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Joaquin's Refusal: An Embodied and Geographic Active Subjectivity

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Abstract

This essay explores a Latinx, queer and trans, student's resistance to a gender-neutral restroom at a high school in an agricultural community of the Central Coast of California. Through a close reading of a field note, I analyze Joaquin's narrative of refusal to demonstrate how queer and trans youth engage in an active subjectivity (Lugones, 2003). For decolonial philosopher María Lugones (2003), an active subjectivity is the process through which oppressed communities become conscious and critical by engaging in a meaning-making process centered on their socialites. I argue that queer and trans high school students' active subjectivity is in relation to their embodied knowledges and geographies. The body and space are both critical in learning to think in community and reflexively. Joaquin's refusal of the restroom becomes useful in understanding how queer and trans youth tell narratives of their self, grounded in a social history capable of alternating the story told about space and place.

Keywords: queer and trans youth, active subjectivity, Latinx geographies, queer geographies, resistance

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You are concrete. Your spatiality, constructed as an intersection following the designs of power, isn't.
(Lugones, 2003, p. 10)

The high school's "gay club" sits together during their lunch inside a bungalow classroom off to the backside of the school, across from the school's barn. I can smell the combination of wet dirt and the manure from the cattle. Inside the room, the broken air-conditioning exuberates the heat, but the students continue their conversation as they fan their faces with their nail-polished hands, share a family size bag of Doritos chips and eat dried mango dipped in a contortion of lime and Tajín.² I watch and listen from a side desk whose cracked tabletop is engraved with a series of f-bombs and whose bottom corners are plastered with old gum. From their discussion, I gather that the only gender-neutral restroom in the school is in the back of the campus near the football field. The toilet flushes occasionally and the restroom doubles as a storage room.

The debate at hand is around the type of energy that is worth putting into the restroom. They ask each other how much responsibility they owe the restroom. Should they fix it? What is the role of the administration? What school do they want for future queer and trans students? I listen patiently until Joaquin, a trans student, says that the restroom marks his body.

What does the marked body uncover? The queer and trans youth in this ethnography contend with narratives of race, sexuality, gender, and class that serve to surveil, restrain, and contain their bodies. Indeed, a growing body of critical scholarship and education researchers have uncovered how systems of oppression and domination work congruently to marginalize and undermine the livelihood of queer and trans youth (Brockenbrough, 2013; Cruz, 2011; Marquez & Brockenbrough, 2013; Shange, 2019). Joaquin's statement, however, is a bodily and spatial consideration of resistance. His affirmation amounts to a historical knowledge of the high school's geography that interacts with the multiplicity of experiences of queer and trans youth as they navigate different topographies in search of life-affirming spaces. For queer and trans Latinx youth whose lives are dominated in a multiplicity of ways, engaging in the reflexive work of traveling to each other's worlds allows them to develop a critical consciousness from their socialites, a type of collective meaning-making María Lugones calls an "active subjectivity" (Lugones, 2003). The body and space are both critical in learning to think in community and

² Tajín is a popular Mexican chili seasoning that is primarily used to season snacks like chips and fruit.

reflexively. It is through an embodied knowledge that queer and trans youth tell narratives of their self, grounded in a social history capable of alternating the story told about space and place. This essay describes the practice of an active subjectivity in relationship to geographies of oppression and liberation (Anzaldúa, 1999; McKittrick, 2006) for queer and trans youth at Villa High, a high school in an agricultural community where space and the body are central to a sense of self.

A Resistance Sociality

In my ethnography of queer and trans youth, I read resistance through their socialites—a tug and pull of experiences and opinions that brew into a process of meaning-making—away from the common infrastructure of their school where their being is marked by difference. Lugones (2003; 2010; 2016) suggests that resistance is not the end goal of a political struggle or a complete action but rather a beginning of a possibility. As such, she defines resistance as:

the tension between subjectification (the forming/informing of the subject) and active subjectivity, that minimal sense of agency required for the oppressing ↔ resisting relation being an active one, without appeal to the maximal sense of agency of the modern subject. (Lugones, 2010, p. 746)

For Lugones (2003), resistance is the strain within the messy moment one understands the condition of their oppression while simultaneously understanding that *that* very condition is antithetical to their well-being—“the forming/informing of the subject.” The tension that arises and that is felt from that knowing is the foundation of a possibility for an alternative way of being, distant and different from what oppression makes possible. Liberation, in this sense, is the ability of the individual to construct their material being from their own perspective but in relation to others.

