

On Unmaking and Remaking

An Introduction

(with obvious affection for Gloria Anzaldúa)

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Our title for this volume makes obvious reference to Gloria Anzaldúa's magnificently rich collection of writings by feminists of color titled *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras* (1990). Her recent death is a loss for all of us, and her passing warrants memorializing. In addition to her two coedited collections, including *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), Anzaldúa authored her own essays and poetry, a book combining poetry and critical analysis titled *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), and several works in children's literature. A common theme in her work is the significance of linguistic expression and how it is central to the formation of one's sense of self and the possibilities for community. Her *Borderlands* explores the cultural spaces between geographic, sexual, spiritual, and economic borders drawn specifically to distinguish, isolate, and exclude those who are deemed deviant from the dominant cultural interests. Although this book was well underway prior to Anzaldúa's death, we hope that it will serve in some small way as a tribute by advancing the aims of her writings and editorial labors.

In the introduction to *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, Anzaldúa describes "making face/*haciendo caras*" as an expression of feeling (as in what one conveys when one "makes a face"), a kind of sharing and communicating with others, a way of relating to them. Making face can also carry political import in the form of "the piercing look that questions or challenges, the look that says, 'Don't walk all over me,' the one that says, 'Get out of my face'" (Anzaldúa 1990, xv). Many of the cultural productions discussed and presented in this volume incorporate both of these senses in their meditations on the nature of community and social justice.

Anzaldúa further observes that the face at the body's surface is also the site for inscriptions of social structures in which, "We are 'written' all over [. . .] carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience" (1990, xv). A major premise of this book is that one of the ways in which persons of color, but especially *women of color*, have effected an *unmaking* of the face that marks them as female and gives them racial particularity is through their cultural productions in which they aesthetically transform the values that have been used to stain them as inferior, deficient, and defective. Cultural productions such as those considered here constitute efforts to elude and transform the "gaze" that constitutes such faces and to remake oneself according to one's own aesthetic sensibilities and aspirations. This way of "looking back" locates women's political resistance in places not often recognized as legitimate sites of political contestation. And yet it is, in part, because women are excluded or shunned from more traditional venues of political organization against racial and class oppression (specifically because of their gender) that they seek these alternative modes and media of expression.

The facts that women have complicated and compromised access to outlets for organized resistance and that their oppressors refuse to recognize them as legitimate contestants in the public sphere partly—but *only partly*—explain why so many women have consciously sought transformative social change through less traditional channels. Another reason is that the kind of transformation or remaking sought *requires* different modes of expression. Many find they do not have the language to simply rewrite the inscriptions that mark the faces of racism and sexism, or they find that writing alone is insufficient for their task. Thus, women of color have been leading innovators in remaking a variety of media in the formal arts as well as in creative practices that lie outside those dominant categories. Women working in the traditional arts have also sought to blend or bend standard genres, developing novel forms such as choreopoetry (as in the case of Ntozake Shange 1981a). They also utilize approaches that several contributors here describe as *syncretic*. Syncretism involves drawing upon and incorporating a variety of traditions in the making of something new that is nevertheless authentic and respectful of traditions.

Syncretism is particularly significant as a strategic response to problems faced by women of color especially, as numerous authors here indicate. Persons of color who endeavor to inhabit and nurture cultural spaces outside of the traditions that define them as "other" and "outsider" face a dilemma: they can cling to romantic notions of a cultural past from which

they are geographically and historically separated, or they can strive to invent a culture anew. The former prong of this dilemma is often organized around an essentialized and static conception of culture generally, and the latter seems too readily dismissive of the ways in which meanings emerge from historical and situated contexts and are not simply the free-wheeling inventions of individuals. The denial of metaphysical essentialism (often used as the basis for the subjection of others) differs from recognition of “situational differences” insofar as the features that are defined and used as the basis for “constructed” differences are understood as having real material consequences with durable legacies. The contributors to this volume and the artists they discuss are mindful of this distinction and emphasize the constellation of interests and desires that inform and shape their lived experiences.

