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Homeplace of Hands: Fractal Performativity of Vulnerable Resistance

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HOMEPLACE OF HANDS:
FRACTAL PERFORMATIVITY OF VULNERABLE RESISTANCE

by

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B.A., Eastern Illinois University, 1993
M.A., Eastern Illinois University, 1995

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree

Department of Speech Communication
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
December 2009

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

HOMEPLACE OF HANDS:
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By

Diana L. Tigerlily

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the field of Speech Communication

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

DIANA L. TIGERLILY, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in SPEECH COMMUNICATION, presented on September 24, 2009, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: HOMEPLACE OF HANDS: FRACTAL PERFORMATIVITY OF VULNERABLE RESISTANCE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Elyse Pineau

Homeplace of Hands: Fractal Performativity of Vulnerable Resistance is a feminist autoethnography of possibility that puts on display two new concepts I've named *fractal performativity* and *vulnerable resistance*. *Fractal performativity* as a way of *seeing* is an integrative performance methodology that utilizes fractal geometry and performative autoethnography and brings together performance studies, feminist theory, multiethnic literature, personal story and poetry to communicate vulnerable resistance as a strategy for social transformation and selfhood. *Vulnerable resistance* as a way of *being* embodies a praxis of homeplace enacted through five modes I've identified as *nurturance, sustenance, maintenance, performance, and alliance*, expressed through the daily work of the hand as a metaphor, tool, and fractal. Deploying fractal performativity as an integrative method and conceptual framework, I design the fractal hand as a template that embodies intersecting identities and holds my stories as I cultivate homeplace and enact vulnerable resistance through the five modes. For scholar-artist-activists working on the margins, this integrative strategy offers hope to keep coming back day after day, and a template for cultivating homeplace of vulnerable resistance.

Key Words: feminist autoethnography, performative writing, fractals, vulnerable resistance, homeplace

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FRACTAL PERFORMATIVITY OF THE HAND

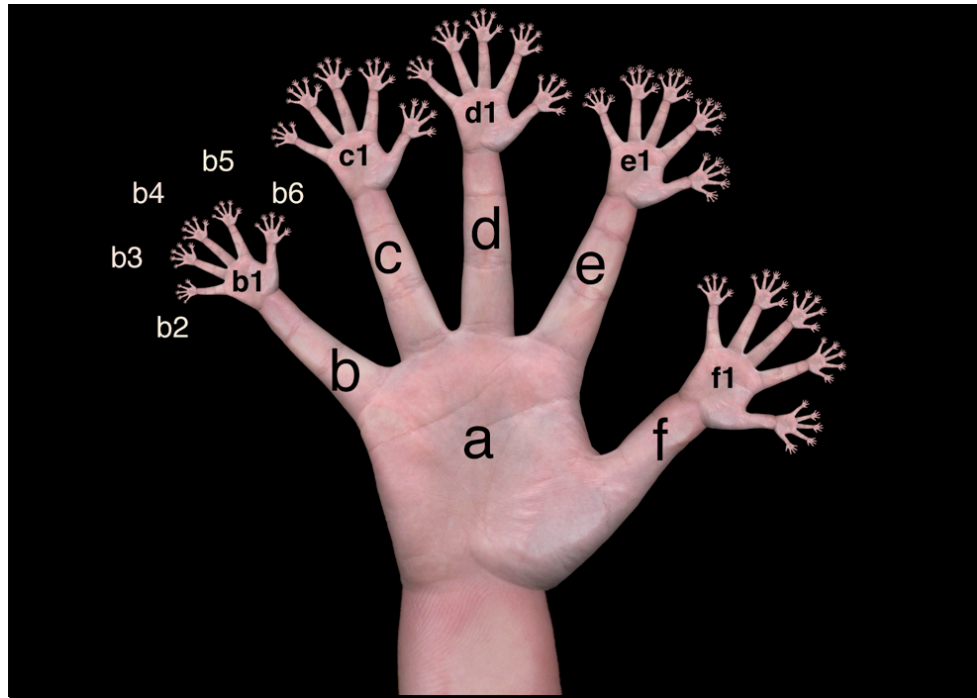


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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING FRACTAL PERFORMATIVITY OF VULNERABLE RESISTANCE

And yet no matter what these dreams and coincidences were, everything that happened during those months...had a wondrous effect on me, on the shape of my life. It pushed me, enlarged my outlook, and sent me searching for what I should believe in. Does it matter what the origins were? (Amy Tan, The Opposite of Fate 59)

Like Amy Tan I am learning that for my purposes on this planet, identifying cause isn't as important as understanding signs. I am learning that it is more productive for me to "see" and hear what it *means*, for example, when I feel a scent and energy shift, when I speak with intention and see a cardinal land in a tree with a snake coiled around the branch, when I recognize patterns and remember what I've already known in my heart. That recognition deepens my desire and affirms my capacity for living within a paradigm that values trust, hope, possibility, love. It is a "turn toward compassion that is the foundation of all ethical engagement" (Pineau, Green Window ix). It is an opening to the insight that "I am a reader of signs....I want to trust....I accept the possibility that my heart knows its facts" (Pelias, Methodology of the Heart 172). It is a resonance with Tan's epiphany that her writings "return to questions of fate and its alternatives" (2): "I saw that these musings about fate express my idiosyncratic and evolving philosophy, and this in turn is my 'voice,' the one that determines the kinds of stories I want to tell..." (Opposite of Fate 2).

I, too, see patterns in the stories I hear and the stories I choose to tell. My writings tend to be 'musings about fate' and reflections on 'dreams and coincidences' that have

been significant to ‘the shape of my life.’ These stories are my sense-makings, and they grow from the palm of my hand, from the place I hold my stories with both vulnerability and resistance. My hand is the metaphorical homeplace of generational lifelines, etched like tree roots in the soil of my palm. From this homeplace, my stories branch into theories of how I daily move through the world. What do I do to maintain, to simply breathe? How do I sustain myself, so I don’t deplete my resources? How can I daily perform without perpetuating the status quo? What nurtures me so I feel warm, safe, fed? What kinds of alliances do I value and cultivate as a means of creating communion and relationship? I view all of these as daily acts necessary for my survival, and I view the hand as the worker of these daily tasks. My hand holds together the patterns of my life, in all its various fated and alternative combinations. Amy Tan believes “these permutations of changing fate are really one all-encompassing thing: hope. Hope has always allowed for all things. Hope has always been there” (Opposite of Fate 3). One could say that hope is Tan’s mode of being, her strategy for survival. If I were asked what is my mode of being? What is the all-encompassing thing I believe is infused into permutations of fate? I would answer *vulnerable resistance*. Vulnerable resistance is the name I’ve given to a way of being that demonstrates daily practical spiritual survival by creating homeplace, using the tools at hand, with a spirit of attention, intention, and copresence.