Active subjectivity is a derivation from agency. For many resistance scholars of education, particularly those of Marxist and Kantian thought (see, for example, Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985), agency is the ability to break from one’s predetermined condition in order to establish autonomy. However, Lugones (2003) understands this framing of agency as too individualistic and an illusion of liberation formulated by dominant groups that lack an understanding of the social dynamics and structures that allow *certain* individuals to accomplish their emancipatory aims. The subject who can in fact bring its intentions to fruition under this frame of Western liberal agency is who Lugones (2003) names the “modern subject.” To

destabilize the individuality of the modern subject, Lugones (2003) thinks through an active subjectivity, where one becomes conscious by moving with people, and “by the difficulties as well as the concrete possibilities of such movings” (p. 6). Because the “I” is thought through the “we,” Lugones (2003) represents an active subjectivity as $I \rightarrow we$, wherein the “we” is not necessarily a homogeneous collective. Lugones (1987) instead reminds us of the multiplicity of the self and the *interdependence* on the multiplicities of individuals that help us to make meaning of oppression and domination. Through this lens, Lugones (1987) also reminds us of the existence of multiple “worlds of sense” and the multiple selves that attend to those worlds. “World” for Lugones (2003) is a spatial temporality through which the social is made—a “world” where one is subjected to inescapable oppression, where refusal that is read as defiance may exist alongside another “world” where refusal is an act of liberation (p. 55). The trick is in learning how to read the distinction.

Throughout my time with the queer and trans youth in this ethnographic work, I witnessed various moments in which their resistant practices were opaque by logics of delinquency in their school. Criminalized was the errantry of a queer youth with alcoholic parents who would skip school after lunch to go feed their younger sibling. To understand this youth's negotiation, not as disobedience but rather as an enactment of love, dignity, and self-sovereignty, one must have the ability to travel to their world and learn “what it is to be them, and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). The exercise of world traveling, of leaving our world of sense to willfully move into one another's world of sense as *they see it*, is the technique through which one comes to understand a communal but often opposing syntax of resistance and afford an understanding of oppression as a process that is never truly complete. Lugones (2003) teaches us that the relation between oppressing \Leftrightarrow being oppressed is always ongoing. As she eloquently writes, “Resisting meets oppressing enduringly. It is the active subject resisting \Leftrightarrow oppressing that is the protagonist of *our own creation*” (Lugones, 2003, p. 31). In other words, our learning to recognize others' reclamations to dispossession—a gesture of refusal, a rainbow bracelet—by traveling to their world of sense steals oppression's success. When we fail to recognize each other's worlds, when we cease to travel within another's geography, we also fail to render oppression futile.

A Geography of the Body

The U.S.–Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country. (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25)

In the Borderlands/you are the battleground (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 216)

When Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) writes of the U.S.–Mexican border as an open wound—*una herida abierta*—she writes the land onto her body. Through her poetry and essays, Anzaldúa (1999) gifts her readers a map with a different set of topographies, where borders expose flesh, healing is contested by an arrangement of rugged edges, and blood gives birth to a different set of landscapes. Anzaldúa (1999) also writes the body into the land. She tells us of bones, legs, and lips as the locations of a war for her own being. Her sense of body and land, as synonymous and tethered together, is a declaration that the body is inscribed as territory, rendered conquerable, and made property (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cruz, 2001; McKittrick, 2006). Indeed, as Anzaldúa (1999) endures the hauntings from the colonial past and imperial present at the borderlands, her writings illuminate how through the body the border extends past the U.S.–Mexico nexus and continues to define a broader Latinx community as foreign and out of place (Cahuas, 2019, para. 12). No wonder claiming ownership to one’s body and stitching our made faces (Anzaldúa, 1990) are acts of insurgency.