This fact is relevant to the classical aesthetic concept of ‘disinterestedness,’ which was so prominent in European-centered conceptions of aesthetics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which served as a criterion for the possible contemplation of true, genuine, or “high” art. Disinterestedness—the idea that aesthetic objects are necessarily disengaged from practical concerns—has fallen out of favor, at least overtly, as a criterion for worthy aesthetic contemplation, although it lives on with more subtlety in the ongoing debate about whether political art can be appreciated primarily for its aesthetic qualities (see Mullin 2003).

The aesthetic transformations of women of color are anything but disinterested; indeed, they are often connected to lived, everyday experience, the practical realm of interests that comprise the social institutions that limit and define their possible ways of being in the world. The artists discussed here are concerned with *exposing* the (often hidden) racist, patriarchal, and economic interests of others and of shaping and *remaking* a form of interest or desire that is redemptive of the value of their experiences and aspirations. We are, all of us, informed by a great variety of traditions and cultural values, and our conceptions of the lives we want as *ours* are shaped by these forces, which are often in conflict. Early theoretical formations of racial/ethnic oppression, including constructions of the colonial in both postcolonial theory and anticolonial nationalism, tended to elide gender differences in the experience of oppression. Many feminist critics have shown, however, that gender was deployed strategically in imperial and colonial practices and that women suffered at least two layers of oppression relating to their colonized and gendered bodies (McClintock 1995, Suleri 1992, Mohanty 1991, Spivak 1995, Wallace

1979). By the same token European and North American feminists (white and nonwhite alike) have sometimes misrepresented the problems and interests of women in developing nations by analyzing their situations using theoretical models that are blind to the very differences that define their particular situations (Oyewumi 2003, Mohanty 1991, hooks 1984). For many of the authors and artists whose contributions and works are discussed here, what is meant by “making” and “remaking” soul involves grappling with these challenges: a kind of critical relationality, which “means negotiating, articulating and interrogating simultaneously a variety of resistant discourses relationally and depending on context, historical and political circumstances” (Davies 1994, 47).

The cultural productions of many artists, writers, and musicians featured here can be read as their *homes*. As hooks puts it: these repositories of personal transformation and visions of beauty, art, and human possibility shelter and provide ground for the cultivation of new aesthetic sensibilities, new ways of relating to others and to the world, and thus new possibilities for building community and organizing resistance (e.g., 1994a, 1994b). The very subtitle of this collection, *Transformative Aesthetics and the Practice of Freedom*, echoes a subtitle by bell hooks—*Teaching to Transgress: Education and the Practice of Freedom*. In many of her writings, hooks connects aesthetics and education to an ethic or practice of freedom that enables and activates a resistive form of agency. Her writings explore in a variety of ways how educating the senses (drawing out and cultivating them, as the Latin relative of the word *education*, *educere*—to lead forth, suggests) and nurturing sensibility enable intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth, activism, and community formation. In her essay “An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional,” hooks heralds a radical aesthetic to be sought by progressive African Americans, which would provide “vital grounding that helps make certain work possible, particularly expressive work that is transgressive and oppositional” (hooks 1990, 110; compare and contrast with texts central to the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s [Baraka 1966, Fuller 1967, Gayle 1971, Sell 2001], which played a prominent role in the establishment of black studies).



Each part of the book is comprised of chapters motivated by and explicitly oriented toward the idea that social and political progress requires not *only* what is traditionally considered intellectual or cognitive devel-

opment but also expansion of the sensibilities that both sharpens our perceptual capacities and fuels creativity activity. We call this “aesthetic agency.” In designating this capacity for action “aesthetic,” we do not imply a strict contrast with what the so-called western tradition allegedly considers to be moral agency and its typical rational basis and ideal of autonomy (we write “allegedly,” because there is a tradition stretching back to Kant and further to Plato that connects morality and aesthetics). Yet the exclusivity and presumed primacy of these conditions for action (rationality, autonomy) are challenged in a variety of ways by the women whose works are discussed in this volume. The importance of individuality for identity, the conception of freedom as independence or freedom from restraint, and the ideal of a universal intelligence are questioned here without simply renouncing everything conceived as emblematic of Euro-centered culture, including theory and its applications. The core idea of aesthetic agency is that integral to our understanding of the world is our capacity for making and remaking the symbolic forms that supply the frameworks for the acquisition and transmission of knowledge.