To overview briefly, in this dissertation I reveal and enact vulnerable resistance through the content of academic, literary and personal narratives, and I draw upon fractal geometry to create the structure of this dissertation: a *fractal hand*. I rely upon the qualities of fractals and the tenants of performative autoethnography to create *fractal performativity*, the name I give to the method that integrates my stories to reflect the

pattern of my way of seeing. More concretely, this dissertation puts on display (1) *fractal performativity* of the hand to demonstrate my way of seeing that (2) as a means of creating *homeplace* while at the same time subverting dominant paradigms/ideologies, (3) many people enact in daily life what I have come to identify as *vulnerable resistance*, (4) a way of being expressed through the five modes of *maintenance, sustenance, nurturance, performance, and alliance* (5) utilizing the metaphorical and practical tools of the *fractal hand*.

I discuss and define all of these concepts in detail in this introductory chapter, following a brief preview of the chapters of this dissertation.

Preview of the Chapters

The dissertation as a whole is structured as a fractal hand. Simply stated, fractals are irregular or fragmented shapes that can be continually broken into smaller-scale versions of themselves or expanded into larger-scale versions of themselves in a repeating, self-similar structure. The repeating structure in this dissertation is the hand. Structurally speaking, the fractal hand is comprised of a “palm” and the five “fingers” which I refer to as the five modes of vulnerable resistance. The palm holds general information, and the modes (like fingers) have more specified actions. This introductory chapter, for example, is the “palm” of the dissertation as a whole, and the subsequent five chapters are the five modes: nurturance, sustenance, maintenance, performance, and alliance. As a fractal hand, the structure of the palm and five modes repeats itself through every chapter. Every chapter has its own “palm” that serves as the introductory component of the five modes contained within that chapter. Within the content of each chapter, personal stories and

literary narratives demonstrate my own and others' vulnerable resistance enacted daily through concrete examples, descriptions, and actions of maintenance, performance, sustenance, nurturance, and alliance.

This introductory chapter is divided into two parts and introduces terms and methods of the dissertation. Part I introduces terminology and includes definitions and discussion of vulnerable resistance, homeplace, and the five modes of vulnerable resistance: nurturance, sustenance, maintenance, performance, and alliance. Part I offers the reader a basis into how these concepts both shape and ground the dissertation. Part II introduces a methodology of fractal performativity and defines and discusses fractals, fractal hands, and fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance. This section discusses how other scholars have utilized fractals as an organizing logic, how fractals serve as an organizing theme for this dissertation, and how performative autoethnography informs fractal performativity. Fractal performativity is my method of seeing that serves an organizing template as I write toward vulnerable resistance as a method of being.

In Chapter Two I enact fractal performativity of "Vulnerable Resistance as Nurturance" to create a sense of homeplace for myself within my family. My personal stories of family history, spirituality, and daily performances as a daughter and mother intersect with themes of food and grief that permeate my Lebanese American identity. I draw upon a variety of literature that connects food and grief with homeplace, and in performative prose with poetic weavings of citation throughout, I share my mother's stories and my father's stories to enact vulnerable resistance through compassion in order to transform generational grief.

In Chapter Three I enact fractal performativity of “Vulnerable Resistance as Sustenance” by drawing on global ecofeminists to foreground my own ecospiritual feminism and to illustrate how this way of being manifests in my daily life. Utilizing personal narrative and performance poetry, I illustrate the ways I sustain homeplace through my relationship to different physical places, friendships I’ve cultivated, my everyday politics, my daily performances of organic parenting and gardening, and my decision to name myself.

In Chapter Four I enact fractal performativity of “Vulnerable Resistance as Maintenance” by detailing the different ways individuals enact aesthetic forms of maintenance through ‘hand and tongue’ as an expression of voice in everyday lives and then by asserting writing as my preferred form of aesthetic maintenance. Here I foreground my writing activism as I write across several genres to display the personal and political ways I enact homeplace by incorporating writing as my way of life. Through performative journal entries, performance poetry, dialogue, personal story, and reflexive prose, I write the landscape of my life, from homebirthing my baby to watching my uncle die, from flying across fractal landscapes to anchoring myself in prayer.

In Chapter Five I enact fractal performativity of “Vulnerable Resistance as Performance” by both writing about and displaying heightened performances organized around the theme of healing splits within myself and stepping into my power as a means of creating homeplace through rituals of performance. Performative writing, prose, and personal story describe performances across venues that include a theatre stage, a classroom, my self, a neighborhood, and a coffeehouse.

In Chapter Six I enact fractal performativity of “Vulnerable Resistance as Alliance” by foregrounding homeplace through relationships. I refer to literature that illustrates egalitarian relationships of safety and homeplace, and I utilize Lorde’s conceptualization of the erotic as the relational glue of this chapter. This chapter reveals an erotic sensibility across themes of fluid sexuality, cross-cultural dynamics, competitive performances, psychic dreams, and deep listening. The stories are expressed through genres of personal narrative, performative prose, performance poetry, and performative reflection.

The conclusion, Chapter Seven, offers the fractal hand as “Opening into Possibility.” Here, I review how fractal performativity as an integrative performance methodology offers a template for cultivating homeplace and enacting vulnerable resistance through modes of nurturance, maintenance, sustenance, performance, and alliance. I suggest ways that artist-activist-scholars might utilize fractal performativity as an embodied intersectional methodology as they work on behalf of social justice.

Part I: Terminology of Vulnerable Resistance and Homeplace

To situate my discussion of vulnerable resistance and homeplace, I offer a brief primer on why fractals are relevant as a conceptual and organizational device. I detail fractals more fully in Part II.

