not; that some have caused the destruction while others have only been subjected to it over the course of history. To cede survival to these white weapons, Walker decides, would be to capitulate to the white logic that has for centuries told her, "I have no right to exist, except in the dirtiest, darkest corners of the globe."[137] It is not for fear of imminent annihilation but in spite of it that she decides it is best to pursue the struggle for justice "to every living thing," concluding that the best "revenge" for white supremacy is the destruction of white supremacy through terms other than the ones it has dictated. This construction of a new world, new futures, with logics and tactics that do not merely subvert but reconfigure the forms offered by engrained structures of white oppression is what makes Atomic Afrofuturism a mode, imaginary, and framework that can flourish even in the most acute moments of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic time and space. It expresses the visions of those who already know the world has already ended, who find ways to construct forward and upward anyway.

Coda: Nuclear, Now?

Nuclear energy is making a comeback. In 2008, Bill Gates founded TerraPower, a "nuclear innovation company," which is set to build its first "demonstration" reactor in a coal town in Wyoming—with half its projected construction costs (four billion) subsidized by the U.S. government.[1] On TikTok and Twitter you can find "nuclear energy influencers" who promote the benefits of carbon-free electricity to Gen-Z.[2] A 2022 post on Twitter by "ISODOPE," who says they are "raising awareness about the need for nuclear energy" features a video that cuts between a clip from *The Simpsons* where characters try to hide nuclear waste in a tree; images from cold-war era nuclear protest; headlines from Fukushima, and a clip from *Godzilla*. ISODOPE's caption reads: "it's the atomic fire breathing t-rex for me. 🙃 this is the media's interpretation of nuclear. . .its no wonder so many people are afraid to adopt nuclear energy as a solution to climate change. its time to flip the script."[3] Conflating news footage, movies, and TV shows as the hegemonic "media," ISODOPE pins resistance to nuclear on unfounded fear stoked by unrealistic and unsubstantiated representations.

In addition to this return to nuclear energy through technology and cultural discourse, a thinktank called "Good Energy Collective" supports the revival of nuclear energy through policy at the nexus of climate change and environmental justice. The group claims it is "building the progressive case for nuclear energy as an essential part of the broader climate change agenda and working to align the clean energy space with environmental justice and sustainability goals."[4] They outline how federal policies can "include nuclear legacy communities" in environmental justice initiatives while also committing to diversify the nuclear workforce.[5] They acknowledge the historical harm caused by weapons production and improper waste disposal while at the same

time distinguishing “progressive” nuclear energy from these “legacy” problems. In a response to the Department Of Energy’s 2022 Request for Information on “Using a Consent-Based Siting Process to Identify Federal Interim Storage Facilities” for nuclear waste—while no plan for long term storage in the U.S. currently exists—they cite the need for “procedural justice,” the centrality of community representation, and even draw on the “Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing,” (1996), which are considered one of the founding documents of the modern environmental justice movement. With policy recommendations for remediation, community input, and a diverse workforce, this “new” version nuclear energy industry appears too good to be true.

It seems that these three approaches to making a new nuclear era—technology, culture, policy—have everything covered. Is this entire dissertation merely a prologue to the innovative solutions and reparative actions promised by these proponents of nuclear energy? Despite my attempt to avoid the narrow premise of pro- and anti-nuclear, when I present at conferences, someone in the audience inevitably just wants to ask me whether I think nuclear energy is necessary to face climate change. “What do you think of fission?”; “Solar panels and EVs require lithium and other precious minerals, why is uranium any worse?”; “If nuclear power hadn’t been shut down by public hysteria, we wouldn’t be dealing with climate change today,” and so on. So, this is the place where I come up with a response. Should we invest billions in “new” nuclear reactors? Should we use whatever tools we have to fix this massive ecological crisis that has already harmed more lives than a potential reactor meltdown? Shouldn’t we just all be pro-nuclear, now?

. . .

In her 1979 essay in *Akwesasne Notes,* Winona La Duke explains the essential relationship between fossil fuels and nuclear power. She begins by discussing how, in the 1860's, the discovery of oil in Indigenous territories within Oklahoma led to yet another forced relocation of the Cherokee, who only decades earlier had lost a quarter of their people during the forced relocation known as the "Trail of Tears." La Duke writes: "The treaty provisions of 'as long as the grass shall grow' lasted only till the discovery of valuable resources—oil….Indian land and blood was transformed into oil money."[6] She cites the death, disease, and dispossession that continues in the ensuring decades, all to feed America's ever-growing appetite for consumption. She then explains the deep intertwining of this petro-colonialism with uranium mining, nuclear waste, nuclear bombs—all parts of the ever-expanding nuclear complex. There is no separating the U.S. fossil fuel industry from nuclear industry, La Duke shows: ARCO used to manage (and mismanage) radioactive waste at Hanford, Washington; a copper mining company owned by ARCO was responsible for starting uranium mining on Laguna Pueblo land in the Southwest; nuclear bombs were used to explore natural gas reserves in Colorado; the list goes on and on. The common denominator for these energy companies is how they occupy, use, and abandon native lands. The common narrative they offer the public is that the more energy we have, the more free we are.

The history of energy is entwined with settler colonialism, white supremacy, and patriarchal dominance. Through the lens of these histories of occupation and control, it becomes evident that nuclear energy is not only the "other" fossil fuel, but a false antidote to a half century of war and economic distress, despite what President Eisenhower argued in his 1953 "Atoms for Peace" speech. And of course, the focus of this project has not been on nuclear energy alone, but rather the inextricable, latent, and often obscured forms of the nuclear that

cannot be separated into discrete units and isolated contexts, despite the repeated attempts to disarticulate them.

. . .

Historian Kate Brown, in her astounding account of Chernobyl's nuclear meltdown and the decades following of bureaucratic cover-ups, widespread suffering, and lasting harm, understands that the question she will inevitably get asked by readers is something along the lines of "are you pro- or anti- nuclear?" In her introduction she considers the options:

> Maybe nuclear power is, as advocates say, the best option for a growing global population. And maybe nuclear weapons, which are the genesis of nuclear power, are the best way to defend against "rogue" nations. Perhaps there is no other way. If that is so, then I set out to travel around the Chernobyl Zone of Alienation with my eyes wide open, trying to understand how human life changes in the post-apocalyptic shadow. I made this journey because I don't want to be one of those duped comrades who found out too late that the survival manual contained a pack of lies.[7]

What Brown's book provides, what I hope this dissertation provides, and what I know the writers I study provide, is not a simple answer but rather a demonstration of the real and imagined, historical and ongoing effects of just one small piece of the nuclear complex, the depths of which cannot ever be fully plumbed.

. . .

The final poem in Mariko Nagai's poetry collection *Irradiated Cities* grapples with the inaccessibility of knowledge in the nuclear complex. The poem begins: ": there was no meltdown : no one has died from the Daiichi Fukushima Nuclear power plan *incident* : 400,000 people will die from this : the polluted cooling water was never released into the ocean : (what is

the truth? What is a lie?).”[8] The technology may have changed, may be changing, but the structures of secrecy, obscurity, and inaccessibility remain, as do the mechanisms of repression, diminishment, and banalization that frame the effects of the nuclear complex as essential and ordinary risks that communities today must endure if they are to maintain the “freedoms” granted to them by ever-increasing sources of energy. And as long as nuclear waste continues to accumulate at defunct power plants and generations of people cope with the violence of fallout, poets will grapple with these incongruities and contradictions, building new forms to articulate the aspects of the nuclear complex that are still so difficult to hold together.

. . .

As I write this, Russia is attacking Ukraine. A couple months ago, Chernobyl was making headlines again. A loss of power. Water evaporating around fuel rods. Later, a nearby fire. People in the U.S. were using missile simulation maps to see where a warhead from Russia might land. Suddenly the people who hadn’t thought about the nuclear complex for a very long time remembered it existed. Many people, however, have never been able to forget.

Bibliography

ISODOPE [@i_sodope_]. "It's the Atomic Fire Breathing t-Rex for Me. This Is the Media's Interpretation of Nuclear...Its No Wonder so Many People Are Afraid to Adopt Nuclear Energy as a Solution to Climate Change. Its Time to Flip the Script. Https://T.Co/L7nybnf6QE." Tweet. *Twitter*, May 5, 2022. https://twitter.com/i_sodope_/status/1522262204367650816.

"A Policy Pathway for Nuclear Justice | Good Energy Collective." Accessed May 10, 2022. http://www.goodenergycollective.org/policy/a-policy-pathway-for-nuclear-justice.

"About Us | Good Energy Collective." Accessed May 10, 2022. http://www.goodenergycollective.org/about-us.

Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

Altieri, Charles. *The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry: Modernism and After*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.

Ashton, Jennifer. "Periodizing Poetic Practice Since 1945." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Poetry Since 1945*, edited by Jennifer Ashton, 1–15. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2013. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2137996002/citation/3DEBF31114434B02PQ/1.

Awiakta, Marilou. *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*. 6th Edition. Memphis, TN: St. Luke's Press, 1986.

———. *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*. 8th Edition. Bell Buckle, TN: Iris Press, 2006.

———. “Amazons in Appalachia.” In *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*, edited by Beth Brant, 125–30. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1988.

Axelrod, Steven Gould. Review of *Review of Plutonian Ode: Poems 1977-1980*, by Allen Ginsberg. *World Literature Today* 58, no. 1 (1984): 104. https://doi.org/10.2307/40139757.

Baker, Shalanda, Subin DeVar, and Shiva Prakash. “The Energy Justice Workbook.” Initiative for Energy Justice, December 2019.

Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Duke UP, 2007.

Baraka, Amiri. “Milestones 1.” In *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues*, by Amina Baraka and Amiri Baraka. New York: Morrow, 1987.