Geography, subjectivity, and the body are intimately connected (Cruz, 2001; McKittrick, 2006). In the broad sense, geography refers to the social arrangement of space and the systems of meanings produced through such arrangements (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991; McKittrick, 2006; Massey, 2005). As such, geographies are often determined by physical and material objects like highways and roads but also by non-physical items imbued with human meaning and signification like borders and territories. The meaning-making that happens through space, therefore, has the power to organize and naturalize human hierarchies and to displace differences in order to make particular bodies seem misplaced (McKittrick, 2006).

In “Toward an Epistemology of a Brown Body,” Cindy Cruz (2001) asks, “how does the brown body know?” (p. 658). To interrogate her question, Cruz (2001) utilizes Anzaldúa’s (1999) mestiza consciousness as a methodology to outline how, when traversing different world

landscapes, the brown body negotiates transcultural spaces equipped with the “tactics and worldviews” that help us change and develop (Cruz, 2001, p. 661). The brown body, Cruz (2001) asserts, is capable of rearranging subjectivities and of “comprising the impetus for the mitigation of racialized, classed, and queered intersections” (p. 660) in the production of new forms of being. Anzaldúa (1999) exemplifies the ways in which the body is always/already supplied with the necessary momentum to shift and adjust. Indeed, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999) she writes of the body at U.S.–Mexican border as a:

1,950 mile–long open wound / dividing a pueblo, a culture, / running down the length of my body, / staking fence rods in my flesh, / splits me splits me / me raja me raja / This is my home / this thin edge of / barbwire. / But the skin of the earth is seamless. / The sea cannot be fenced, / El mar does not stop at borders / To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance. / Yemayá blew that wire fence down. (p. 25)

Anzaldúa's (1999) proclamation is that her body is inescapable from the violent tear in the land that splits her and the U.S. and Mexico nation-states. Through this perspective, one can understand the brown body as entrenched in “divergent thinking” (Cruz, 2001, p. 661), allowing Anzaldúa (1999) to negotiate her relationship to herself according to the transformation that she undergoes as she moves through different geographies and worlds of sense. But she is seamless like the ocean. Without fences to contain her. Incapable of being “disciplined to obey the dominant social and cartographic order of borders” (Cahuas, 2019, para. 15). In this sense, Anzaldúa's (1999) open wounds are not symptomatic of a fragmented body. Rather, Anzaldúa's (1999) open wounds are the spillage of her “*resistance to the mutilation [emphasis added]*” of the brown body (Cruz, 2001, p. 661). *Before a scab forms, it hemorrhages again*, overflowing with her sense of self and a sense of place. It is not surprising then, that Anzaldúa (1999) finds a home at the thin edge of barbed wire, where the *lifeblood of two worlds* merge together to *form a third country*, a limen from her plurality.

The narratives, memories, and histories that are prompted from within the brown body remind us that space is socially constructed and therefore alterable (McKittrick, 2006). Because the brown body is a location of multiple ways of knowing, it is capable of charting new geographies that insist “on the possibilities for Latinx life in the most inhospitable of places” (Cahuas, 2019, para. 15)

A Method of Faithful Witnessing

How does one recognize resistance? A rich genealogy of Women of Color have asserted that traditional understandings of knowledge production have forced them to create and develop alternative methodologies for the study of their communities (Collins, 1989; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). In following the teachings of Women of Color researchers, scholars, and cultural practitioners, this ethnography is grounded on a Lugonian framework of faithful witnessing (Lugones, 2003) or what Yomaira C. Figueroa (2015) describes as a “method of collaborating with those who are silenced” (p. 642).