Benoit Mandelbrot, the father of fractals, acknowledges that the “ambition of fractal geometry” is to provide a “middle ground” between the “extremes of the excessive geometric order of Euclid, and of the true geometric chaos of the most general mathematics” (“Fractals” 6). Mandelbrot’s fractals also create a “middle ground” between art and

science. He reflects upon the constructed divide between art and science, and his integration of the two:

It may have become true that people who think best in shapes tend to go into the arts, and that people who go into science or mathematics are those who think in formulas. On these grounds, one might argue that I was misplaced in going into science, but I do not think so. Anyhow, I was lucky to be able – eventually – to devise a private way of combining mathematics, science, philosophy and the arts. (“In His Own Words” 215)

That “middle ground” of Mandelbrot’s “fractal ambition” is a third space of its own. In the same way that Mandelbrot’s fractals represent a non-binariéd ambition of finding new ground between total order and total chaos and to create an interdisciplinary bridge between the arts and the sciences, so does this dissertation seek to create a third thing. This dissertation, written as a fractal aesthetic from my particular way of being, offers an epistemological methodology that is a third mode I call *vulnerable resistance*. As fractals are not the extreme of order nor the extreme of chaos, but a “middle ground” of simultaneity that holds elements of both extremes and is a third thing in and of itself, vulnerable resistance is neither the extreme of vulnerability nor the extreme of resistance but a ground of simultaneity that is a third thing in and of itself.

Vulnerable Resistance

I move through this world in vulnerability to stay attuned to life’s interconnections. Sometimes, I lose my clarity and my place in the world feels strange. The world around me swirls until I’m able to reconnect. When I am grounded and

centered I can stand in place, I can resist, I can be at home amidst the swirling world. My standing in place is not a rigid resistance, but rather a vulnerable resistance. It is a resistance that means being securely planted, like a seed in soil: open to the elements, absorbing, full of potential, receptive and reciprocating. This vulnerability merges with a resistance of solid stillness, a supple centeredness that allows for bending without breaking and can continue standing amidst dominant ideologies, mainstream dictations of 'True' ways of being that conflict with my personal truths and experiences. Vulnerability and resistance together create vulnerable resistance. Vulnerable resistance is a mode of being that demonstrates daily survival from a non-binariad perspective that is spiritually, creatively, and physically nourishing. Vulnerable resistance is my daily spirituality of opening my heart, listening deeply, reading the signs, trusting the moment.

As Mandelbrot suggested, fractal patterns offer alternatives to binary ways of thinking in that they create a ground of simultaneity that is a third thing in and of itself. Similarly, vulnerability and resistance together create a vulnerable resistance that is neither solely the extreme of vulnerability nor the extreme of resistance, but a third mode for daily practical spiritual survival. Vulnerable resistance prevents erasure through standing rooted in flowing stillness, as "word and body/are all we have to lay on the line," (Rich, "transparencies" 49). Vulnerable resistance refers to the body of an individual or a people resisting literal and/or metaphoric colonization by resisting disconnection from their homeplace through nurturance, sustenance, maintenance, performance, and alliance.

Vulnerable resistance is similar to Winona LaDuke's both/and strategy of 'survival,' a holistic strategy she distinguishes from Western either/or paradigms of

conquest and predator/prey relationships (“Honor the Earth” 180). Vulnerable resistance is also similar to Gloria Anzaldua’s “*mestiza* consciousness,” a way of being for people living in the “borderlands,” the space between two or more cultures. Mestiza consciousness allows one to keep “intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity” (Borderlands), and seeks to break down that “duality that says we are able to be only one or the other” (41). Vulnerable resistance is similar to Patricia Hill Collins’ “Black Feminist Thought,” which she offers as a way to avoid the binary pitfalls of absolute truth and relativism, which she says tend to minimize the importance of location. Black Feminist Thought is an approach that bridges the two extremes without losing the power of an individual or group standpoint, while at the same time empowering voices to speak from their personal standpoint (Collins, Black Feminist Thought), or homeplace. Vulnerable resistance is also similar to Jose Esteban Munoz’s strategy of disidentification, “a third mode” that works not through assimilation nor rebellion but ““on and against”” dominant ideology “to enact...structural change while ...valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (11). And it is similar to Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity, “an ‘in-between’ reality” (“Home and the World” 148), a “third space” that “overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking...that is...*neither the one nor the other*” (Location of Culture 25, italics in original). Vulnerable resistance is a social activism in keeping with LaDuke’s notion of survival, Anzaldua’s *mestiza* consciousness, Collins’ Black Feminist Thought, Munoz’s concept of disidentification, and Bhabha’s suggestion of hybridity, all of whom are writing toward homeplace. They, along with

Mandelbrot, are each speaking beyond binaries, toward a liminal third space of political praxis to create homeplace.

Many activist-scholars' across disciplines address a need to speak beyond binaries, and I draw upon that work in this dissertation. I recognize a commonality in their activism as vulnerable resistance, a liminal third space of political praxis that creates homeplace. Vulnerable resistance is my name for embodied possibility, and I identify it as my way of being. The soft openness of vulnerability combined with the fierce strength of resistance creates a third space of safety: the safe space I call homeplace. Vulnerable resistance is an embodied enactment of Bhabha's assertion that we need "a shift of attention from the political as a theory to politics as the activity of everyday life" (Bhabha "The World and The Home" 149). Vulnerable resistance is both a theory and a practice of homeplace. Said another way, vulnerable resistance is a praxis of everyday living, the embodied enactment of survival, grounded in the tangible actions of creating homeplace. In the following paragraphs I offer a collection of examples ranging across literature, poetry, and essays that demonstrate vulnerable resistance.