———. “New Music/New Poetry.” In *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues*, by Amina Baraka and Amiri Baraka, 243–45. New York: Morrow, 1987.

———. “Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical.” In *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues*, by Amina Baraka and Amiri Baraka, 119–73. New York: Morrow, 1987.

———. *S.O.S.: Poems 1961-2013*. Edited by Paul Vangelisti. New York: Grove Press, 2014.

Berkeley Barb. “Barbwires,” May 19, 1979.

Barnhisel, Greg. *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015.

Basso, Keith. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. UP New Mexico, n.d.

Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*. Sage Publications, 1992.

Bellanger, Pat, Lorelei Means, Vickki Howard, and Kris Melroe. “Interview: On the Edge of Extinction.” *Off Our Backs*, May 1979.

Bennett, Joshua. “We Who Can Die Tomorrow: Black Optimism & the Atomic Bomb.” *Syndicate* (blog), May 22, 2019. https://syndicate.network/symposia/literature/cultivation-and-catastrophe/.

Boyer, Paul. *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture At the Dawn of the Atomic Age*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Brant, Beth. *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1988.

Brown, Adrienne R. *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Brown, Kate. *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019.

Brown, Wilmette. *Black Women and the Peace Movement*. Bristol, England: Falling Wall Press, 1984.

Bruchac, Joseph. *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets*. University of Arizona Press, 1990.

Burris, Barbara. “Off Our Backs: Off Our Backs” 1, no. 1 (February 27, 1970): 2.

Caldicott, Helen. *Nuclear Madness: What You Can Do!* Brookline, Mass.: Autumn Press, 1978.

Cariou, Warren. “Aboriginal.” In *Fueling Culture: 101 Words for Energy and Environment*, edited by Imre Szeman and Patricia Yaeger, 17–20. Fordham University Press, 2017.

Churchill, Ward. *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002.

Clark, Tom. *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*. Santa Barbara: Cadmus Editions, 1980.

Clausen, Jan. “A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism, 1970-81 and Beyond (Part III).” *New Women’s Times*, March 1982.

Clifford, Catherine. “Bill Gates’ TerraPower Aims to Build Its First Advanced Nuclear Reactor in a Coal Town in Wyoming.” CNBC, November 17, 2021. https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/17/bill-gates-terrapower-builds-its-first-nuclear-reactor-in-a-coal-town.html.

Clymer, Adam. “Poll Shows Sharp Rise Since ’77 In Opposition to Nuclear Plants.” *New York Times (1923-Current File)*. 1979.

Coole, Diane, and Samantha Frost, eds. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Duke UP, 2010.

Crowe, Thomas Rain, and Marilou Awiakta. “Marilou Awiakta: Reweaving the Future.” *Appalachian Journal* 18, no. 1 (1990): 40–54.

Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Cornell UP, 1981.

Culler, Jonathan D. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Cornell Paperbacks. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Davis, Colin. “État Présent: Hauntology, Specters, and Phantoms.” *French Studies* 59, no. 3 (July 2005): 373–79. https://doi.org/doi:10.1093/fs/kni143.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Duke University Press, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478005582.

Derrida, Jacques. “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives).” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (1984): 20–31.

———. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*. Routledge, 1994.

Dery, Mark. “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose.” In *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, edited by Mark Dery. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993.

Dippie, Brian. *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*. Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1982.

Energy.gov. “DOE History.” Accessed June 16, 2022. https://www.energy.gov/lm/doe-history/historical-resources.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. “Atoms for Peace Speech.” Text, December 8, 1953. https://www.iaea.org/about/history/atoms-for-peace-speech.

Enszer, Julie R., ed. *Sister Love: The Letters of Audre Lorde and Pat Parker 1974-1989*. A Midsummer Night’s Press, 2018.

Folayan, Ayofemi. “The View from the Bridge.” *Sojourner: The Women’s Forum*, June 1993.

Ford, Mark. “I Gotta Use Words.” *London Review of Books*, August 11, 2016.

Getaz, Betsy. “Radiation.” *Women*, January 1977.

Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. Harvard University Press, 2001.

Ginsberg, Allen. *Concerned Citizens for Cerritos Benefit Reading, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque*, 1979. https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Ginsberg/Cerritos/Ginsberg_Creeley_Orlovsky_Sakaki_18_Plutonium-Ode_Concerned-Citizens-Of_Cerritos_U-New-Mexico_Albuquerque_3-6-79.mp3.

———. *Howl and Other Poems*. 40th anniversary commemorative ed.. Pocket Poets Series ; No. 4. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996.

———. *Kiva Room at the State University of New York at Buffalo*, 1978. https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Ginsberg/Ginsberg-Allen_Complete-Recording_Kiva-Room_SUNY-AB_10-5-78.mp3.

Ginsberg, Allen. "Nuts to Plutonium." *Whole Earth Catalog/The CoEvolution Quarterly*, Fall 1978.

Ginsberg, Allen. *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*. City Light Books, 1982.

Goldstein, Brian D. "'The Search for New Forms': Black Power and the Making of the Postmodern City." *Journal of American History*, September 2016, 375–400.

Gross, Lawrence W. "The Comic Vision of Anishinaabe Culture and Religion." *American Indian Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2002): 436–59. https://doi.org/10.1353/aiq.2003.0038.

Grundy, David. *A Black Arts Poetry Machine: Amiri Baraka & the Umbra Poets*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

Time Magazine. "Gun Thy Neighbor?," August 18, 1961.

Hanisch, Carol, Barbara Leon, and Catherine Charuk. "To Off Our Backs." *Meeting Ground*, June 1979.

Hass, Robert. *A Little Book on Form: An Exploration into the Formal Imagination of Poetry*. New York, NY: Ecco, 2017.

Heath, Dr Robert L., and Elizabeth L. Toth. *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations II*. Routledge, 2013.

Hogan, Linda. *Daughters, I Love You*. Denver, Colo.: Loretto Heights College, [Research Center on Women], 1981. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008325731.

Holladay, Hilary. *The Power of Adrienne Rich: A Biography*. Kindle. Nan A. Talese, 2020.

Hughes, Langston. *Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Later Simple Stories, Volume 8*. Edited by Donna A. Harper. University of Missouri Press, 2002.

———. "Simple And The Atom Bomb." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967); Chicago, Ill.* August 18, 1945, sec. Editorial Page.

———. "Simple Supposes What Would Happen If Our People Were Immune To Atom Bomb." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967); Chicago, Ill.* October 29, 1949.

———. "Week By Week: Simple Speculates On Peace." *The Chicago Defender (National Edition) (1921-1967); Chicago, Ill.* July 11, 1959.

Hume, Angela. "The Queer Restoration Poetics of Audre Lorde." In *The Cambridge Companion to American Literature and the Environment*, edited by Sarah Ensor and Susan Scott Parrish, 204–21. Cambridge Companions to Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108895118.016.

Hurley, Jessica. *Infrastructures of Apocalypse: American Literature and the Nuclear Complex*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Intondi, Vincent J. *African Americans Against the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Freedom Movement*. Stanford University Press, 2015.

Jaffe, Susan. "The Pro-Nuke Lobby Targets Women, Wooing Support with Coffee, Cake, and Crock Pots." *Ms.*, June 1980.

Jameson, Frederic. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. 1st ed. Cornell University Press, 1981. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1287f8w.

Jarvis, Anita A., John R. Brown, and Bella Tiefenbach. "Strontium-89 and Strontium-90 Levels in Breast Milk and in Mineral-Supplement Preparations." *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 88, no. 3 (January 19, 1963): 136–39.

“Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office - Posts.” Accessed July 18, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/JeffersonCountySheriff/photos/a.10151205433034899.546814.18943944898/10155181383144899/?type=1&theater.

Johnson, Sandie, and Loraine Hutchins. “Black Hills Gathering: The Ties That Unite and Divide Us.” *Off Our Backs*, October 31, 1980.

Jones, LeRoi. “What the Arts Need Now.” *Floating Bear*, no. 27 (1969): 143.

Jordan, June. *Civil Wars*. New York: Beacon Press, 1981.

———. *Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan*. Edited by Jan Heller Levi and Sara Miles. Copper Canyon Press, 2005.

———. *His Own Where*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971.

———. “Letter to R. Buckminster Fuller (1964).” In *Civil Wars*, 23–28. New York: Beacon Press, 1981.

———. *Living Room: New Poems*. New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press : Distributed by Persea Books, 1985.

———. *On Call: Political Essays*. South End Press, 1985.

Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting ’til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*. New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2006.

Karaim, Reed. “Nearly A Nuclear Disaster-- Wind Shifted Fire On B-52 Away From Bomb, Experts Say.” *The Seattle Times*. August 13, 1991. https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/?date=19910813&slug=1299674.

Kaye/Kantrowitz, Melanie. “Notes from the Editor: A Letter to Elena.” *Sinister Wisdom*, Summer 1991.

King, Ynestra, and Rena Grasso Patterson. "Women's Pentagon Action Answers Criticism." *WomaNews*, November 1981.

Klein, Richard. "The Future of Nuclear Criticism." *Yale French Studies*, no. 77 (1990): 76–100. https://doi.org/10.2307/2930148.

Koen, Susan, and Nina Swaim. *Ain't No Where We Can Run: A Handbook for Women on the Nuclear Mentality*. Vermont: Self-published, 1980.

Kolbert, Elizabeth. *The Sixth Extinction*. Picador, 2015.

Kornbluh, Anna. *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*. University Of Chicago Press, 2019.

Krupar, Shiloh R. *Hot Spotter's Report: Military Fables of Toxic Waste*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

La Duke, Winona. "Anaconda: The Industrial Snake." *Akwesasne Notes* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 25.

———. "Conference at Mount Taylor." *Akwesasne Notes* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 22.