In the introduction to *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, Lugones (2003) writes that faithful witnessing is an epistemic praxis of “conveying meaning” to oppositional thoughts and movements fashioned by “subjects negotiating life in the tension of various oppressing ⇔ resisting relations” (p. 21). As such, she states that:

To witness faithfully is difficult, given the manyness of worlds of sense related through power so that oppressive and fragmenting meanings saturate many worlds of sense in hard to detect ways. A collaborator witnesses on the side of power, while a faithful witness witnesses against the grain of power. To witness faithfully one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression. (Lugones, 2003, p. 21)

Indeed, a method of faithful witnessing “requires researchers to develop literacies that are differential” (Cruz, 2011, p. 550); in other words, it requires a grammar that enables a reading that produces meaning across multiple “worlds of sense.” A commitment to witness faithfully defuses the dominant narrative of a singular interpretation of truth and knowledge (Figueroa, 2015). As such, ethnographers who witness faithfully must be responsible for two things: First, they must recognize oppression, in all of its subtleties, and second, they must recognize the myriad of ways in which subjects assert their dignity and humanity in spaces where these practices would otherwise be illegible. Witnessing faithfully, however, can be dangerous. In underscoring a thread to domination—in telling the story of how the oppressed challenge national investments of dispossession—faithful witnessing ruptures the knowability of domination, often naturalized by liberal and progressive notions of equity. Telling a different

story than school principals, district officials, and education non-profit organizations is a treacherous act. However, it is in the faithful witnessing of the moments of deceptions, stubbornness, and gestures that refuse violence that ethnographers can actively participate in the declaration of other voices and the affirmation of other truths. Certainly, as Figueroa (2015) writes, “without this kind of recognition, histories are erased, silenced, and ultimately invalidated as human experience” (p. 644).

An Ethnography of Queer Resistance in La Villa

La Villa is a pseudonym for a town widely known as Mexican and field working. Villa High, where this ethnography takes place, is the oldest educational institution in the town. Central to the story of La Villa is a strong and deep history of immigration and agricultural labor that pays homage to the legacy of the Bracero Program on the West Coast of the United States. As such, Villa High's yearbooks tell the story of immigration and racial segregation, with each turn of the page literally illustrating the transition from a homogeneously white to a homogeneously Latinx, but primarily Mexican, school. Villa High is a Title I school, and the year I first started visiting, the school increased its student population to a total of 2,170 students.

The stories at the center of this ethnographic work are the product of two years of active participation at the high school. All names of the protagonists are pseudonyms. During class periods, I assisted in a U.S. History class where I met some of the students whose voices are central to this story. Other students, like Joaquin, I met after being invited to the “gay club” which met once a week during lunchtime and with eight to twelve high school students from all grades. Conversations during this time allowed me to create bonds with these youth and gave me insight into their social world. Lunchtime, I quickly learned, is an opportunity for students to share stories of migration and homelessness, heartbreaks and crushes, and other secretive adventures away from the gaze of power that often interrupts and restructures their narratives.

Throughout the two years at Villa High, I utilized field notes to capture the negotiation and resistance processes that took place as participants reflected on their experiences as queer and trans youth in their school. As students interacted with their peers and staff, I wrote descriptive notes that resembled scenes of plays often with dialogue (Emerson et al., 2011). At times when I was alone walking the neighborhood and the corridors of the school, I engaged in ethnographic sketches—descriptive writing of stills much like photographs (Emerson et al., 2011). Characterizations of the students helped me effectively capture how they talked, moved,

and the nuance ways students relate to each other without the need of spoken words (Emerson et al., 2011). It is important to note that my role as a researcher and as a queer Latina is implicated in the collecting of the youths' stories. It is often common for queer Latinx folk to ask "si es familia"³ as a means of investigating someone else's sexuality. These students quickly evaluated my ties to that kinship. Therefore, my own lived experience as an out queer Black Latina, combined with a youthful aesthetic, facilitated a transition from peripheral researcher to trustworthy queer kin with an ambiguous role as an adult in the school. This, no doubt, facilitated trustworthy relationships.