In "Shaping the World with our Hands," Laila Farah writes of her embodied awareness of resistance, of putting word and body on the line: "During the Israeli invasion of Beirut, I learned whole new meanings of the word resistance... I learned how resistance had nothing to do with revolution; it had everything to do with living" (286). Alice Walker writes that when one begins to "decolonize the spirit," our interactions come from our hearts and we begin to flow:

And out of this flowing comes the natural activism of wanting to survive, to be happy, to enjoy one another and Life, and to laugh. We begin to distinguish the need, singly, to throw rocks at whatever is oppressing us, and the creative joy that arises when we bring our collective stones of resistance against injustice together. (“The Only Reason...” 26)

As Arundhati Roy writes, it’s a strategy that lays siege “with our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our own stories.” (War Talk 112). Everyday, in these daily acts, individuals across times and spaces have laid word and body on the line “expressed as often through the poetry, stories, and novels being published as it is in Indian activist movements” (Gunn Allen, Spider Woman’s Granddaughters 229). As medicine woman Dhyani Ywahoo reminds me:

...the empowerment of the voice cannot come from anger. It comes from the certainty of the gentle power within ourselves. It comes from the certainty that nurturing, giving, receiving, also requires a fierceness to see that the children grow....Let our words be strong and at the same time gentle. Let our planting be planting seeds of certainty.... (Perrone, Medicine Women 81-82)

Ywahoo’s “seeds of certainty” embody extremes exemplifying vulnerable resistance.

Farah’s, Walker’s, Roy’s, Allen’s, and Ywahoo’s conceptualizations of ‘resistance’ are not about linear conquest or aggression, but rather they conceptualize survival as resistance through relationship and reciprocity, an embracing copresence, a naming of homeplace in the struggle to stay connected to place, to each other, within ourselves, in order to hold together and live. It is an act of vulnerable

resistance: a clasping of each other's hands from a shared ground, a cauldron of hands holding one another through stories.

Another example of vulnerable resistance is exemplified in Sitt Marie Rose, Etel Adnan's novel about a Lebanese Christian woman who is kidnapped, tortured, and killed for her work in the Palestinian Resistance. In this novel, vulnerable resistance is an act of enduring strength fueled and sustained by love. During her captivity, Marie Rose exercises vulnerable resistance, staying loving while resisting this system of dominance. "I want to make my peace with everyone. Even with my captors..." (86). Even as she says she "can no longer stand it" (86), she stands in vulnerable resistance when morning breaks and her captors tell her the enemy camp has asked she be exchanged in return for eleven hostages. Instead of agreeing to this exchange that would save her life, Marie Rose declares, "What makes you think that I wouldn't rather die than serve as the small change in one of your transactions?..." (87). Adnan follows Marie Rose's declaration with a metanarrative that demonstrates the power of vulnerable resistance: "Marie Rose frightens them. They have all the means in the world to crush her in a second....But they've known from the beginning that they wouldn't be able to conquer either her heart or her mind. The more she spoke to them of love, the more they are afraid..." (87-89).

Vulnerable resistance is revealed through Carolyn Duferrena's "Woman Sculpted of Stones" and I quote it at length because to me it captures vulnerable resistance in both substance and form—as fractal patterns ("gathered fragments of our mother" and "another truth/within each stone") and in the simultaneous qualities of hard and soft, fierce vulnerability.

A human form outlined in steel:/ Grandmother, filled with stones,/... /
 White quartz cobbles, pieces of the earth,/tumbling down a canyon
 river,/gathered fragments of our mother.//So feminine to remain,/to permit
 abrasion beneath the running water's surface,/be made smooth./Not
 soft.//They are individuals at first glance,/but closer scrutiny reveals another
 truth/within each stone: quartz is nearly as hard as diamond,/yet beneath the
 weight of mountains, flows... (Dufferrena 167-168, on Linda Fleming's
 sculpture Gramma Seed)

Dufferrena's words capture a vulnerable resistance in form and content of this stone sculptured woman, particularly in her specifications of smooth and soft, and hard and flowing. Her use of the phrase "to remain" alludes to the etymology of resist—'to stand in place' which, coupled with 'to be made smooth, not soft,' expresses vulnerable resistance, as do the lines, "quartz is nearly as hard as diamond,/yet beneath the weight of mountains, flows."

Throughout this dissertation I detail the praxis of vulnerable resistance as homeplace by offering examples and analysis of literary, activist, academic, and personal narratives, prose, and poetry. I show how vulnerable resistance is enacted to create homeplace through the everyday modes of maintenance, nurturance, sustenance, performance, and alliance. In the next two sections, I define homeplace and the five everyday modes of vulnerable resistance.

Homeplace

Activists, writers and performers often address the world's injustices by writing about their own daily survival and resistance. A theme I've recognized across many of these writings is the attention to the importance of homeplace, the emphasis on creating a nourishing place of safety through the daily tasks of living. These writings articulate for me a notion of homeplace as a site for restor(y)ing identity by cultivating relationships among and between selves and soils. The writers dismantle hierarchies by revealing that holistic infusion of mindbodyspirit is necessary for survival in our local and global everyday lives. I have come to understand that writing homeplace has long been an act of psychic survival, written against chronic colonization in all its forms. I am struck by this theme as I similarly attempt to create and sustain a sense of homeplace, a safe space of centeredness and flow, through the mode of vulnerable resistance.

Chandra Mohanty asks, "What is home? The place I was born? ... Where I locate my community, my people? Who are "my people"? Is home a geographical space, a historical space, an emotional, sensory space?..." (Feminism Without Borders 126). With Mohanty I begin to realize that "this question—how one understands and defines home—is a profoundly political one" (126) and that individuals' understandings and definitions of homeplace are as unique as they are political. Paula Gunn Allen points to homeplace as relationships between self, other, and soil: "Sense of place is about an ongoing relationship, not only of self but of others who have touched one's life. And all those events are cradled in the land" (237). In her essay "Household Words," Kingsolver writes, "Home is place, geography, and psyche; it's a matter of survival and safety, a condition of attachment and self-definition" (197-198). In Yearning, bell hooks names homeplace as "a site of resistance" (41) and states that the white subjugation of black

people globally has deprived many people of the means to “make homeplace” (46). She writes that homeplace is “that small private reality where black women and men can renew their spirits and recover themselves” and that “when a people no longer have the space to construct homeplace, we cannot build a meaningful community of resistance” (47). Nawal el Saadawi explicitly ties identity and homeplace:

For me there is no identity without home, no identity without a land on which I can stand, without a language, without the means to keep it alive and help it to flourish and grow, without an organization and a pen with which to struggle for freedom and justice and love and peace, for women to know they are human beings, for blacks to feel that all the colours in the world are what make it glow.
 (“Identity” 126)

Saadawi links identity and homeplace to emphasize the relationship between the personal and political: the act of writing oneself into existence is an act of social justice.