———. "Native Nations and the Nuclear Fuel Cycle." *Akwesasne Notes* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 4–8.

———. "'They Always Come Back.'" In *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*, edited by Beth Brant, 62–67. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1988.

Lee, Tanya H. "H-Bomb Guinea Pigs! Natives Suffering Decades After New Mexico Tests." *Indian Country Today*, September 13, 2018. https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/h-bomb-guinea-pigs-natives-suffering-decades-after-new-mexico-tests.

Leighton, Angela. *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word*. Oxford UP, 2007.

Leonard, Keith D. "'Which Me Will Survive': Rethinking Identity, Reclaiming Audre Lorde." *Callaloo* 35, no. 3 (2012): 758–77.

Locke, Alain. "Harlem." *Survey Graphic*, March 1925.

Lorde, Audre. "'Learning from the 60s' (1982)." *BlackPast* (blog). Accessed May 1, 2020. https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1982-audre-lorde-learning-60s/.

———. "New York Head Shop and Museum (1974)." In *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*, Apple Books. W.W. Norton & Co., 2000.

———. *The Black Unicorn*. New York: Norton, 1978.

———. *The Cancer Journals*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute books, 1997.

———. "The Erotic as Power." *Chrysalis*, Fall 1979.

———. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." *Sinister Wisdom*, Spring 1978.

Masco, Joseph. *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*. Princeton UP, 2006.

Maurer, Anaïs, and Rebecca H. Hogue. "Introduction: Transnational Nuclear Imperialisms." *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020). https://doi.org/10.5070/T8112050495.

Mayo, Anna. "Allen Ginsberg and the Mother of Us All." *The Village Voice*, January 29, 1979.

McCracken, Samuel. *The War against the Atom*. New York: Basic Books, 1982.

McEnaney, Laura. *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*. Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Merrill, Thomas F. *Allen Ginsberg*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.

Meyer, June. “Instant Slum Clearance.” *Esquire*, April 1965.

Meyette, Terri. “Celebration 1982.” In *A Gathering of Spirit: A Collection by North American Indian Women*, edited by Beth Brant, 60–61. Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1988.

Miller, Mark, and Judith Miller. “The Politics of Energy vs. The American Indian.” *Akwesasne Notes* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 20–22.

Milne, Drew. “Poetry After Hiroshima?: Notes on Nuclear Implicature.” *Angelaki* 22, no. 3 (2017): 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2017.1387372.

Montgomery, Paul L., and Francis X. Clines. “Thousands Riot in Harlem Area; Scores Are Hurt: Negroes Loot Stores, Taunt Whites-- Police Shoot in Air to Control Crowd.” *New York Times*. July 19, 1964.

Moore, Jason. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. Verso Books, 2015.

Morgan, Bill. *The Typewriter Is Holy*. Free Press, 2010.

Moten, Fred. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

“Mothers Battle Nukes.” *New Women’s Times* 5, no. 11 (May 25, 1979): 9.

Musser, Amber Jamilla, and Lana Lin. “Audre Lorde Revisited.” *ASAP/Journal* 6, no. 1 (2021): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2021.0000.

Nagai, Mariko. *Irradiated Cities*. Les Figures Press, 2017.

“Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement.” *Big Mama Rag* 10, no. 7 (July 1982): 8, 17.

Nelkin, Dorothy. “Nuclear Power as a Feminist Issue.” *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 23, no. 1 (February 1981): 14–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/00139157.1981.9940928.

Nelson, Lin. "Offenses of Civil Defense: The Militarization of Life and the Exploitation of Women." *New Women's Times*, November 1982.

———. "Promise Her Everything: The Nuclear Power Industry's Agenda for Women." *Feminist Studies* 10, no. 2 (1984): 291–314. https://doi.org/10.2307/3177868.

Nichols, Ashton. "Ecomorphism and Ecoromanticism." *Romantic Circles* (blog), August 15, 2008. https://romantic-circles.org/blog_rc/ecomorphism-and-ecoromanticism.

"Nuclear Power: A Feminist Issue." *The Spokeswoman* 9, no. 12 (June 1979): 5.

"Nuclear Power Is a Feminist Issue." *Off Our Backs* 9, no. 5 (May 1979): 5.

"Nuclear War: Uranium Mining and Nuclear Tests on Indigenous Lands." *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, September 1993. http://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/nuclear-war-uranium-mining-and-nuclear-tests-indigenous.

Omolade, Barbara. "Women of Color and the Nuclear Holocaust." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1984): 12–12.

Pareles, Jon. "Cabaret: 'Primitive World,' A Jazz Musical." Accessed April 15, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/1984/01/20/arts/cabaret-primitive-world-a-jazz-musical.html.

Paton, Fiona. "The Beat Movement." In *American Literature in Transition, 1950–1960*, edited by Steven Belletto, 223–37. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Up and Coming. "Peace Is a Feminist Issue," August 1985.

Popova, Maria. "What Power Really Means: Cheryl Strayed Reads Adrienne Rich's Homage to Marie Curie." *Brain Pickings* (blog), April 24, 2015. https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/04/24/cheryl-strayed-adrienne-rich-power/.

Pound, Ezra. "Date Line." In *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited by T.S. Eliot, 74–87. New Directions, 1968.

“Radiation: ‘Dangerous to Pine Ridge Women,’ W.A.R.N. Study Says.” *Akwesasne Notes* 12, no. 1 (Early Spring 1980): 22–23.

Rankine, Claudia, and Michael Dowdy, eds. *American Poets in the 21st Century: Poetics of Social Engagement*. Wesleyan UP, 2018.

Raskin, Jonah. *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg’s Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Reagan, Ronald. “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security.” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library - National Archives and Records Administration, March 23, 1983. https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/32383d.

Rennie, Susan, and Kirsten Grimstad. *The New Woman’s Survival Sourcebook*. New York: Knopf, 1975. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102067431.

Rich, Adrienne. “Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women (1976).” In *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*, Apple Books. W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.

———. *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972*. W.W. Norton & Co., 1973.

———. “In Support of Mary Daly.” *New Women’s Times*, May 27, 1979.

———. “Notes for a Magazine: What Does Separatism Mean?” *Sinister Wisdom*, 1981.

———. “Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman (1977).” In *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*, Apple Books. W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.

———. *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977*. W.W. Norton & Co., 1993.

———. “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action.” *Sinister Wisdom*, Spring 1978.

———. *Trying to Talk of the Man and American Nationalism*. Mp3. Kelly Writers House Fellows Program, 2005. Penn Sound. https://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Rich.php.

Ronda, Margaret, and Lindsay Turner. “Introduction: Poetry’s Social Forms.” *Post45* (blog), April 22, 2019. https://post45.org/2019/04/introduction-poetrys-social-forms/.

Rose, Wendy. *Halfbreed Chronicles and Other Poems*. Los Angeles: West End Press, 1985.

Roy, Arundhati. *The End of Imagination*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016.

Rupp, Leila. “Women, Power, and History.” *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, 1974.

Ruthven, K. K. *Nuclear Criticism*. Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1989.

Sanders, Ed, ed. *Nuke Chronicles.* New York: Contact II Publications, 1980.

Schell, Jonathan. *The Fate of the Earth*. New York: Knopf, 1982.

Schumacher, Michael. *Dharma Lion: A Critical Biography of Allen Ginsberg*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992.

Schwab, Gabriele. *Radioactive Ghosts*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Sharp, Patrick B. *Savage Perils: Racial Frontiers and Nuclear Apocalypse in American Culture*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007.

Sharp, Sarah Rose. “Artist’s Billboard Declaring ‘There Are Black People in the Future’ Taken Down by Landlord.” Hyperallergic, April 9, 2018. https://hyperallergic.com/436763/alisha-wormsley-the-last-billboard-pittsburgh-there-are-black-people-in-the-future/.

Smith, Barbara. “‘Fractious, Kicking, Messy, Free’:* Feminist Writers Confront the Nuclear Abyss.” *New England Review and Bread Loaf Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1983): 581–92.

Spaide, Christopher. "'A Delicate, Vibrating Range of Difference': Adrienne Rich and the Postwar Lyric 'We.'" *College Literature* 47, no. 1 (January 14, 2020): 89–124. https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2020.0003.

Spillers, Hortense J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (July 1, 1987): 65–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/464747.

Stansell, Christine. "Diving into the Wreck." *Off Our Backs*, February 1974.

Starbecker, Gene. *The Atom and Eve*. Green Mountain Post Films, 1966. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fs_P7ggt03E.

Sun Ra. *Space Is the Place*, 1974. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuGAxii7xac.

Szeman, Imre, and Dominic Boyer. *Energy Humanities: An Anthology*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.

Tate, Claudia. *Black Women Writers at Work*. New York: Continuum, 1983.

The Allen Ginsberg Project. "The Allen Ginsberg Project: 1979 Allen Ginsberg Reading in Toronto (Plutonian Ode & Other Poems)," February 21, 2015. http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.com/2015/02/1979-allen-ginsberg-reading-in-toronto.html.

"The Black Hills Alliance." *Akwesasne Notes* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 24.

The Combahee River Collective. "The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)." *BlackPast* (blog). Accessed March 1, 2021. https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/.

Tilseu, Mark, and Jose Barreiro. "Native Americans Fight for Sacred Land." *El Diario de La Gente*, April 16, 1979.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor.” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (September 8, 2012). http://www.decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/download/18630.

“Uranium in the Black Hills.” *Akwesasne Notes* 11, no. 1 (Late Winter 1979): 13–14.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4, no. 3 (1998): 469–88. https://doi.org/10.2307/3034157.

Voyles, Traci Brynne. *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Waldman, Anne. “Rocky Flats: Warring God Charnel Ground.” In *Disembodied Poetics: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School*, edited by Andrew Schelling and Anne Waldman, 482–90. University of New Mexico Press, 1994.