Thus, this new sensibility does not simply pertain to what is generally conceived as sheer emotional energy or what the western tradition might designate (and, at times, *denigrate*) as mere “feeling.” Aesthetic sensibility cultivates the senses, including that of sight: it nurtures a different way of seeing. For many of the authors here, such “seeing” grounds a different cognitive perspective, a different way of understanding the world, one’s place within it, and how the world might possibly be negotiated and reorganized. Thus, aesthetic agency is liberating in a broad sense to include the expansion not only of our capacity for joy but also our capacities to know, to judge, and to act.

One of the purposes of this volume is to allow the distinctive ways of seeing and feeling of women artists to become available for others to experience. We have conceived the designation of “artist” broadly so as to include those working in a variety of cultural media, including artistic practices other than those exercised in the formal arts. (This same interest motivates our companion volume titled *Cultural Sites of Critical Insight* 2007.) To accomplish our aim, we have selected scholarly and theoretical works that provide numerous illustrative examples, and we have included visual reproductions of several works of art, most of which are not widely accessible. This way of organizing the material and developing themes distinguishes this book from others, which either focus particularly on literature and literary theory (e.g., Bobo 2001), a particular cultural tradition

(e.g., Martinez 2000), primarily the productions of men (e.g., Gayle 1971, Powell 1997), or relevant issues of theory that nonetheless do not explicitly consider the cultural innovations and reformations that are advanced in the kinds of works discussed here (e.g., Gordon and Gordon 2006). These other volumes make their own significant contributions, so we recommend them for those wishing to further develop ideas raised in this text.

Many of the anthologies treating feminist aesthetics and the cultural productions of women include only a few pieces that focus on the experiences, theoretical perspectives, and self-consciously creative practices of women of color (as an exception, see Shohat 1998). This is not to say that the fine collections available, including a special issue of *Hypatia, Women, Art, and Aesthetics* (Brand and Devereaux 2003), include *no* essays that are relevant to, by, or about women of color (see also Hein and Korsmeyer 1993, Brand and Korsmeyer 1995, Allan 1995, and Ecker 1985); but often their perspectives remain marginal or sparse. Our volume aims to make the works and distinctive concerns of women of color more prominent, to spur and supplement the growing body of work in this area. Anthologies that are devoted primarily or exclusively to the works and ideas of women of color, such as James' and Sharpley-Whiting's *The Black Feminist Reader* (2000), Bobo's *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism* (2001), Brown and Gooze's *International Women's Writings: New Landscapes of Identity* (1995), and Wisker's *Post-Colonial and African-American Women's Writing* (2000), generally include only previously published materials, are focused on theoretical perspectives, or are written chiefly by literary theorists. Our volume includes only new material written specifically for this book by scholars and artists who work in a variety of disciplines and media and who utilize interdisciplinary methods. Our collection explicitly develops the relation between (and challenges the binary of) the theoretical and the practical as it illuminates theoretical revisions that emerge from the cultural productions of women of color, and it accomplishes this through works that emerge from a variety of cultural perspectives. Each of the related works mentioned above fills gaps left open in the prior literature. They are highly recommended to those who wish to further pursue themes raised here.

An original plan for the book called for its organization along the lines of the kinds of arts or cultural productions under discussion, so, for example, we planned a section on literature, one on performance art, and others on visual and material arts. As we prepared our manuscript for review and publication, however, we realized that our original