Throughout this dissertation I reference a selection of literary and scholarly writings that articulate for me a notion of homeplace. In this context, ‘homeplace’ refers to land and soil as well as places not directly tied to landscape; ‘homeplace’ can be a psychic, non-physical, and/or relational “space”; homeplace can refer to nation or family but does not assume that one’s nation or family is one’s “homeplace” (with the understanding also that “family” can be more than a genetic, biological, or genealogical construction).

While the landscape of these writings are diverse, they are grounded in a shared terrain: they enact what I identify as vulnerable resistance in relation to colonization, globalization, and destruction of home by storying identity through a commitment to maintaining interconnections within and between self, place, and other. Each of the writers

are writing across a variety of genres, writing a future by writing narratives from their own homeplaces of resistance. Or, as Anzaldua would say, they are “creating a new mythos... a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves and the ways we behave” in order to create “a new consciousness” (Borderlands 102). Said yet another way, and again by Anzaldua, by sending our “voices, visuals and visions” into the world we “alter the walls and make them a framework for new windows and doors. We transform the *posos*, apertures, *barrancas*, *abismos* that we are forced to speak from. Only then can we make a home out of the cracks” (Making Face, Making Soul xxv).

I offer a working definition of homeplace as a site or space where persons can feel safety and acceptance to be ‘themselves’ and to love and be loved. Homeplace is a site or space one can return to and/or create for nourishment. I’ve identified meanings of homeplace emerging in five general ways of experience, and examples for each will be provided throughout the dissertation: (1) homeplace through acts of *nurturance* such as cooking and sharing food as well as transforming grief; (2) homeplace through acts of *sustenance* grounded in the soil, such as connections sustained between self and place; (3) homeplace through acts of everyday and heightened *performance* that both requires and facilitates a healing of splits, a grounded centeredness or ‘homeplace’ within the self; (4) homeplace through everyday aesthetic acts of *maintenance* such as writing; and (5) homeplace through acts of *alliance*, creating communion with others to facilitate strong relationships and coalitions.

Homeplace and the Five Modes of Vulnerable Resistance

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance creates homeplace through sharing

food, providing comfort, transforming grief. The hand nurtures. The nurturing hand shapes the dough, catches the newborn, buries the dead, and wipes the tears. My experience and conceptualization of nurturance is related to family, food, and grief contextualized within everyday themes of living and dying. This mode of nurturance is most reflective of my Lebanese-American self, my biological family and my bicultural upbringing. Themes of homeplace through Lebanese identity, food, and grief are present across stories of all nurturance sections. If I were to characterize the mode of nurturance as an element, I would call it “water,” for tears and bloodlines.

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance is the connection to place: geographical, physical, mystical, including the living world of plants and spirits, also called the “*Shringar Bhum*” (Mies and Shiva). The hand sustains. The sustaining hand builds the soil. In the connection to a site or space we sustain homeplace. For some people the relationship exists between selves and a specific physical location. For some that location is a particular landscape, a particular tree, a particular crack in the sidewalk. For others, it is a less tangible place, and more of a psychic space. For me, when I am in connection with the soil around me, be it sandstone, clay, or ocean shore, I feel a solid sense of safety. I feel that I am connected to something bigger than myself that is tangible and that helps me feel at home. In that sustaining feeling of homeplace where I feel safe and strong, I am able to be the most open and vulnerable to perception, to perceiving the world around me. Here is when I’m able to learn from “reading the signs” of the world around me. Here my heart-memory awakens. In the mode of sustenance, I create homeplace by working *in relationship with* the world around me; for example, I build the soil for my organic gardens with manure from my chickens who eat/control the tick

population, and in turn provide me with the high-protein eggs I eat daily. When I sustain connections, I feel I am in the most control over my life and the most safe, and therefore am able to be more open to receiving and ultimately to be more giving. This fierce vulnerability is vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance. The mode of sustenance is most reflective of my earth spirituality/ecofeminist self. If I were to characterize this mode as an element, I would call it “earth,” for soil and stability. Across the sustenance sections, themes of ecofeminism, spirituality, and environmentalism are present.

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance is the creating of homeplace through everyday aesthetic acts of maintenance that also have a practical function such as cleaning, weeding, painting (as both refined art and housekeeping), building houses, and writing. I refer to these everyday acts of the hand as aesthetic in that these acts embody an aesthetic of utilitarian, everyday beauty. In acts of maintenance, I appreciate the aesthetic of everyday beauty created, for example, from sweeping the floor so it is simply clean and writing a journal entry for catharsis and personal clarity, to crafting a hand-carved bowl used to serve food or piecing together a quilt functioning as warm, beautiful, utilitarian, and as a narrative of maintaining survival, not so different from the quilt in Alice Walker’s short story “Everyday Use.” The hand maintains. In Maintenance sections, I reference activists, artists, and scholars who demonstrate vulnerable resistance through aesthetic acts of maintenance. I make the link between hand and tongue, pen and voice. I acknowledge that my personal and preferred mode of maintenance is writing. Writing for me functions in a number of ways. When I am writing, I feel ‘home.’ I need to write for my own feelings of centeredness, plus I feel it is one of my most effective modes of activism. Writing is an act of vulnerable resistance because I open myself

deeply, in the most vulnerable way, but it is through writing that I can also feel strong and safe within this open vulnerability. Writing allows me to examine myself, to “see” myself in ways that I normally cannot, and so I am able to feel empowered to be “safely” my strongest. Through writing I feel that I am in the most control over my voice (at least in my selection and arrangement of words; how my words are interpreted or used I admit I have much less control over). It is this fierce vulnerability that is, in effect, vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance. The mode of maintenance is most reflective of my writer self. If I were to characterize this mode as an element, I would call it air, for breath and voice. A theme of “breath” or “breathing” is present across the sections of maintenance as are themes of writing as activism and storying to prevent erasure.