Waldman, Anne, and Andrew Schelling, eds. *Disembodied Poetics: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School*. University of New Mexico Press, 1994.

Walker, Alice. “Nuclear Madness: What You Can Do.” In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, 343–436. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

———. “Only Justice Can Stop a Curse.” In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

———. “The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?” In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, 119–29. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Wang, Dorothy. “The Future of Poetry Studies.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-First Century American Poetry*, edited by Timothy Yu, 220–33. Cambridge UP, 2021.

Yipster Times. “Why Wait for the 70's to End?,” October 1978.

Whyte, Kyle. “Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene.” *English Language Notes* 55, no. 1–2 (Fall 2017): 153–62.

———. “Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises.” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, no. 1–2 (2018): 224–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618777621.

———. “Settler Colonialism, Ecology , and Environmental Injustice” 9 (2018): 125–44. https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090109.

Wildcat, Daniel. *Red Alert!: Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge*. Fulcrum Publishing, 2009. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucdavis/detail.action?docID=478922.

Williams, Paul. *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War: Representations of Nuclear Weapons and Post-Apocalyptic Worlds*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012.

Witt, Karende. “Women Gather To Hear Nuclear Power Promoted.” *New York Times*. 1979.

Wormsley, Alisha. “There Are Black People In the Future on the Last Billboard.” alisha b. wormsley. Accessed April 11, 2018. http://www.alishabwormsley.com/blog-1/2018/4/6/there-are-black-people-in-the-future-on-the-last-billboard.

Yu, Timothy. “Introduction.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-First Century American Poetry*, edited by Timothy Yu, 1–16. Cambridge UP, 2021.

Zaretsky, Natasha. *Radiation Nation: Three Mile Island and the Political Transformation of the 1970s*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.

Zipp, Samuel. *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

End Notes

Introduction Notes

1. Nagai, *Irradiated Cities*, 28.
2. Nagai, 28.
3. Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*.
4. Awiakta, “Amazons in Appalachia,” 127.
5. Ronda and Turner, “Introduction.”
6. Schwab, *Radioactive Ghosts*, xii.
7. Stephanie LeMenager’s 2013 *Living Oil* opens the flood gates on “petro” terminology: petrocultures, petro-masculinity, petro-melancholia, and so on.
8. Szeman and Boyer, *Energy Humanities*, 1.
9. Even at the institutional level, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is, in the DOE’s own words, “the lineal descendent of several predecessor agencies, including the Manhattan Project and the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)” (“DOE History”).
10. See Bill Gates’s 2021 book, *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster,* for his atomic-techno-optimism.
11. Eisenhower, “Atoms for Peace Speech.”
12. Zaretsky, *Radiation Nation*, 5.
13. Krupar, *Hot Spotter’s Report*, 88.
14. Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 10.
15. Beck, *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*, 37–38.
16. Beck, 38. Italics in original text.
17. DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, 171.
18. Maurer and Hogue, “Introduction,” 27.
19. Maurer and Hogue, 27.
20. See articles and critical and creative texts by Aimee Bahng, Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Steve Mentz, Craig Santos Perez, and Stacy Alaimo.
21. For example, Gabrielle Hecht’s 2020 monograph *Radioactive Ghosts* centers the distinctness of the nuclear: “The ontological insecurity generated by the invention of the Bomb and enforced by the proliferation of nuclear power plants establishes a qualitative leap in the formation of subjectivity” (xi).
22. Schwab, *Radioactive Ghosts*, xiii.
23. Ashton, “Periodizing Poetic Practice Since 1945.”
24. Yu, “Introduction,” 2.
25. Yu, 5.
26. Yu, 5.
27. Wang, “The Future of Poetry Studies,” 221.
28. Rankine and Dowdy, *American Poets in the 21st Century*, 5–6.
29. Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 142.
30. Altieri, *The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, 7–8.
31. Altieri, 3.
32. Clausen, “A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism, 1970-81 and Beyond (Part III),” 8.

33. See Steve Belletto and Daniel Grausam (2012), Daniel Cordle (2017), Daniel Grausam (2011), Andrew Hammond (2009), Adam Piette (2009), David Seed (2013), Paul Williams (2012) for explorations of the relationship between culture and nuclear power. While illustrative of certain archives and histories, these texts do not center poetry as a defining cultural object.
34. Schwab, *Radioactive Ghosts*, 5.
35. Eisenhower, "Atoms for Peace Speech."
36. Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," 23.
37. Caldicott, *Nuclear Madness*, 93.
38. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*.
39. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 250.
40. Culler, 250.
41. Kornbluh, *The Order of Forms: Realism, Formalism, and Social Space*, 4.
42. Hass, *A Little Book on Form*, 3.
43. Ronda and Turner, "Introduction."
44. Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word*.

Chapter One Notes

1. See Schumacher, *Dharma Lion*.
2. Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*.
3. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*.
4. Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*, 20.
5. McCracken, *The War against the Atom*.
6. Caldicott, *Nuclear Madness*, 72. Later, Caldicott conceived of the nuclear in terms of haunting "Clearly, nuclear warfare presents us with the specter of a disaster so terrible that many would simply prefer not to think about it," the unimaginability of which facilitates repression (83).
7. Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*, 9.
8. Krupar, *Hot Spotter's Report*, 88.
9. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*.
10. Milne, "Poetry After Hiroshima?," 90.
11. Milne, 89.
12. Milne, 98.
13. Raskin, *American Scream*, xxv.
14. In *Cold War Modernists,* Greg Barnhisel shows how modernism was repackaged and defanged for bourgeoise consumption after World War II. For example, in what Barnhisel calls the "Cultural Cold War," abstract expressionism became the perfectly apolitical aesthetic that both superseded the "coca-colonization" that characterized the new American Century and won European intellectuals over to the cause of freedom enshrined in democracy and, it follows, suppressed by communism. "Freedom of expression" becomes the rallying cry again McCarthy era censorship but also of pro-West propaganda in the early Cold War years. The strategic deployment of expression meant that many well-meaning artists and writers were unwittingly supporting an American cause they thought their work repulsed.
15. Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*.
16. Raskin, *American Scream*, xiv.
17. Raskin, 142.
18. "The Allen Ginsberg Project."

19. Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*.
20. Caldicott, *Nuclear Madness*, 93.
21. Krupar, *Hot Spotter's Report*, 8.
22. Zaretsky, *Radiation Nation*, 97.
23. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*, 11.
24. Milne, "Poetry After Hiroshima?," 94.
25. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*, 11.
26. Ginsberg, 11.
27. Ginsberg, 13.
28. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture At the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, 34.
29. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*, 12–14.
30. Davis, "État Présent: Hauntology, Specters, and Phantoms," 373.
31. See Peter Van Wyck's *Signs of Danger* (2004), which explores the difficulty of signifying danger to beings that might not speak our language tens of thousands of years into the future.
32. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*, 12.
33. Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)."
34. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, 153–54.
35. See: Alaimo and Hekman (2008); Barad (2007); Coole and Frost (2010); Bennett (2010) for representative accounts of this material turn.
36. Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, 7.
37. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 141.
38. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*, 16.
39. Ginsberg, 16.
40. Ginsberg, 16.
41. "Why Wait for the 70's to End?"
42. Mayo, "Allen Ginsberg and the Mother of Us All," 29.
43. Mayo, 30.
44. Ginsberg, *Kiva Room at the State University of New York at Buffalo*.
45. Ginsberg, *Cerritos Benefit*.
46. Ginsberg, *Kiva Room at the State University of New York at Buffalo*.
47. Zaretsky, *Radiation Nation*, 30.
48. Zaretsky, 16.
49. Zaretsky, 16.
50. Ginsberg, *Plutonian Ode and Other Poems: 1977-1980*, 18.
51. Sanders, *Nuke Chronicles.*
52. As Mark Ford writes in his exploration of Eliot's notes and allusions, the notes took on a life of their own, becoming "stuck" to *The Waste Land.* Eliot laments that the notes "'have had almost greater popularity than the poem itself – anyone who bought my book of poems, and found that the notes to The Waste Land were not in it, would demand his money back'" (Ford, "I Gotta Use Words").
53. Paton, "The Beat Movement," 225–26.
54. Pound, "Date Line," 86.
55. Ginsberg, *Kiva Room at the State University of New York at Buffalo*.
56. A simplified overview of the Poetry Wars: On one side was the avant-garde, constructivist movement associated with the language school of poetry, which saw decentering the subject and

exposing the vexed construction of language as its main political intervention. On the other side was the poetry of the new social movements (NSM), which was not a coherent school but rather a loose aggregation of poets writing against racism, homophobia, misogyny, patriarchy, and other tactics of oppression. For these poets, expression itself was a means of political intervention because historically their voices and subject-positions had been disregarded. Both "sides" saw poetry as politically committed but disagreed about the tactics and aesthetics behind this commitment.

57. The Merwin Affair is the stuff of writing workshop gossip. Poet and journalist Tom Clark dedicated an entire book—*The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*—to recording the details (alongside his dislike of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche). The book situates the clash between the aesthetics and persons of the "establishment" poet (i.e., National Book Award winner) W.S. Merwin and the formerly anti-establishment poet and now administrator Allen Ginsberg. The book's title is also a nod to the "Poetry Wars" unfolding at that time and in which, as I mentioned previously, the remaining Beats were not key actors. In short, in the Fall of 1975, poet W.S. Merwin, a practicing Buddhist, and his girlfriend Dana Naone, attended the "Vajra" seminary retreat at Naropa. This visit occurred after Merwin had taught at the Kerouac School's inaugural session that summer. The incident occurred the evening of the Halloween party at a lodge in Snowmass, Colorado. According to several eye-witness accounts, an intoxicated and naked Chogyam Trungpa demanded the Merwin and Naone, who had left the party early, come down from their room. When they refused, Trungpa's guards broke down the door, dragged them downstairs, where Trungpa demanded they take off their clothes and verbally assaulted them. When they refused, writes Clark, "he had them stripped in front of the gaping eyes of a shocked, but compliant room full of seminarians" (57). After being exposed, the rest of the room was instructed to strip, at which point, dancing purportedly ensued and Merwin and Dana were able to escape to their room. They stayed for the rest of the retreat, and the rumors regarding the incident slowly circulated, though nothing publicly came of it until nearly two years later.