scheme was problematic. Virtually all of the artists discussed here work in multiple media or in media that cannot be easily classified, and they often challenged the very distinctions such an organizing principle would utilize. It soon became clear that a different scheme for arrangement would be more appropriate and perhaps more helpful to the reader. Thus, we have grouped the essays here along the lines for four broad themes: those developing a crucial precursor (and product) of aesthetic agency—imagination; those focused on issues relating to the body, particularly as its morphological features provide the material for both discrimination and recreation of meaning; those investigating the connection between aesthetic productivity and the formation of new or specific identities both personal and cultural; and those concerned with issues of space and place, the transformation of the conditions in which we live and our relations to geographic and spiritual domains. As writers in the first part argue, there are certain powers of imagination that people must cultivate in order to be able to exercise the human form of creativity that characterizes the production of culture and its reformation; there is, as Kelly Oliver describes, a kind of psychic space that must be claimed in order to have the resources to imagine a different life one would want to call one's own. Aesthetic experience and imaginative activity are bidirectional: aesthetic experience can ignite imaginative activity, and the latter enhances and further facilitates the likelihood of the former. This basic feature of aesthetic agency has immediate applications for the transfiguration of the body, its articulations in the productions of dominant and oppressive cultures, and resistive practices that form the basis for political action. Chapters in the second part of the book specifically focus on this idea. The third part considers specific formations of identity that are enabled by a remodeled sense of body and spirituality, particularly as such are enabled through engagement in aesthetic productivity in material, visual, and literary arts. The fourth and final part considers the aesthetic dimension of relations to earth, home, community, and nation as it relates to place making. The chapters here consider aesthetic agency as a way of *dwelling* in a sense that permeates ordinary lived experience and conditions the extraordinary sense of connection to others. In many ways, each chapter addresses or is relevant to each of these themes, too, although the present arrangement allows grouped chapters to bring out more subtle commonalities as well as differences and complementary perspectives.



Part One includes chapters that aim to articulate the kind of imagination that is engaged in the process of creativity and how it bears on the development of a kind of political imagination that is crucial for resistance. Artists considered include Ana Castillo, Julia Alvarez, Ntozake Shange, Audre Lorde, and Toni Morrison. Ritch Calvin's chapter, "Writing the Xicanista: Ana Castillo and the Articulation of Chicana Feminist Aesthetics," provides a point of entry for the collection, since one of Calvin's claims is that Castillo endeavors to create a new discourse entirely—one that is not preoccupied with the need for translation and thus operates on its own terms—but that is concerned with *communication*, thus engaging the norms and customs of formal discourse that predominate institutions of power such as academia. Calvin persuasively argues that Castillo's writing is misunderstood when viewed only as an example of the genre of magical realism. The *real* magic of her works, as he describes them, lies in her transformation of language, her reformation of identity, and her development of prepatriarchal models for Xicanista ontology that are deeply rooted in lived experience. Calvin intelligently describes the peculiar position and dilemma of Xicanistas, who find the need to simultaneously resist colonial identities as well as the patriarchal elements of resistance movements and who, nevertheless, as a legacy of colonialism, find themselves at a considerable distance from indigenous models of world making that might supply the cultural and creative resources for engaging in such transformative resistance. As Calvin traces the strategies that Castillo deploys throughout her vast body of writing, he particularly notices how Castillo's Xicanisma discourse incorporates as well as subverts traditional Anglo discourse, including academic models. In this regard he finds Castillo's work distinctive. What emerges is a form of Xicanista subjectivity that is defined in and on its own terms, but which is also interactive with other forms of subjectivity and alternative ways of structuring and ordering experience. It also redefines the very terms of subjectivity, shifting it away from an account of distinctive individual identity to one that is first and foremost rooted in community and social relations.

Kelly Oliver, in "Everyday Revolutions, Shifting Power, and Feminine Genius in Julia Alvarez's Fiction," focuses on the ways in which the fault lines of oppressive power structures are reconfigured according to race, class, and gender. She considers how gendered power in particular can be manifest in the exploitation of tensions and cross-currents within and among these structures by illuminating how Alvarez depicts scenes in which we see, for example, "shifting power relations": "class privilege has given way to gender privilege, and then the relation between gender hier-

archy and class hierarchy is reversed again.” Oliver provides examples of the ways in which one form of privilege can be played to undermine another or turned against itself. Two other features of gendered power are explored in Oliver’s essay, including the idea of the female genius, borrowed from Julia Kristeva, and the significance of the everyday and ordinary struggles that are faced by the characters in Alvarez’s novels. Although the figure of the genius might appear to stand far apart from the ordinary, Oliver shows how the characters in Alvarez’s volumes often show themselves to be geniuses of the ordinary, “in which the very trappings of femininity, womanhood, and motherhood can be used against patriarchal values and institutions in order to open up a space for women’s resistance to domination.” A particularly potent feature of Alvarez’s writing, as Oliver describes it, is its exercise of imagination, which “enriches our own sense of possibility and freedom.”