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of performance creates homeplace through healing splits within oneself to access one’s personal power as well as to begin healing the disconnections that occur under colonization. This healing occurs through everyday and heightened performances. The hand channels energy. Holding a torch for justice like a seed between thumb and forefinger, the performing hand ignites social activism from a place of personal power. In this section I discuss how the performance paradigm heals mind/body/spirit splits by reintroducing the body to the academic paradigm, which has traditionally privileged the mind over the body. Across all sections of performance in this dissertation, vulnerable resistance is enacted through everyday actions as well as staged activism. For example, through my performance work addressing depleted uranium I try to heal damages resulting from the many disconnections inherent in war. The mode of performance is most reflective of my performer self. If I were to characterize the mode of performance as an element, I would name it “fire” for the passion and spark involved

in self-empowerment as a first step toward social justice. Themes of war, competition, power, and justice are present through the sections of performance.

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance creates homeplace through relationships between people. The hand creates alliance. Holding hand in hand, the allying hand reaches across diversities to touch in solidarity. The allying hand forms communities and support networks built around the caring of the seeds of vulnerable resistance. We create homeplace through relationships with each other. In doing so, we enact vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance. The sections of alliance offer examples of the ways alliances between people create meaningful relationships that have power to enact social change. The mode of alliance is most reflective of my erotic self. The theme of the erotic, as conceptualized by Audre Lorde, is a sensual source of power that fuels justice. The erotic theme runs through all sections of alliance. If I were to characterize alliance as an element, I would call it “ether” or “spirit” for its connective power: spirit infuses and holds together relationships.

Part II: Methodology of Fractal Performativity

I have defined and discussed vulnerable resistance, homeplace, and the five modes of vulnerable resistance: nurturance, sustenance, performance, maintenance, and alliance. In this section, I define and discuss fractal performativity as a structure and method for organizing and demonstrating the ways I enact vulnerable resistance to create homeplace through the five modes. First, I define fractal geometry and discuss the *qualities of fractals*. Second, I introduce the *hand as a metaphor, a practical tool, and a fractal* in order to explain my choice of structuring this dissertation as a *fractal hand*.

Third, I discuss *fractals as a way of seeing* to begin to introduce fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance. Fourth, I offer an overview of *performance studies* to show how it informs fractal performativity. Fifth, I discuss *fractal performativity as a unifying schema* for the interdisciplinary aspect of this dissertation, as well as my multiple ways of seeing/being, and I offer a definition of fractal performativity. Sixth, I review literature revealing how other *scholars have also utilized fractals as an organizing theme* for their scholarship. Finally, I review methods of performative writing, autoethnography, and autoethnographic performance as I write toward *fractal performativity as an integrative performance methodology*.

Fractals and their Qualities

For as long as I can remember, I've read the patterns of things. I've watched fireflies sparkle like constellations falling from the skies, dancing the visual of frog chorus. I've found stars in the centers of flowers and spirals in the tendrils of vines. I've traced concentric circles in the flesh of beets and naked branches webbed against sky. I've held leaf-veins in the palm of my hand and worshiped the muscles of tree roots entwined like lovers in loam. I began to recognize the repetitions of these patterns: silk stars centered in hollyhock blossoms and seed stars centered in apple hearts; waves in water and ripples on sand; rivers coursing towards oceans, veins mapping my hands. I realized that these patterns are a form, a shape for holding energy. I saw the energetic shape of flowing river water express itself in branching patterns, and the energetic shape of ocean water present itself in waves. I saw that these energies and patterns created a fabric mosaic, a pulsing of spirit that led me to know I was alive. I came to feel this

pulsing energetic tapestry of patterns as that life force some people call God. But when I learned that ‘God’ was, to many people, a power conceptualized as separate from us, out there, up there, looking down on us from “His” place on high, I sensed that this might be a God different from the pulsing life force I believed in. When I was five, I asked my mom, Who is God’s mother? and this stumped her, so she took me to the priest at our church. He talked to me about a chicken and an egg and told me that God was a chicken. I left that conversation concluding that there must be more than one God because my God was more likely an egg, the holder and potential of life, and together we were all that egg of potential, some of us a little more scrambled than others, some fried, some over easy. I decided that for the most part, I was sunny side up, and I went back outside to watch the patterns of ants.

At the same time that I was studying patterns and conversing with priests about eggs, a French mathematician named Benoit Mandelbrot conceived and developed a “new geometry of nature” to describe the “irregular and fragmented patterns around us.” Mandelbrot called this family of shapes “fractals” (Fractal Geometry of Nature, 1977), “a new concept whose roots are traceable over centuries and millennia” (Mandelbrot “A Maverick’s Apprenticeship” 1). Found in nature and also mathematically fabricated with computer-generated visuals, fractals are shapes that can be broken into parts, each part a small-scale model of the whole-- a concept whose simplicity, says Mandelbrot, is deceiving: “It has generated a surprisingly broad range of important shapes that can model a surprisingly broad range of important phenomena,” (“Maverick” 1). In the instance of this dissertation, for example, fractals have allowed me to generate the shape of the fractal hand in order to model the phenomenon of vulnerable resistance.

Mandelbrot was deliberate in his naming of fractals, coining the word *fractal* from the Latin adjective *fractus*, whose corresponding Latin verb *frangere* means “to break:” to create irregular fragments. He exclaimed, “It is therefore sensible—and how appropriate for our needs!—that, in addition to ‘fragmented’ (as in *fraction* or *refraction*), *fractus* should also mean ‘irregular,’ both meanings being preserved in *fragment*” (Fractal Geometry 4).