58. Waldman and Schelling, *Disembodied Poetics: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School*, xii.

59. Morgan, *The Typewriter Is Holy*, 232.

60. As is clear from Raskin's title—*American Scream*—*Howl* was often described by both Ginsberg and his critics as a type of scream. Raskin writes: 'The poet and critic William Everson allowed that *Howl* was like a 'scream from a paddy wagon,' but he also noted that 'even a scream has structure'" (xxv).

61. Axelrod, "Review of Plutonian Ode."

62. Axelrod.

63. Merrill, *Allen Ginsberg*, 131.

64. Axelrod, "Review of Plutonian Ode."

65. Axelrod.

66. Raskin, *American Scream*, xv.

67. Qtd. in Raskin, 228.

68. Though Ginsberg's relationship with Trungpa, and Trungpa himself, is not without controversy, Raskin notes how, ironically when set against Ferlinghetti's comment, this was the very teacher who "encouraged him, as did Kerouac, to be more spontaneous and to trust his first thoughts" (228), thus encouraging him to be more like that self who wrote "Howl" and initiated the Beat generation.

69. "The Allen Ginsberg Project."

70. "Barbwires."

71. Raskin, *American Scream*, xiv.
72. Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*.
73. Clark, *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*, 65.
74. Waldman, "Rocky Flats: Warring God Charnel Ground," 482.
75. Ginsberg, Allen, "Nuts to Plutonium," 15.
76. Ginsberg, Allen, 16.
77. "Jefferson County Sheriff's Office - Posts."

Chapter Two Notes
1. Churchill, *Agents of Repression*, 132.
2. Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 23.
3. Miller and Miller, "The Politics of Energy vs. The American Indian."
4. Miller and Miller, 20.
5. La Duke, "Conference at Mount Taylor," 22.
6. Kyle Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice" 9 (2018): 136, https://doi.org/10.3167/ares.2018.090109.
7. Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 7.
8. Voyles, 10.
9. Whyte, "Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene," 153.
10. Wildcat, *Red Alert!*, 4.
11. Awiakta, "Amazons in Appalachia," 127.
12. Churchill, *Agents of Repression*, 129.
13. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 7.
14. Beck writes that "The production of modernization risks follows the boomerang curve. Intensive industrial agriculture, subsidized with billions, does not just cause the lead content in mothers' milk and children to rise dramatically in distant cities. It also frequently undermines the natural basis of agricultural production *itself*: the fertility of the soil declines, vitally important animals and plants disappear, and the danger of soil erosion grows." Beck, *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*, 38.
15. Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 216.
16. Meyette, "Celebration 1982," 60.
17. Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*, 36.
18. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy*, 14–15.
19. In the 1970's, the OPEC oil crisis compounded fears of "energy shortages" and heightened the desire to depend on domestic sources of energy. Under the Carter administration, his energy policy proposed 200 nuclear reactors which, as one Akwesasne article argues, would "have made uranium a new cornerstone America's energy plan" ("Uranium in the Black Hills," 13).
20. Whyte, "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises," 227.
21. Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 10.
22. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, 63.
23. La Duke, "Native Nations and the Nuclear Fuel Cycle," 4.
24. La Duke, "'They Always Come Back,'" 66.
25. La Duke, 64.
26. Bellanger et al., "Interview: On the Edge of Extinction," 8.

27. “Radiation: ‘Dangerous to Pine Ridge Women,’ W.A.R.N. Study Says,” 23.
28. “Radiation: ‘Dangerous to Pine Ridge Women,’ W.A.R.N. Study Says,” 23.
29. Awiakta, “Amazons in Appalachia,” 125.
30. Awiakta, 125.
31. Awiakta, 126.
32. Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*, 1986, 95.
33. Cariou, “Aboriginal,” 18.
34. Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*, 1986, 13.
35. Crowe and Awiakta, “Marilou Awiakta,” 50.
36. Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*, 1986, 15.
37. Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*, 2006, v.
38. Awiakta, v.
39. Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*, 1986, 21.
40. Awiakta, 47.
41. Awiakta, 83.
42. Awiakta, 47.
43. Awiakta, 47.
44. Awiakta, 47.
45. Awiakta, 47.
46. Awiakta, 48.
47. Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” 23.
48. Awiakta, *Abiding Appalachia: Where Mountain and Atom Meet*, 1986, 49.
49. Awiakta, 48.
50. Awiakta, 49.
51. Awiakta, 49.
52. Awiakta, 51.
53. Awiakta, 53.
54. Awiakta, 53.
55. Awiakta, 53.
56. Awiakta, 67.
57. Awiakta, 67.
58. Awiakta, 47.
59. Awiakta, 79.
60. Awiakta, 89.
61. Awiakta, 89.
62. Awiakta, 89.
63. Awiakta, 91.
64. Brant, *A Gathering of Spirit*, 236.
65. Meyette, “Celebration 1982,” 60.
66. Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 215.
67. Meyette, “Celebration 1982,” 60.
68. Meyette, 60.
69. Meyette, 60–61.
70. Meyette, 61.

71. The Western Shoshone have had 814 nuclear detonations on their land since 1951. Reports confirm that "substantial radioactive fallout has contributed to a high concentration of cancer and leukemia on the reservation" ("Nuclear War: Uranium Mining and Nuclear Tests on Indigenous Lands.)"
72. Meyette, "Celebration 1982," 61.
73. Zaretsky, *Radiation Nation*, 97.
74. Rose, *Halfbreed Chronicles and Other Poems*, 63.
75. Rose, 63.
76. Rose, 63.
77. Bruchac, *Survival This Way*, 258.
78. Rose, *Halfbreed Chronicles and Other Poems*, 63.
79. Lee, "H-Bomb Guinea Pigs! Natives Suffering Decades After New Mexico Tests."
80. Rose, *Halfbreed Chronicles and Other Poems*, 63.
81. Rose, 63.
82. Rose, 63.
83. Rose, 63.
84. Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*, 82–83.
85. Rose, *Halfbreed Chronicles and Other Poems*, 63.
86. Rose, 63.
87. Rose, 63.
88. Rose, 63.
89. Churchill, *Agents of Repression*, 106.
90. "The Black Hills Alliance."
91. Tilseu and Barreiro, "Native Americans Fight for Sacred Land."
92. Johnson and Hutchins, "Black Hills Gathering."
93. In 1972, President Richard Nixon declared the region to a "National Sacrifice Area for the mining and production of uranium and nuclear energy," as cited in the 2007 Senate Hearing 110-272, "Hard-Rock Mining on Federal Lands."
94. Johnson and Hutchins, "Black Hills Gathering."
95. La Duke, "Native Nations and the Nuclear Fuel Cycle," 5.
96. Hogan, *Daughters, I Love You*, 2–3.
97. Hogan, 6.
98. Hogan, 7.
99. Hogan, 7.
100. Hogan, 7.
101. Hogan, 7.
102. Hogan, 7.
103. Hogan, 8.
104. Hogan, 8.
105. Hogan, 8.
106. Hogan, 8.
107. Hogan, 12.
108. Hogan, 12.
109. Hogan, 12.
110. Hogan, 12.

111. Hogan, 16.
112. Hogan, 16.
113. Hogan, 16.
114. Hogan, 16.
115. Hogan, 16.
116. Hogan, 16.
117. Hogan, 17.
118. Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism."
119. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, 5,7.
120. Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, 7.
121. Hogan, *Daughters, I Love You*, 17.
122. Hogan, 17.
123. Hogan, 17.
124. Hogan, 17.
125. Hogan, 17.
126. Beck, *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*, 38. Emphasis original.
127. Hogan, *Daughters, I Love You*, 3.
128. For example, a recent "Energy Justice Workbook" cites "energy justice" as a movement that emerges in the 2010's out of climate justice movements, which they argue arise out of the 1970's and 80's environmental movements (13). However, in reading Indigenous histories, we see that energy justice precedes and undergird both of these movements.