In the final section of her chapter, Oliver focuses on Alvarez’s novel *In the Name of Salomé*, in which the main character battles depression and struggles to recapture her creative imagination. Oliver focuses upon this character to underscore the ways in which oppression can diminish the capacities for sublimation and imaginative activity that are crucial for women’s psychic lives and exercise of agency. This very problem is at the center of Christa Davis Acampora’s “Authorizing Desire: Erotic Poetics and the *Aisthesis* of Freedom in Morrison and Shange.” Instead of describing the problem in terms of sublimation, Acampora considers how oppressive power structures diminish and redirect desire so as to cut one off from both the resources to create and the imagination of free ends toward which one might direct creative action. Acampora shares Oliver’s interest in what constitutes psychic freedom and emphasizes how it is predicated, at least in part, upon certain kinds of aesthetic experiences. In pursuit of this thesis, Acampora draws on an existential framework to elaborate how existential freedom is dependent upon opportunities for creative activity, particularly in the production of meanings. She looks to Frantz Fanon’s work to expose some problems with early existential views, and to the choreopoetry of Ntozake Shange for further elaboration of the particular situation faced by men and women of color and the potency of aesthetic experiences for addressing these problems. Highlighting Audre Lorde’s conception of erotic power, Acampora further underscores the importance of the aesthetic basis of freedom in consideration of the deformations of desire illustrated in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.



Part Two focuses on issues of embodiment and the transformation of the meaning of the body through aesthetic creativity. Martha Mockus heads her chapter, “MeShell Ndegéocello: Musical Articulations of Black Feminism,” with an epigraph in which bassist/singer/songwriter Ndegéocello emphasizes her sense of rhythm that is informed by the invisible materiality of the body: “the pulses of the rivers of blood that flow through my body.” This is how she describes her sense of the divine, her belief in things that are not visible. Mockus’ chapter takes its cue from Ndegéocello’s interest in “the epistemological power of music,” which is often ignored in a culture that is driven primarily by the visual and literary. Using what Mockus describes as an alternative and defiant “acoustic logic,” Ndegéocello challenges her listeners to tap that unseen but *felt* power in order to rethink and redefine what they believe they know about freedom. This is further reflected in her lyrics addressing capitalism, racism, sexism, and homophobia particularly in African American culture. Although Ndegéocello herself has resisted describing her work as feminist—largely because she associates feminism with the interests of white middle-class women—Mockus reveals how her compositional process, her use of musical formations, and her lyrics are compatible and in dialogue with feminist analyses along the lines of those advanced by bell hooks and Angela Davis.

A different approach to transforming our sense of the visual and literary, particularly as it relates to representations of the body, is taken by Kimberly Lamm in her “Portraits of the Past, Imagined Now: Reading the Work of Carrie Mae Weems and Lorna Simpson.” Lamm describes how both Simpson and Weems explore and exploit the “bizarre axiological ground” (determinations of value that ground meaning and significance), borrowing a phrase from Hortense Spillers, from which the lives of African American women and their families emerge. Lamm’s focus on portraiture is significant, since the portrait is a good index of the historical axes of individuality, dignity, and respectability (particularly among whites), which define and regulate norms of beauty and propriety and thereby control or contain the (especially black) body. Portraiture is thus a potent medium for resistance as well as a site against which resistance must be mounted.

Weems’ and Simpson’s portraits of women also draw on their complicated place in their homes, their immediate communities, and the larger social order that presses upon and endeavors to define, regulate, and control the other spheres. As mentioned near the outset of this introduction, women of color face particular difficulties when endeavoring to

claim, craft, or create positive models for subjectivity from such a considerable historical distance to models they might regard as legitimate expressions of their own cultural traditions. Lamm does an especially good job of elaborating the pitfalls of endeavoring to find such models simply through reappropriation of what is cast as marginal or negative. She helpfully describes how the works by Weems and Simpson depict—offer a portrait of, that is, constitute a way of *looking at*—the lives of women in ways that recognize their perceived status as marginal and imagine an alternative set of values and norms in which their concerns might be central.