Refusal as a Historical and Spatial Resistance

At the time this field note was written, I had known Joaquin for a whole academic year. At seventeen years, he possessed wisdom far beyond his age and took leadership positions in many of the school's clubs. Prior to this conversation, I had participated in one of Joaquin's "safe binding" workshops that he made for his queer and trans peers at school. Here, he shared his experience with different binding methods, offering product suggestions, warning others of what would happen if this was not done right and sharing his experience navigating school absence when he needed to rest from the physical fatigue binding caused his body. At that workshop, Joaquin offered to share his address to his peers if they felt unsafe having binders shipped to their homes. In another occasion, I witnessed Joaquin explaining to his peers the need to make their club a commitment to a safer school *and* community. This time, he told the story of the time a few students from Villa High harassed him and his best friend a few blocks from the school, but the dean of students took no action because the event happened off campus. He proceeded to tell his peers that other students who had graduated from Villa High had experienced similar situations. He finished the story by making fun of himself and saying, "I wear these ripped Vans, 'cause they're lighter to run with." Joaquin's knowledge of a history of homophobia in and out of his school sets the basis for his refusal of the restroom.

Audra Simpson (2016) defines refusal as a commitment to a historical truth. Refusal, in this sense, is the embodied knowledge and understanding that domination and oppression are not one single event but instead are constituted by a history of dispossession. By situating a historical knowing at its core, refusal "maintains and produces [a] sociality through time"

³ Familia is the Spanish word for family.

(Simpson, 2016, p. 330) that exposes a social-historical vision irreconcilable with liberal progressive projects that propose that dignity has been restored. Joaquin's deep awareness of the past is what allows him to point to the specific way that queer and trans youth continue to experience violence. Therefore, Joaquin's refusal to have an X on his back is an attempt at avenging a set of prior injustices and a denial that a gender-neutral restroom is a step toward inclusivity.

Joaquin's refusal also proposes that homophobia, transphobia, and sexism are not only bodily or identity based but are spatial acts that illustrate geographic experiences as they are made possible through domination. The home, the restroom, and the liminal borders of Villa High and La Villa are sites of struggle where queer and trans youth cannot do the emancipatory work their livelihood demands. Certainly, part of the work Joaquin's refusal does is link the historical past and present with a recognition of the locations of an urgent struggle for a socially just world. Joaquin provides an astute examination and practices of resistance to gendered and sexual domination across different borders that bring into focus queer and trans youths' complex relationship with geography.

Active Subjectivity as a Pedagogy of Resistance and Geography

Though Joaquin is the president of the student organization, he did not start the conversation. Instead, the impetus came from a student who wanted to know if it was okay with the group to beautify the gender-neutral restroom as her community capstone project. When this student asked the question, a freshman learned of the restroom but quickly became disappointed when he also learned that the restroom was by the bleachers, that the toilet did not work properly, and that the custodial staff stored their work items there. He made everyone laugh when he said, "*Uhh pues, ¿pa' que?* I'd pee my pants before I make it to the toilet."

Joaquin was silent for most of the conversation. Testosterone had made his face much rounder since the last time I saw him and had broadened his shoulders, but his giving nature ceased to change. The first thing he said came from a space of care—"But is that your job?" He assured the student that if beautifying the bathroom was something she wanted to do, he would be supportive, but reiterated that perhaps this was not a job that she needed to take on. Though the conversation was respectful and entangled with jokes and laughter, coming to a conclusion on the matter required narrating different experiences and perspectives that were

highly contested. For example, Joaquin’s partner, an undocumented cisgender gay male felt that beautifying the restroom would help facilitate a safer campus for queer and trans students who were yet to attend the school. After all, he asked, was a safer and more inclusive campus not part of the commitment they had made as a group? Another student felt that beautifying the restroom was not going to change things because the toilet itself was not functional. As such, Joaquin listened, nodded his head, agreed with some points, and, before he asked the question, he let everyone know that he also thought that his opinion would not be as popular as others. After some hesitation from his part and encouragement from his peers, he finally said:

I don’t think this gender-neutral restroom would be safer,” Joaquin speaks up. He pauses for a bit and then continues “Dre, do you have any thoughts or advice about changing the sign? I really think a sign that says, ‘gender neutral’ makes the bathroom ‘the trans bathroom’ and I don’t want us to have another X on our backs. Maybe a sign that says ‘single stalled restroom’ would be better. What do you all think?” (Field note, October 17, 2019)