Chapter Three Notes
1. Rich, "In Support of Mary Daly," 8.
2. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement."
3. Nelkin, "Nuclear Power as a Feminist Issue," 21, 38.
4. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," 8.
5. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," 8.
6. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," 8.
7. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," 8.
8. Popular texts such as *The New Woman's Survival Catalog* (1973), and *The New Woman's Survival Sourcebook* (1975) centered the figure of the survival in the women's liberation movement. The former contained "self-help resources that women in every walk of life were organizing to gain control over our lives" while the latter sought to "establish the women's movement as an irreversible social phenomenon" that documented the "ideas of feminism" (Susan Rennie and Kirsten Grimstad, 12). In an interview with Robin Morgan and Adrienne Rich on women's poetry, Rich describes how the feminist archive—the collective expression of women's lives—has reached a critical mass of survival. She writes: "If the planet is not obliterated, it will be impossible this time to sweep our movement under the rug" (128).
9. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," 8.
10. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," 8.
11. As one nuclear engineer explained in a room full of women during a campaign to increase female support of nuclear power: "Women have to be just as knowledgeable as men. That's why I'm here. You're the majority of the population but you have less than fifty percent of the

knowledge." Jaffe, "The Pro-Nuke Lobby Targets Women, Wooing Support with Coffee, Cake, and Crock Pots," 30.
12. Lorde, "The Erotic as Power," 29.
13. Lorde, 29.
14. Lorde, 29.
15. Rich, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," 18.
16. Rich, 21.
17. Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," 12.
18. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" was a title of the 1977 Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention panel for the Lesbians and Literature Caucus, featuring Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Mary Daly, and Judith McDaniel.
19. Lorde's often repeated paradox appears first as the title of her 1979 speech "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." Rich's phrase appears in this form in her poem "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," which first appears in her 1971 collection *Will to Change,* but resonates as a theme throughout her prose and poetry from the 1970's on as she grapples with how to refashion her elite, male-centered education and relationship to poetry as a form.
20. Eisenhower, "Atoms for Peace Speech."
21. In California alone, all but one nuclear reactor is still running (Diablo Canyon, which is slated for closure in 2025), while the rest remain monuments to the failed nuclear renaissance and the toxic investments of utility companies like Edison International, Sacramento Municipal Utility, and Pacific Gas and Electric. Their assets are "toxic" in more ways than one as the spent nuclear fuel is still stored on site, as there is no long-term storage facility for high-level nuclear waste in the U.S.
22. Starbecker, *The Atom and Eve*.
23. Getaz, "Radiation," 17.
24. Getaz, 17.
25. Quoted in Heath and Toth, *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations II*, 222.
26. In 1980, Congress passed a joint resolution declaring March 21st a "National Energy Education Day"; the anniversary of Three-Mile Island is March 28th. The resolution cites how "inexpensive and abundant energy permitted our great Nation to rise to a position of pre-eminence in the world community of nations" and that "recent events" have called to the fore the importance of energy security and independence.
27. Clymer, Adam, "Poll Shows Sharp Rise Since '77 In Opposition to Nuclear Plants," A16.
28. Jaffe, "The Pro-Nuke Lobby Targets Women, Wooing Support with Coffee, Cake, and Crock Pots," 28.
29. Jaffe, 28.
30. Quoted in Jaffe, 28.
31. Witt, "Women Gather To Hear Nuclear Power Promoted."
32. Nelson, "Promise Her Everything," 295.
33. Nelkin, "Nuclear Power as a Feminist Issue," 38.
34. "Mothers Battle Nukes."
35. "Peace Is a Feminist Issue."
36. Koen and Swaim, *Ain't No Where We Can Run: A Handbook for Women on the Nuclear Mentality*, n.p.
37. Burris, "Off Our Backs."

38. "Nuclear Power Is a Feminist Issue."
39. Hanisch, Leon, and Charuk, "To Off Our Backs."
40. Hanisch, Leon, and Charuk.
41. Hanisch, Leon, and Charuk.
42. King and Grasso Patterson, "Women's Pentagon Action Answers Criticism."
43. Zaretsky, *Radiation Nation*, 97.
44. Jaffe, "The Pro-Nuke Lobby Targets Women, Wooing Support with Coffee, Cake, and Crock Pots," 30.
45. Nelson explains how power companies linked the economic downturn of the 1970's and the beginning of deindustrialization in America with the need for nuclear energy. She writes: "In a period economic crisis, nuclear propaganda announces that increasing nuclear energy will pull blacks and women out of economic subjugation…that were it not for nuclear power, their lives would be miserable (or more miserable)" (295). In order to maintain their meager political power, women and African Americans needed nuclear power. Nelson continues, "Not surprisingly, the industry is directing its message to liberal feminism" as "Liberal feminists' desire to participate fully and assertively in a reformed liberal capitalism" is being capitalized upon by companies that present nuclear energy as the key to freedom and the reversal of gender discrimination via economic prosperity (299).
46. Lorde, "'Learning from the 60's' (1982)."
47. Ronda and Turner, "Introduction."
48. Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action," 12.
49. Lorde, 13.
50. Hume, "The Queer Restoration Poetics of Audre Lorde," 204.
51. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," 8.
52. Lorde, "New York Head Shop and Museum (1974)."
53. Lorde.
54. Leonard, "Which Me Will Survive," 759.
55. Lorde, *The Black Unicorn*, 31.
56. Lorde, 31.
57. Jarvis, Brown, and Tiefenbach, "Strontium-89 and Strontium-90 Levels in Breast Milk and in Mineral-Supplement Preparations," 136.
58. Lorde, *The Black Unicorn*, 31.
59. Lorde, 32.
60. Nelson, "Offenses of Civil Defense: The Militarization of Life and the Exploitation of Women," 1.
61. "Necessary Bread Disarmament Statement," 8.
62. In *Spokeswoman's* "Health" section in a 1979 issue, they frame nuclear power as a feminist issue and cite reports from the National Academy of Sciences that say "cancer risk for women from exposure to radiation may be twice as high as it is for men" ("Nuclear Power: A Feminist Issue," 5).
63. Musser and Lin, "Audre Lorde Revisited," 9.
64. Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, 20.
65. Lorde, 20.
66. As the Combahee River Collective writes, one of their main issues is the racism present in the "white women's movement." They explain: "As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their

racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue." ("The Combahee River Collective Statement (1977)").
67. Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, 21.
68. Lorde, 32.
69. Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, 86.
70. Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, 20.
71. Zaretsky, *Radiation Nation*, 86.
72. Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, 61.
73. Lorde, 77.
74. Lorde, 77.
75. Musser and Lin, "Audre Lorde Revisited," 5.
76. Smith, "``Fractious, Kicking, Messy, Free''," 583.
77. In her 1983 article, Barbara Smith's links Lorde's refrain to the accretion of oppressive structures that threaten women, especially black women. She acknowledges that "Nuclear annihilation is not the sole threat we face, but one of a hundred possible bloody ends," yet nonetheless calls attention to how this threat amplifies and reconfigures the others. She argues that this layered oppression affects their writing, especially as women are finding new methods for including "political questions in an integrated and concrete fashion. For us, the realities of oppression are not intellectual or theoretical pursuits but are woven into the very fabric of our existence and our art." ("Fractious, Kicking, Messy, Free''," 583).
78. This was a controversial choice at the time, and Parker is worried about Lorde's judgement, who spoke of her choice to not have radiation and chemotherapy after her mastectomy in *The Cancer Journals,* due to her view that these treatments were themselves carcinogenic.
79. Enszer, *Sister Love: The Letters of Audre Lorde and Pat Parker 1974-1989*, 78, 81–82.
80. Beck, *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*.
81. Enszer, *Sister Love: The Letters of Audre Lorde and Pat Parker 1974-1989*, 90.
82. In 1958, a group of scientists started the Baby Tooth Collection Project in order to measure the levels of Strontium-90 in children, who were considered especially susceptible to this particular form of radiation, raising alarm bells about the impact of war games on future generations. Repositioning fears of Strontium-90 in terms of fertility and the perpetuation of the human species as whole, Dr. Ernest J. Sternglass's article warns of the newly discovered effects of strontium 90 on fertility. He argues that "Nuclear war…is no longer "thinkable'" because their "by-products" are in fact "the most powerful biological poison weapons that man has yet invented" (Sternglass).
83. Lorde's refrain continues to circulate to this day as different groups of women adapted this framework to prove their collective power: that they have, in fact, survived, despite the accumulating conditions of violence stacked against them. For example, In 1987, reflecting upon the continued survival of the lesbian feminist magazine *Sinister Wisdom,* which was founded in 1976 (and briefly edited by Adrienne Rich and her partner Michelle Cliff), outgoing editor Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz writes: "in the words of Audre Lorde, we were never meant to survive, none of us, not us, not our children, not our magazines." ("Notes from the Editor: A Letter to Elena," *Sinister Wisdom*). Lorde's line became mantra that echoed across queer and Black feminist pamphlets, sustaining the shared struggle for their lives, their work, and their future. In another instance, the opening lines of a 1993 speech by Ayofemi Folayan at the Black Gay and

Lesbian Leadership Conference quotes "Litany for Survival" and connects the transatlantic slave trade to the AIDS epidemic and ongoing police violence: "Survival…is not guaranteed…the generations of our African ancestors whose bodies line the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, the men and women and children killed by the pandemic of AIDS in a season of governmental neglect, the women and children of our communities who are afraid to be on the streets that flow with the blood of violence."("The View from the Bridge," *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*). Even today, Lorde's line serves as a call-to-action that is repeated in protest fliers and chants, demonstrating its power to survive as inseparable from the collective that gives it shape.
84. Brown, *Black Women and the Peace Movement*, 29.
85. "Women, Power, and History," 4.
86. Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977*, 3.
87. Holladay, *The Power of Adrienne Rich: A Biography*.
88. Clausen, "A Movement of Poets: Thoughts on Poetry and Feminism, 1970-81 and Beyond (Part III)," 10.
89. Clausen, 11.
90. Rich, "Notes for a Magazine: What Does Separatism Mean?," 88.
91. Rich, "In Support of Mary Daly," 8.
92. Qtd. in Stansell, "Diving into the Wreck," 15.
93. Rich, *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972*.
94. This and many of the poems in *Diving,* as Hilary Holladay argues in her 2020 biography of Rich, reflect "the raw pain of her life as a heterosexual woman who tries and failed to connect with men" (Holladay).
95. Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*, 43.
96. Rich, *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972*, 3.
97. Spaide, "A Delicate, Vibrating Range of Difference," 95.
98. Beck, *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*, 60.
99. Hurley, *Infrastructures of Apocalypse*, 9.
100. Rich, *Trying to Talk of the Man and American Nationalism*.
101. Rich, *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972*, 3.
102. Rich, 3.
103. Rich, 3.
104. Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 17.
105. Rich, *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972*, 3.
106. Rich, 4.
107. Nichols, "Ecomorphism."
108. Rich, *Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972*, 3.
109. As in Leila Rupp's "Women, History, and Power" (1974).
110. In a recent interview, Cheryl Strayed, the contemporary author who inspired thousands of women to literally venture into the wilderness to find themselves, cites Rich's poem as foundational to her aesthetics and ideology as a writer. Strayed comments:

> Adrienne Rich … did not die a woman who denied that her wounds came from the same source as her power. In fact, she spent her life making power from those wounds [but] Marie Curie… didn't have that luxury — she *had* to deny that in order to be who she was in her time. But we don't. And I think so much of the work I've done … and the work I hope I continue to do, is about writing into those wounds (Popova).