Fractal geometry is distinct from traditional Euclidean geometry. Euclidean geometry is associated with standard geometric shapes and smooth edges and characterizes all other shapes as “formless.” Mandelbrot characterizes Euclidean geometry as a geometry that has “disdained the challenge” to “investigate the morphology of the ‘amorphous.’” (Fractal Geometry 1). He asserts:

Why is geometry often described as “cold” and “dry?” One reason lies in its inability to describe the shape of a cloud, a mountain, a coastline, or a tree. Clouds are not spheres, mountains are not cones, coastlines are not circles, and bark is not smooth, nor does lightning travel in a straight line. (Fractal Geometry 1)

The traditional geometric structures of Euclid, as well as the evolving dynamics of Newton, informed 19th century classical mathematics. The era of 20th century modern mathematics began with a revolution resulting from the discovery of mathematical structures that did not fit the standard patterns of Euclid and Newton. Classical mathematicians rejected these non-standard structures. “The hold of standard geometry was so powerful...that the resulting shapes were not recognized as models of nature. Quite the contrary, they were labeled ‘monstrous’ and ‘pathological’” (Mandelbrot, “Fractals as a Morphology” 6). Fractal geometry was born of this revolution. Mandelbrot stresses that fractal geometry “is a new branch born belatedly of the crisis of

mathematics” (Fractal Geometry 4).

Mandelbrot refers to fractal geometry as “a branch of learning, more precisely, of knowing and feeling” that he built around “two intertwined threads of thought: disorder in nature and self-similarity” (“Fractals” 2). Random fractals reflect the repeating patterns of what is seemingly disorder in nature. Geometric fractals reflect the self-similarity, or self-repeating structure, of fractals.

A coastline is an example of a random fractal. One of Mandelbrot’s most famous early essays, “How Long is the Coast of Britain?” demonstrates the random fractal. The short answer to the title’s question is “it depends.” It depends on the length and mode of measurement. Empirical evidence reveals that the smaller the increment of measurement, the longer the length. If you were to measure the length of the coastline by circling it in a boat, you would get a particular measurement. If you were to measure its length while on foot, you would get a longer measurement because traversing the coastline on foot is going to reveal more nooks and crannies, more “roughness.” If you were a small insect traveling the coastline, the length of the coastline would be still even longer. Mathematically speaking, the coastline’s length is variable and infinite. Fractals, in their own mathematical language, reiterate what progressive qualitative researchers remind us: how we stand in relation to one another, with another being or object, matters. Importantly, everything can’t be measured with the same yardstick or standard. Meaning is relational and contingent and multiple. My fractal hand is a random fractal possessing its own unique “roughness” or experiences, and every other person’s hand expresses its own unique ‘story’ of roughness. Both the mathematical language of fractal geometry and the narrative language of qualitative methods such as autoethnography teach us that our similarities and

differences live in these terrains of roughness and require varying standards of measurement in order for us to begin to understand each other and to value what we've learned from our stories.

The second quality of fractals is self-similarity, which refers to the self-repeating structure of fractals. Each fractal set is made up of fractal shapes that are identical at all scales. A popular example of this is the *Romanesco* cauliflower. Each individual bud of the cauliflower looks exactly like the entire head, and each bud sub-divides into smaller buds. Says Mandelbrot, "The same structure repeats over the five levels of separation you can do by hand and see by the naked eye, and then over many more levels you can see only with a magnifying glass or microscope" ("Fractals" 6). Mandelbrot explains that if a person took smaller and smaller portions of a standard geometric shape and magnified each portion, the enlargements would become increasingly smooth. Fractals, however, possess "roughness," and this makes them a category their own, whether they are mathematically constructed or found in nature. "Broadly speaking, mathematical and natural fractals are shapes whose roughness and fragmentation neither tend to vanish, nor fluctuate up and down, but remain essentially unchanged as one zooms in continually and examination is refined. Hence, the structure of every piece holds the key to the whole structure" ("Fractals" 6-7). In this way, fractals are simultaneous and multiple. Each fractal scale, upon magnification, is both the ground that provides input for the next magnified figure, and it is the figure itself. Each fractal comprises the fractal set and is the fractal set itself. This self-similar structure captures the essential quality of a fractal. Fractals intensify in detail with magnification; looking closely at the particulars reveal components of the universal, and vice versa. Regarding the dissertation as a fractal hand, each chapter of this dissertation is a fractal set

holding all the components of the entire dissertation: homeplace and the five modes of vulnerable resistance are present in every chapter as fractal sections. In this way ‘the structure of every piece holds the key to the whole structure’. Each section offers a complete fractal (a full fragment) of my way of being.

Hand as Metaphor, Tool, and Fractal

Fractals are useful to me in organizing this dissertation as a metaphor for my way of being and as metonym of my body. The fractal hand I have conceptualized as the structure and content of this dissertation is both a geometric fractal and a random fractal. The fractal hand is a geometric fractal in that, structurally, the pattern of the hand repeats itself at various scales throughout the document; e.g., the structure of the fractal hand contains smaller fractal hands through the repetitive structure of the palm and five modes of nurturance, sustenance, maintenance, performance, and alliance. At the same time, in terms of content, the fractal hand is a random fractal, as in Mandelbrot’s coastline example. For example, the fractal sections of nurturance, sustenance, maintenance, performance, and alliance within the fractal set of each chapter are not of identical length and content. The lengths vary, as do the genres. Some fractal sections are written as academic prose; some as performance poetry, some as journal entries, some as poetic prose. Additionally, the fractal sections do not follow the same order in every chapter. For example, in some chapters the first fractal section might be alliance and in another chapter the third or fourth fractal section might be alliance. Their order is random. In other words, each fractal set and fractal section holds varying degrees of “roughness” and meanderings not unlike the coast of Britain, not unlike the texture of my physical hand. I offer a structure of the hand that

demonstrates the fluid multiplicity and simultaneity of individual and collective (co)existence and possibility.

The fractal hand, specifically, allows me to “hold” the many parts of myself. The hand structurally and symbolically holds together the multiple aspects of my identity, while it remains the literal, tangible worker of daily tasks. In a fractal sense, the hand’s daily work has been repeated across times and places, across generations and cultures. The hand is both receptive and active, and it is more. Hands are multiplicitous in their skills. Hands heal binary splits, connect us to each other, connect our hearts and tongue so that we may speak our minds. When we open our fists, stand with open palms, we enact healing and create a more loving world. With our hands we maintain, sustain, nurture, perform, and form alliances. Hands are spiritual and physical tools for creating common places, for holding empathy, understanding, and love for people across differences. Often, our hands reveal, in practice and metaphorically, the ways in which we choose to stand in relation with each other, our stories and experiences. We choose the gestures of a friendly wave, a polite handshake, entwined fingers, hands hidden in pockets, a closed fist, a welcome embrace, a loving caress.