When Lugones (2003) writes of an active subjectivity, she recognizes that an active subjectivity comes into contact with systems of oppression, and therefore, understanding the achievements of an active subjectivity will often be impaired by logics of domination. In fact, she writes that “from the standpoint of liberalism, [active subjectivity] would look like an almost inconsequential or attenuated sense of agency” (p. 5). However, Lugones’s (2003) understanding of active subjectivity as a process of “resistant meaning-making” (p. 5) provides a comprehensive appreciation of resistance that encompasses the dispositions, thoughts, and opinions that make critiques of oppression thinkable. As such, what started as an ask for collective permission developed into a meaning-making process where students engaged the “contradictions of the world” (Cruz, 2013)—Is inclusivity indeed a measure of safety?—and engaged in a practice where they are “actively constructing meaning together as a political activity” (Cruz, 2013, p. 449). Central to this discussion is the construction of knowledge, where students in intimate proximities like Joaquin and his peers of four years (and even his partner) share risks as they share different, and sometimes opposing, narratives of erasure, violence, desire, and hope attached to the gender-neutral restroom. Yet when Joaquin states that his opinion may not be a popular one, he opens the door of vulnerability for his peers and simultaneously conveys to them that he understands their world while allowing them to travel

to his world. Thus, what is at stake is the collective narrative that the gender-neutral restroom represents. In this sense, the multiple readings of what the restroom can mean for queer youth is important in seeing the world and learning to think differently and reflexively.

The spatial and embodied nature of the student's meaning making is also significant. A visible challenge for each student is the negotiation of how the restroom can make visible and invisibilize their bodies within the structure of Villa High. Indeed, a single-stalled restroom sign with no bodies that space can mark is a viable option. This is not the first time that Joaquin critiqued space through embodied knowledge. During another lunch hangout, Joaquin flashed an honor roll certificate with a girl's name. As he showed it to me, he said "Look, how cute, this girl is a star!" He then proceeded to tell me that earlier that day a teacher asked him if he wanted his name changed in the school's roster. My field note reads:

"She asked me in front of everyone," his eyes locked with mine, fire within them. "I know she meant well, but *the new students in that classroom* wanted to know what she was talking about." Joaquin left his certificate on top of a desk, exposing a previous embodied life. As students entered the classroom Joaquin greeted them, at times waving the certificate, laughing when students asked, "*who's that?*" This time he started the meeting by saying, "Y'all, before you hear it from someone else, I want to tell you what happened *in Ms. Smith's class* today." Whispers of "she thinks she's sooo woke," "I'm never taking a class with her," and "*You won't see me in her classroom,*" escaped from the group. (Field note, February 29, 2019, emphasis mine)

The X Joaquin spoke of is an understanding of how, as a trans person, he is both a target and disembodied even in the hospitable spaces of Villa High. Geographies of domination or what McKittrick (2006) defines as the "displacement of difference," wherein particular kinds of bodies are materially and visibly structured by a hierarchy that underscores a right to humanity (p. xiv), are present in the youths' active subjectivity. The purpose of Joaquin's story was not only to put out gossip fires but to also acknowledge the way in which space intersects with oppression to highlight the knowings that arise from the many terrains queer and trans youth travel. In this meeting, while students traveled to Joaquin's world, they learned how domination is a visible spatial project that organizes and *literally* names difference. It certainly is infuriating to Joaquin that he cannot be treated with dignity as he is outed and named by those who hold authority. The students' consideration of a restroom sign without a representation of

a body is a way of resisting the dismembering of their X'ed bodies. In this sense, the knowledge that stems from the body's journey to different terrains makes its way to their active subjectivity, refusing the story Villa High wants to tell about queer youth.