What Strayed's interpretation of Rich here perpetuates is a myth—the very ideological structure of which Rich was deeply critical.
111. Rich, "Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women (1976)."
112. Rich.
113. Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977*, 3.
114. Rich, 3.
115. Rich, 3.
116. Rich, "Power and Danger: Works of a Common Woman (1977)."

Chapter Four Notes
1. Jordan, *Living Room*.
2. Jordan, *On Call: Political Essays*, 63.
3. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour*, 5.
4. Joseph, 40–41.
5. Amiri Baraka, whose political commitments varied significantly throughout his life, offers a productive insight into what happens to Black radicalism in the 80's, the decade in which most scholarship marks as the end of Black Power (see Joseph's *The Black Power Movement*). Baraka began his career as a poet affiliated with the primarily white poetry scene of the 1950's lower east side in New York, often categorized as part of the Beat movement, before distancing himself from that geography and poetics to usher in the Black Arts movement in Harlem, which heralded another Black renaissance in the 1960's. In the 1970's, he changed his name from Leroi Jones to Amiri Baraka and committed himself to Black cultural nationalism. During this time, he helped lead Pan-African organizations such as the Congress of African People (CAP), before spearheading its transition into a Marxist-Leninist organization in 1974 (Baraka, *S.O.S,* xxiii). He considered there to be a continuity between his nationalist and socialist politics in terms of how it affected his poetics. He writes: "They were similar in the sense I see art as a weapon of revolution. It's just that I define revolution in Marxist terms." (qtd. in *SOS,* xxiii). While he developed a perspective in line with what we might call racial capitalism today, his popularity as a writer suffered from this shift from race-based separatism to class-based solidarity. Baraka reflects: "'When I was saying "white people go to hell," I never had trouble finding a publisher. But when I was saying "Black and white, unite and fight, destroy capitalism," then you suddenly get to be unreasonable.'" (qtd. in *SOS* xxiiii-xxiv). In short, the market made room for his extreme perspective because that radicalism could see be profitable as exemplary as an identifiable mode of Black power. However, his move to consider race in the context of capitalism made his poetics and politics less legible to literary critics and popular media. In the 1980's, his politics becomes sharpened by the onslaught of conservatism known as the Reagan-era, to which he attributed the dispersion of radicalism: "after the high-water marks of mass insurgency against this exploitative and oppressive white racist monopoly capitalist society, the cooling out of that mass movement…has meant there has been a cooling out, decline, retreat in many other areas, such as the arts and critical writing' (Baraka, "Jazz Writing," 253). Baraka's evocation of the ongoing struggle—both in terms of class and race—against exploitation, reflects his skepticism of the lasting gains of the Civil Rights movement and the logic that more representation or inclusion would result in real change.
6. Dery, "Black to the Future," 180.
7. Sinker qtd. in Williams, 148. A similar theory is advanced by scholars in indigenous studies to account for how Native Americans have seen "the end of their world," and thus experience what

Larry Gross calls "Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome" in "The Comic Vision of Anishinaabe Culture and Religion" (2002).
8. Afrofuturism entered popular discourse with the blockbuster film *Black Panther* (2018) and has also been making its way into artistic and literary discourse, further shaping and expanding its application. For example, in 2018, artist Alisha Wormsley's contribution to the Last Billboard project in Pittsburgh was prematurely removed due complaints from residents in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood of East Liberty (Sharp). The text on the billboard read: "THERE ARE BLACK PEOPLE IN THE FUTURE." After its removal, Wormsley explained how "Afrofuturism dares to suggest that not only will black people exist in the future, but that we will be makers and shapers of it, too" (Wormsley). She also links the apocalypse of diaspora to ongoing racialized gentrification and segregation occurring across the U.S.: "The work has become an archive of information, histories and myths that continue the diaspora's apocalyptic narrative."
9. Chapter One of *Nuclear Madness* is titled "Our Own Worst Enemy." Caldicott cites "Homo sapiens" as having to contend with the "evolutionary turning point" signaled by the atomic age. She also classifies social and anti-war movements as distractions from what she views as the more pressing aim of the nuclear threat: "during the 1960's the American public became pre-occupied with other matters: political assassination, the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam war. The threat of nuclear holocaust was submerged by these more immediate problems" (16). However, as I demonstrate, the Civil Rights Movement in particular was not positioned as separate from the nuclear threat, but was often theorized in light of it. While Caldicott's anti-nuclear tract might seem, on the surface, to have the "correct" activist politics, it narrowly represents the stakes of the nuclear threat due to is insistence on the global and universal effects of nuclear war without acknowledging the uneven effects and contributions of the nuclear apocalypse.
10. Walker, "Nuclear Madness," 345.
11. Walker, 345.
12. Due to the fact that the racial segregation of city neighborhoods results in segregation in schools, busing historically has been a common tactic for racial integration. "Forced busing" as it was often called, saw vigorous opposition throughout the Civil Rights movement as well as after. While the 1970's saw some of the most heated anti-busing demonstrations, an anti-busing amendment made it to Congress in 1982, supported by the Reagan administration. Though it did not pass, it brought to the surface how racial inequality was built into the very infrastructure of communities.
13. Walker, "Nuclear Madness," 346.
14. Roy, *The End of Imagination*, 49–50.
15. Joseph Masco, *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico* (Princeton UP, 2006). Masco calls the bomb America's "national fetish because it takes a nation-state to build and maintain it, and because the international hierarchy of nation-states is mediated through possession of the bomb" (22).
16. Omolade, "Women of Color and the Nuclear Holocaust," 12.
17. Hughes, *Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, 50–52.
18. Jordan, *Living Room*.
19. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Harvard University Press, 2001). Gilroy writes: "Roger Griffin has made these movements' concern with national rebirth a vivid and essential part of his valuable generic definition of their activities. His

emphasis on the special theoretical investment that fascists have always made in the 'vision of a radically new beginning which follows a period of destruction or perceived dissolution' points toward the fascists' great faith in the restorative revolutionary transformation of human history" (332).
20. This extended version of black power and nuclear power supports Peniel E Joseph's argument for a "long Black Power era" that extends it forward into the 1950's and back into the 1970's. He also argues that this extended reading helps deconstruct the binary between Civil Rights and Black Power ideologies, as it "transforms civil rights scholarship by placing militant organizers side-by-side with nonviolent moderates" (*The Black Power Movement,* 8).
21. Intondi, *African Americans against the Bomb*, 2.
22. Bennett, "We Who Can Die Tomorrow: Black Optimism & the Atomic Bomb."
23. Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, 338.
24. Linnaeus's taxonomy, developed in the mid-18th century, was one of the early works in what we would now call "race science," as it claimed that the human species could be divided into four essentially distinct races: Americanus, Africanus, Europaeus, Asiaticus.
25. In her 1972 essay "White English / Black English," Jordan describes how President Nixon's white English allows for the diminution of geocide as well as the manipulation of reality. She writes: Language is political. That's why you and my, my Brother and my Sister, that's why we sposed to choke our natural self into weird, lying barbarous, unreal, white speech and writing habits…those who are the powerless (you and me) better shape up—mimic/ape/suck—in the very image of the powerful, or the powerful will detroy you—you and our children" (*Civil Wars,* 62-3).
26. Robeson Taj P. Frazier explains this transition: Baraka claimed that "the nationalist character of the Black liberation movement was nothing but Blacks' reaction to their super exploitation in America" and that "nationalism…remained an uncritical perspective because it obtained its currency only from its success during the 1960's. Baraka argued that nationalism was a reaction to the middle class identity of the civil rights movement and was thus the dialectal reaction to white racism…He argued that 'nationalism was not enough' and that what was imperative was for Black progressives to ''show their solidarity and unity with our Puerto Rican brothers and sisters who are struggling against the same system of oppression''(155).
27. Intondi, *African Americans against the Bomb*, 63.
28. Walker, "Civil Rights," 121.
29. Walker, 129.
30. For more on Jordan's experience of the riot, see "Letter to Michael (1964)" in her collection of essays, *Civil Wars.*
31. Jordan, *Civil Wars*, x–xi.
32. Jordan, *Civil Wars*. In "Letter to Buckminster Fuller (1964)," 27-8.
33. June Jordan, *His Own Where* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971), 5.
34. Jones, "What the Arts Need Now."
35. Baraka, *S.O.S.: Poems 1961-2013*, 194.
36. Jones, "What the Arts Need Now," 534.
37. Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture At the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
38. Qtd. in Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture At the Dawn of the Atomic Age*, 198–99.
39. Hughes, "Simple And The Atom Bomb."