A poignant mindfulness of the impact of *being seen*, the gaze, is a central concern for Eduardo Mendieta in “The Coloniality of Embodiment: Coco Fusco’s Postcolonial Genealogies and Semiotic Agonistics.” Mendieta looks to the vast array of productions of Coco Fusco to consider how she crafts a perspective that challenges and undermines the colonizing and racializing gaze that endeavors to make her “other.” He is especially interested in how Fusco accomplishes this sort of “looking back” through what he calls “semiotic agonistics”—a deliberate and self-conscious entrée to the public sphere that aims to destabilize and transform signifiers and the construction of what is signified. Mendieta argues that Fusco engages this struggle of meaning (that is “semiotic agonistics”) in body performance, which contributes to and reconfigures the meaning of the body itself and how the body serves as a creative site of meaning (“somatic semiology”). For Mendieta, Fusco’s work exemplifies both “performance of the body and the body in performance.”

Mendieta draws on a broad and somewhat unexpected range of theoretical perspectives in his analysis, including Heidegger’s conception of “worlding” and Foucault’s conception of genealogy. He characterizes Fusco’s work as “arting” the body, which is to say she quite consciously highlights how bodies are bearers of meaningful signs and how they are used in the transmission of culture, and she performs her body in ways that trace, interrogate, and challenge the genealogies of producing colonial and postcolonial subjectivities. Mendieta provides illuminating examples of precisely how this is accomplished by Fusco, particularly in his discussion of her performance work “Two Undiscovered Amerindians,” with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, to mark the five hundredth anniversary of the “discovery” of the “New World.”



Mendieta's chapter provides an excellent segue to part Three, which is focused on the nature of agency and identity as they are produced through artistic and aesthetic enterprises that take a variety of cultural forms. The chapters in this section consider the remaking of self and the making of agency not just in terms of disassembling or erasing but rather as a practice that replaces the face of race with the pleasure and joy of soul. They envision a truly creative enterprise that *vivifies* and transforms rather than simply masks or re-masks. What is found here is an effort to develop a poetics of soul and community that challenges the self-contained individualism of most western, Enlightenment-based cultures. Extreme individualism underwritten by late capitalism in these cultures keeps us from recognizing our connections with others and the natural world. Many Native American women writers critique this ontology and express alternative visions of harmony and wholeness between the individual, community, environment, and cosmos (Allen 1991). Ruth Porritt finds such a view in Pueblo Tewa cosmology and in the contemporary sculpture of Roxanne Swentzell. Porritt's "Pueblo Sculptor Roxanne Swentzell: Forming a Wise, Generous, and Beautiful 'I Am'" describes how Swentzell's sculptures convey a sense of self as first and foremost rooted in a community that complements an array of talents while nurturing and balancing a variety of needs. The agent as emotional energy is also of concern to Swentzell, and she is particularly interested in how the communal ties mentioned above can provide a basis for healing and growth. Calling herself "a sculptor of human emotions," Swentzell endeavors to expand emotional capacities for expression and healing and to provide a sense of *felt-form* to augment our more familiar senses of visual form. Her work is stirred by a deep recognition of human suffering and responsibility and a candid exploration of the role of sadness in our lives.

Drawing on the writings and works of Kay WalkingStick, Oscar Howe, and Nancy Hartsock, Porritt argues that Swentzell's works engage what she describes as "standpoint emotional integrity." Standpoint emotional integrity, as Porritt defines it, draws on the concept of 'standpoint epistemology' that is developed in the work of Hartsock (1983). Porritt highlights both the cognitive and ethical character of the emotions in standpoint theory as she describes "a sensitive individual's perceptive consciousness of intercultural and intracultural differences, particularly as discrepancies in values or beliefs are carried by emotional recognitions." But this is not simply an exchange of empathy: standpoint emotional integrity also clarifies and neutralizes aggressive and divisive intentions,

replacing them with “a strong sense of wonder and hope.” It involves the agent in thoughtful and reflective creative action in which “the individual manifests a talent for forming an undivided—if emotionally complex—whole.” That practice of making whole provides a formal basis for community building and regenerative healing from the scarring effects of racism and sexual discrimination. Porritt emphasizes the way in which standpoint emotional integrity “is specifically embodied; the sensations which signal our emotions arise out of our bodies as physical responses to our experiences with other people and our environment.” Through analysis of numerous illustrated examples Porritt describes precisely how Swentzell brings this forth in her works.