The Margins Aren't Marginal

During my time with Joaquin and his peers, I also witnessed how queer and trans youth made a home in a bungalow next to the school's barn. Here the youth were free to laugh, break bread, develop as teachers and activists, and engage in life affirming politics in an intimate space away from the core infrastructure of their school. These life affirming practices were simple: sharing chips when a student did not have money for lunch, making fun of a homophobic teacher, and enjoying the pleasures of sharing a kiss. These practices were activities that could not be situated within the gaze of the broader Villa High community without the fear of repercussions. They had to take place away from the surveillance of heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia.

McKittrick (2006) writes of the metaphoric use of "the margins" in social theory. Starting from the vantage point of Black feminists, McKittrick outlines how the idea of the margin is indeed interrelated with the displacement of the marked body but cautions social scientists of the reductionist potential of the margin, particularly as it relates to geography. For example, in writing of the way that bell hooks (1984) utilized the margin, McKittrick (2006) states that:

While black feminist theory and black women's struggles in general, are underwritten by a radical disruption of white patriarchal space, it should be emphasized that we think of this disruption not simply through the language of space... Indeed, metaphors like the margin are repeatedly and sporadically called on to name difference: the margin is emptied out, placeless, just theory, just language, and seemingly the *only* black feminist geography available in wider social theories. (p. 57)

As a descriptive and analytical tool, "the margin" and other places "outside" the dominant discourse allow black feminist and other disposed communities to locate the complexities of their unique relationships to domination and a struggle for liberation. As such, taking stake to the margin speaks back to processes of bodily territorialization. However, McKittrick (2006) argues that implicit in the *language* of the margin is the notion that "politics are where one speaks from" (p. 56), rhetorically and metaphorically placing certain

communities always/already in geographical margins. A margin is an edge, a border, the ignored space, the crust no one wants to eat. As McKittrick writes, "This language, the where of the margin shapes it [the spatiality of the margin] as an exclusively oppositional, unalterable site that cannot be easily woven into the ongoing production of space because the bifurcating geographies—margins are *not* centers—prohibit integrative processes" (p. 57). As such, the language of space inherently orients the understanding of the materiality and physicality of space. In doing so, the language of space also orients the value of the bodies and knowing of those who occupy that space.

Following McKittrick (2006), I want to suggest that Joaquin's and his peers' spatial and resistant politics are not at the margins. Their narratives, their teachings, their historical social memory, and their active subjectivity refashions spaces like the classroom by the school barn as central to their geographies. Like Anzaldúa (1999) who makes a home from barbwire because she knows the condition of her oppression, the queer and trans youth in this ethnography retell the story of space through their socialites. For example, when Joaquin tells the story of the teacher who outed him, his peers help rewrite the topographies of the school by shifting class schedules that rewire their movements throughout Villa High and thus push against the hegemonic routes the school wants them to use. In this sense, the youth not only reimagine their geographies but actively reconstruct them. For these youths, taking claim to space is not determined by ownership. Their geographies are underscored by a movement toward liberation (McKittrick, 2006).

Conclusion

Contrary to contemporary movements where young queer and trans people of color demand social change (e.g., Terríquez, 2015), the queer and trans youth I work with practice a resistance from *within* their social relationships. Resistance that stems from the intimacies of the quotidian is difficult work because it requires an acknowledgment of the way domination attempts to control the deepest sea beds of our being while also having to understand what that sea bed looks like for others. When Joaquin states that the X marks their bodies, he bridges his peers' understanding of the world and searches for a place where they can move toward liberation. Indeed, he provides a new set of literacy practices where he reads the body and transforms space.

What would it mean for educators to take Joaquin's pedagogy seriously—to start from the embodied socialites of queer and trans youth? To teach from a perspective where space is not the backdrop but rather a vital and dynamic ever-present actor in schools? At its bare minimum, it would require teachers to become attuned to the ways students located their stories and how they reinvent themselves. Joaquin's refusal demands the same engagement and labor from educators. His pedagogy of refusal is teaching the way youth work within a social history to interpret relationships and geographies of resistance. In a world where violence is inflicted by those who are supposed to love and protect us—cops, principals, teachers, friends, lovers—we cannot afford to ignore Joaquin's argument. We must listen to Joaquin.

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