40. Qtd. in Grundy, *A Black Arts Poetry Machine: Amiri Baraka & the Umbra Poets*, 125.
41. Qtd. in Intondi, *African Americans against the Bomb*, 63.
42. Hughes, "Week By Week."
43. Hughes.
44. In 1954, atomic testing by the U.S. on Bikini Atoll caused radiation sickness and irradiated fish on board the Daigo Fukuryū Maru, called Lucky Dragon No. 5. The Japanese fishing boat was positioned outside the "danger zone" specified by the U.S. at the time of the test.
45. Sun Ra, *Space Is the Place*.
46. Dery, "Black to the Future," 180.
47. Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*.
48. Zaretsky, *Radiation Nation*, 181.
49. Frederick Douglass, in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) underscores this treatment: "We were all ranked together at the valuation. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses and men, cattle and women, pigs, and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being and were all subject to the same narrow examination" (27).
50. Baraka, "Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical," 165. *Elision mine.*
51. Hughes, "Simple Supposes What Would Happen If Our People Were Immune To Atom Bomb."
52. Though these movements are overlapping, for the purposes of this argument I use the canonical periodization of the Civil Rights Movement to span the *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 to the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 and the canonical periodization of the Black Power Movement, as described by Peniel E. Joseph which is 1966 and 1975, with the acknowledgement of antecedents and afterlives in different forms ("Black Power Movement : A State of the Field," 772). By way of definition, I consider the former a utopian movement for racial justice and social and political equality by way of non-violent tactics and the latter, as Peniel E. Joseph writes in *The Black Power Movement,* "as an alternative to the ineffectiveness of civil rights demands in critical areas of American life" rather than a negation or reaction to the perceived ineffectiveness of the Civil Rights Movement.
53. Williams, *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War*, 149.
54. Pareles, "Cabaret."
55. Jacques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),' *Diacritics* 14:2 (1984), 24.
56. Ruthven, *Nuclear Criticism*, 73.
57. Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," 23.
58. Klein, "The Future of Nuclear Criticism," 82.
59. Amiri Baraka, 'Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical,' in *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues*, by Amina Baraka and Amiri Baraka (New York, Morrow, 1987), 119–73.
60. Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," 20. Emphasis mine.
61. Ruthven, *Nuclear Criticism*, 82.
62. Hortense J. Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,' *Diacritics* 17: 2 (1987), 72.
63. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.
64. Spillers, 65.

65. Spillers, 67.
66. Spillers, 65.
67. Moten, *In the Break*, 6–7.
68. Moten, 6.
69. Baraka, “Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical,” 124.
70. Baraka, “New Music/New Poetry,” 245.
71. Baraka, 243.
72. Baraka, “Milestones 1,” 191.
73. Baraka, “Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical,” 173.
74. Baraka, 123.
75. Baraka, 148.
76. Baraka, 166.
77. Baraka, 148.
78. Baraka, 151.
79. Baraka, 151.
80. Baraka, 151.
81. Mark Dery, “Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose,” in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. Mark Dery (Durham, Duke University Press, 1993), 180.
82. Baraka, “Primitive World: An Anti-Nuclear Jazz Musical,” 149.
83. Moten, *In the Break*, 22.
84. Montgomery and Clines, “Thousands Riot in Harlem Area.”
85. Jordan, *Civil Wars*, 19.
86. Jordan, 25.
87. Jordan, 26.
88. *Esquire,* without Jordan’s permission, changed the title of the article to “Instant Slum Clearance,” which describes precisely what a nuclear bomb would do in the logics of civil defense, which considered low-income people of color in the city to be the first victims of an atomic bomb, with those in the suburbs surviving long enough to access their fallout shelters.
89. McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 41.
90. A 1961 *Times* article about the ethics of sheltering one’s neighbor exemplifies this privatization of survival. In “Gun Thy Neighbor?” a white resident of the Chicago suburbs explains what he is willing to do to defend his private shelter, his post-apocalyptic home, from anyone who threatens to intrude: “When I get my shelter finished, I'm going to mount a machine gun at the hatch to keep the neighbors out if the bomb falls. I'm deadly serious about this. If the stupid American public will not do what they have to to save themselves, I'm not going to run the risk of not being able to use the shelter I've taken the trouble to provide to save my own family.’” (*Time Magazine*, August 18, 1961.)
91. June Jordan, “Letter to R. Buckminster Fuller (1964),” in *Civil Wars* (New York: Beacon Press, 1981), 27.
92. As Adrienne Brown argues in her book on the relationship between racial perception and the advent of the skyscraper, “all architectures are, inevitably racial architectures, producing and maintaining site-specific phenomenologies of race.”
93. Meyer, “Instant Slum Clearance,” 109.
94. Meyer, 111.
95. Meyer, 112.

96. Locke, “Harlem,” 629.
97. Meyer, “Instant Slum Clearance,” 112.
98. Mark Dery, “Black to the Future”, 180.
99. Meyer, “Instant Slum Clearance,” 111.
100. Goldstein, “‘The Search for New Forms’: Black Power and the Making of the Postmodern City,” 375.
101. Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York*, 398.
102. Sharp, *Savage Perils*, 207.
103. Langston Hughes, *Collected Works of Langston Hughes: Later Simple Stories, Volume 8,* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2002), 50–52.
104. Jordan, *Civil Wars*, 28.
105. Jordan, *His Own Where*, 5. This image of the crucifixion echoes Jordan’s thoughts in her 1964 letter to Buckminster Fuller in which she describes how the grid pattern of the streets in Harlem limit perspective and imagination: “The crisscrossing pattern too often becomes a psychological crucifixion; an emergence from an alleyway into a danger zone vulnerable to enemies approaching in at least two directions that converge at the target who is the pedestrian poised on a corner” (“Letter to R. Buckminster Fuller, 27).
106. Brown, *The Black Skyscraper*, 3.
107. Jordan, “Letter to Fuller,” 27.
108. Jordan, *Civil Wars*, 65.
109. Jordan’s essay, “Black English / White English: The Politics of Translation,” exposes how structural violence is reinforced and repressed by political discourse. While in the 1980’s it was common for Nuclear Critics and other skeptics of political jargon to deride “nukespeak,” Jordan expands the scope of this phenomenon to demonstrate the racial undertones of political discourse during this period. Jordan dissects the “perfect grammar” of political speech characteristic of the Nixon administration and the Vietnam War, which removes responsibility from those who are inflicting violence, connecting it to the way White English is used against African Americans. She asks: “How will we survive this new—this, to use a standard English term, ‘escalated’—phase of white war against Black life?”. The method for shielding black life from extinction by the intertwined system of white power and white words, Jordan argues, is to construct a future by using the grammar and syntax of Black English. She begins by suggesting the actions that will *not* lead to survival: 1) Playing by the rules of “our enemies” through imitation of “standard English”; 2) Accepting government support that only superficially addresses the “disparity between the white Have-group and the Black Have-nots”; 3) “Delud[ing] our Black selves” into believing that acting like the powerful will result in power; 4) Ignoring the need for collective action. Just as the “master’s tools,” as Audre Lorde says, will not “dismantle the master’s house,” neither can they build a shelter for survival (*Civil Wars,* 64-65).
110. Jordan, *On Call: Political Essays*, 129.
111. Jordan, 129.
112. Jordan, 129.
113. Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security.”
114. Jordan, *Directed by Desire*, 325.
115. Jordan, 327.
116. Jordan, 327.
117. Jordan, 328–29.

118. June Jordan, *Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan*, 2005, 329.
119. Jordan, *Directed by Desire*, 329.
120. Jordan, 330.
121. Karaim, "Nearly A Nuclear Disaster-- Wind Shifted Fire On B-52 Away From Bomb, Experts Say."
122. Jordan, 330.
123. Jordan, *Directed by Desire*, 331.
124. Jordan, 331.
125. The poem demonstrates the contradiction between these performances from an ultra-local perspective, which further undermines a global or national unity determined by the nuclear threat. Here, it is not a country or even a state being threatened by the nuclear complex, but a specific route through the city, a specific driver who may or may not drive well depending on whether he or she is thinking of their mother (and depending on the relationship between the driver and the mother). Concerns regarding the transportation of nuclear wastes were raised primarily by the communities en route from the reactor or power plant to the waste storage sites. The route specified by Jordan originated at the Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island, travelled over the 59th street bridge, across town on Third Avenue, before crossing the George Washington bridge and heading south to a processing site in South Carolina. In 1985, the city of New York brought suit against the Department of Transportation, arguing that, due to the dense populations in Queens and the Bronx, it was ill-advised to transport radioactive uranium through the area. When New York lost the case, officials in Connecticut were "jubilant," as New York's victory would have meant the fuel would be diverted through their state. However, the ruling did not necessarily protect Connecticut from future route changes, as the Transportation Department used the case to demonstrate its power to overrule restrictions set by states regarding the transportation of hazardous materials (Oreskes).
126. Masco points out that the banalization of nuclear weapons into everyday life is one of the nuclear complex's greatest achievements, as it hides from view the extent of this atomic network, which only becomes visible during times of crisis (*Nuclear Borderlands*, 4-5).
127. Jordan, *Directed by Desire*, 338.
128. Jordan, 339.
129. Jordan, 339.
130. Jordan, 359.
131. Jordan, 359.
132. Jordan, 359.
133. Orlando Patterson names the condition of "social death," in which a slave's body is interminably vulnerable to gratuitous violence and severed from kinship as a relational structure in his groundbreaking 1982 study, *Slavery and Social Death.*
134. Jordan, *Civil Wars*, 26.
135. Walker, "Only Justice."
136. Walker.
137. Walker.

Coda Notes

1. Clifford, "Bill Gates' TerraPower Aims to Build Its First Advanced Nuclear Reactor in a Coal Town in Wyoming."
2. Search the Twitter, Instagram, or TikTok handles @i_sodope_ and @realisabelleboemeke.

3. 💎 ISODOPE [@i_sodope_], "It's the Atomic Fire Breathing t-Rex for Me. 🙃 This Is the Media's Interpretation of Nuclear...Its No Wonder so Many People Are Afraid to Adopt Nuclear Energy as a Solution to Climate Change. Its Time to Flip the Script. Https://T.Co/L7nybnf6QE."
4. "About Us | Good Energy Collective."
5. "A Policy Pathway for Nuclear Justice | Good Energy Collective."
6. La Duke, "Anaconda: The Industrial Snake."
7. Brown, *Manual for Survival*, 10.
8. Nagai, *Irradiated Cities*, 125.