Gaining a sense of community in the wake of colonialism and the cultural discontinuity that stems from practices of forced migration and cultural terrorism is addressed by Phoebe Farris in “The Syncretism of Native American, Latin American, and African American Women’s Art: Visual Expressions of Feminism, the Environment, Spirituality, and Identity.” Farris describes the art-making activities of Native American, African American, and Latin American women as practices of syncretism. Syncretism involves utilizing and adapting various symbols and traditions from both ancient and modern cultural practices, and it allows these artists to explore possibilities for generating their own norms and values in the context of the vast network of relations and affiliations (both voluntary and otherwise) that characterize modern life and their lived experiences. Of particular concern to those producing syncretic works is a rejection of the strict notion, pressed from both inside and outside their own cultures, to deploy “traditional” forms of expression as the only way to be truly “authentic” or to realize some essential kind of agency. Farris explicitly rejects this way of conceiving authenticity and cites numerous ways in which it is directly challenged by the women artists she studies: “Any insistence that Indian art remain ‘traditional’ as a way of preserving culture is a form of cultural discrimination because cultures are dynamic, not static.” The artists Farris cites draw upon the ideas and philosophical perspectives of a variety of communities, including those organized around political movements found in feminism and environmentalism, especially for their emphases on human dignity, relational and communal agency, and the connections between human beings and the places in which they live and from which they draw their sustenance. Virtually all of these artists consider art to have curative powers that can heal psyches, communities, and intercommunal relations on a global scale. This art dissolves the

high/low distinction as it challenges the categories of the authentic and naïve/traditional in pursuit of new forms of human expression in the production of ethnic heritage. Farris reviews a stunning array of women artists and vast collections of works to illustrate just how pervasive these ideas are.

The roles and challenges of women in the context of broader liberation movements are explored by Nandita Gupta in her “Dalit Women’s Literature: A Sense of the Struggle.” In particular, Gupta focuses on the distinctive character of the voices of women writers, how they depict the aims of the movements of which they are a part, and the ways in which women characters figure in their literary productions. A special feature of this contribution is its use of materials that are difficult to acquire. Gupta traces the development of agency in the writings of women throughout the Dalit movement, and she underscores the difficulties of the tensions between women of different castes.

The volume concludes with a group of chapters that explicitly addresses a theme raised in the epigraph to this volume in which bell hooks describes a house, more properly a “home,” that is a living space that is shaped by and shapes within those who dwell there (the notion of ‘home’ stands in contrast with ‘house’ in the sense invoked in Audre Lorde’s famous “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House” [1984]; compare a new sense of theoretical ‘house’ in Gordon and Gordon 2006). Such practices of shaping that are found in the production of that home are *aesthetic*. The home-making that organizes and animates such an aesthetic instills what bell hooks describes as “a yearning for beauty,” which is “the predicament of the heart that makes our passion real” (hooks 1990, 103). The chapters in this part of our volume explore in a variety of ways the connections between place, particularly the home or homeland, and a kind of yearning that draws one out of oneself, that serves as the basis for a kind of *ecstasy*—or standing out—from the ready-made personas created by the objectifying gaze of the dominant culture. Such ecstasy is what makes the spaces in which we find ourselves *live*, and in that living, our aspirations, wants, and desires—our passion—is given direction, meaning, and purpose, which makes it real.

The emotional charge of place and its role in shaping a sense of community and cultural continuity are emphasized in Ailsa Smith’s “The Role of ‘Place’ in New Zealand Māori Songs of Lament,” which is a fascinating study of Māori songs of lament collected, recorded, and written by her great-grandfather during the nineteenth century. These

songs are especially important for cultural recovery and identity formation for Smith herself, and for other Māori peoples, since colonial invasion resulted in a sense of dislocation among the self, the land, and language. Smith explores the oral tradition's role in helping to sustain some sense of identity under colonialism. She considers the ways in which the songs were used to convey and preserve tribal information, including practical knowledge about food sources and environmental features. She also reveals how their formal organization provides a rhythmic mnemonic for ideas that shaped distinctive ways of thinking about place, time, history, and community. Smith elaborates this in the context of a discussion of *wā*, which indicates the circumstances of an event that emphasizes the interconnectivity and inseparability of people and place in an ongoing and relational process. Women participated in the composition of songs of lament, and Smith notices that such activities provided powerful outlets for the assertion of agency and the acquisition of respect within the community. Since the Māori community, particularly the Taranaki tribe, which is the focus of Smith's investigation, defined itself in terms whose significances were written in the landscape, its fundamental concepts were particularly durable but also contingent upon rights and access to the lands in which those meanings were inscribed through song. Smith skillfully illuminates this in her discussion of the historical example of the Treaty of Waitangi and how the European presence in New Zealand, facilitated by Māori acceptance of that document, led to the loss of land that was so often the theme of the songs of lament she studies.

Through an exploration of the complicated and fascinating history of the development of the Harlem Experimental Theater in the basement of the public library on 135th Street in Harlem, Katherine Wilson highlights the cultural production of spaces of knowledge and creativity in her "Theater Near Us: Librarians, Culture, and Space in the Harlem Renaissance." While works by and about black artists were featured in a variety of theatrical venues during this time, as Wilson notes the productions staged in the public library basement were among the first that represented the character of black experience both depicted and staged in the places where African Americans actually lived. Instrumental in bringing about this opportunity was the effort of Regina Andrews, whose story as a woman of mixed racial ancestry striving to achieve professional success and institutional reform is interesting in its own right. Entwined in this history of giving the Harlem Experimental Theater its home is an analysis of the library as the home of the space of knowledge, accessible to

women because of its association with “an extension of the (bourgeois) home” in which “library discourses identified librarians literally as ‘hostesses.’” Wilson’s chapter provides a fascinating example of the ways in which social and cultural transformation is manifest in the unmaking and remaking of public space.

The making of home and the recovery of the idea of homecoming in Native American theater is thematized in the final contribution to the volume, “Into the Sacred Circle, Out of the Melting Pot: Re/Locations and Homecomings in Native Women’s Theater” by Jaye T. Darby. Darby draws on the works of Paula Gunn Allen, a Laguna Pueblo/Sioux scholar and writer, in her articulation of how homecomings are variously represented and achieved in the works of three modern women playwrights: Marcie Rendon (*White Earth Anishinabe*), Diane Glancy (*Cherokee*), and Daystar/Rosalie Jones (*Pembina Chippewa*). A variety of themes and challenges are explored in their works, including the tensions between urban life and traditional spirituality, the ways in which cultural narratives that form oral histories can seem alien to younger generations more comfortable with the modern vernacular; and how dance, song, and story can form the basis for the restoration of cultural memory and social transformation. Each play considered explores the liminal spaces lying between the modern situation of cultural and geographic isolation and dispossession and the promise of spiritual renewal in cultural making or coming home.



This book admits of a variety of approaches to enjoying and appreciating its contents. Those wishing to pursue the themes that characterize feminist aesthetics generally—issues relating to imagination, the body, agency, and place—might very well find that reading the book from beginning to end gives them a helpful perspective on these broader issues, especially in the context of thinking about how women of color particularly encounter and approach them. Since most authors also discuss and/or draw upon better known theoretical frameworks, including those generated by women of color, a course that considers the cultural productions of women of color as sites of resistance and social transformation might fruitfully utilize this book alongside readings of important theorists, collections of which are mentioned above. Still others might enjoy exploring the specific works described and illustrated herein, deciding to pick and choose among the chapters without concern for reading the them in any

particular order. Each chapter was written in order to open up a distinctive perspective in its own right; each endeavors to illuminate and articulate a sense of the unmaking and remaking that taps the transformative power of women's aesthetic agency. Each reader is encouraged to engage in an imaginative dialogue in order to make it her or his own.