Hands, with their capacity to both embrace and protect, and to be receptively active, are a physical and symbolic embodiment of vulnerable resistance. Through our hands we make home. I hold the seeds of vulnerable resistance in the soil of my palm. I tighten and loosen the fingers of my hand in an inhale and an exhale of breath, in an exchange of receiving and giving that exists in the simultaneity of living and dying, of resisting and absorbing.

Every palm is a poem. The lines of a palm are the lines of a poem, lines of a

lifetime, lyrical in length, enjambed, endstopped, caesuraed, randomly rhymed, patterned by time and tongue-tips, fingertips, massaging inscriptions, articulating wrinkled pathways. I poem palms and I palm poems, unfolding, holding hearts of breathing hands, enfleshing parchment, parchment enfleshed, palmed, poemed.

The lines of the hand speak across generations through lineages and experiences. Hands connect us to each other and to the earth. As a “researcher, woman, mother” (Spry, “Performative-I” 340), I sense that hands connect us/me to our/my scholarly writing. In “A Sentence Concerning What Is Absent In Scholarly Writing” Pelias writes, “...we could say the hand,.../that soft hand, uncalloused, open as Christ’s palm greeting the spike;.../figures its fingers into its own design,/ pointing, surrounding, beckoning to cast its spell, its myth, its mystery” (A Methodology of the Heart 3, lines 18, 24, 26-27). The hand is an expression of intimacy, a holder of stories, a worker of the daily tasks of survival. The hand is an extension of bodies, and like a fractal, the more intricately we study our hands, the more detailed complexity is revealed and the more we can appreciate differences and similarities relationally and respectfully.

In fractal terminology, the hands hold “roughness.” In poetic language, “Texture touches. It is found within the palm of the hand” (Jagodzinski 165). Neurologically, “The greatest amount of gray matter in the brain is dedicated to the hands” (165). Jagodzinski writes, “When we know the texture of things we feel comfort, security, and a belonging” (165). We hold homeplace in the palm of our hands. My fractal hand becomes a “map to the next world” (Harjo) as I navigate my way to cultivate homeplace through modes of vulnerable resistance. I hold my way of seeing in the palm of my hand, *feeling* my way through the world as a way of perceiving and organizing the patterns around me.

Fractals as a Way of *Seeing*

Mandelbrot himself declares, “Fractal geometry is a recent mathematical and graphic implementation of some very old and basic insights of our culture, and perhaps even of all cultures of [hu]mankind” (“Fractals” 1). Immediate examples that come to mind are the ancient calendar patterns created three-dimensionally and repeated on lands cross-culturally in the forms of henges, medicine wheels, stone circles and rings that mark the solar and lunar cycles of time. Many cultures today still practice spiritualities which emphasize such organic patterns. Susana Valadez elaborates on “pattern awareness” in the Huichol culture:

‘Pattern awareness’ is manifested in many ways in the culture, for instance, in the constant appearance of the sacred number five, in the ceremonial circle dances, in the geometric designs in the art, in the systematic architectural layouts of homesteads and ceremonial centers (which often correspond to the solstices), in the placement of objects on altars, in the seating positions of tribal authorities, in the ceremonial chants of the shamans, and much more. Repeated patterns are evident throughout their sustenance activities, their religion, their self-governing political system, their art, music, history, and folklore. (“Patterns of ‘Completion’”151)

The Huichol believe that everyone is born with their *iyari* (heart-memory) or receives it shortly after birth, but that they must nourish it in order to be able to weave the sacred patterns of their culture. When they learn to view nature around them as “living designs” they are able to produce the designs from their heart-memory, without ever having seen the patterns before in physical form. “When they tune into this mode of seeing their

world, they tap into a wealth of design sources and consciously bring their imagination into visual form” (149).

Similar to the Huichol belief that humans must develop their *iyari*, Mandelbrot says, “Human babies...are born with open eyes, but they must learn to see” (“Fractals” 2), and he considers fractal geometry as a form that teaches us and requires us to see differently. “Fractal geometry has the very distinctive feature of putting enormous reliance upon the eye” (2). Many feminists and autoethnographers emphasize this importance of learning to “see,” from feminist Adrienne Rich’s call for “re-visioning” to autoethnographer Ron Pelias’s claim “I am a reader of signs” (Methodology 172). Additionally, Pelias’s claim that the “heart knows its facts” (172) echoes the Huichol *iyari*.

Mandelbrot writes, “Thanks to fractal geometry, diverse mathematical objects, which used to be viewed as being very far from physics, indeed as being pathological, have turned out to be the proper tools for studying nature” (“Fractals” 4). I am compelled to create my own parallel to his statement: Thanks to fractal performativity, diverse qualitative methodologies, such as feminist autoethnography and performative writing, which used to be viewed as very far from valid, indeed as being pathological or “narcissistic,” have turned out to be valuable tools for studying the relationship between the particular and the universal. I extend Mandelbrot’s quote and suggest fractal geometry puts reliance not only upon the “eye” but also the “I”. I bring the fractal “eye” and the “I” of performative autoethnography together in a method of *fractal performativity* so I can write how I see my world while offering a new way of seeing. This way of seeing offers a unifying schema for my interdisciplinary, multiple ways of being as an individual and an academic. Before I begin my discussion of fractal

performativity, I introduce the discipline of Performance Studies, its evolution, the ways in which “performance” is deployed, and the ways I use performance in this dissertation as it relates to fractal performativity.

Performance Studies

The Performance Studies discipline emerged from two strands of oral traditions: theatre and oral interpretation, and it has continued to evolve along these two pathways. One path followed from New York University’s avant garde of the 1960s and Richard Schechner’s call for an abolition of theatre programs and a shift to a new paradigm in the early ‘90s. (“A New Paradigm” 1992). The other pathway, which eventually led me to my current disciplinary homeplace, followed from Northwestern University’s Department of Oral Interpretation, whose proponents “drew from a classical tradition in oral poetry to argue for the role of performance in the analysis and dissemination of cultural texts” (Jackson, Professing Performance 9). Across universities, Oral Interpretation was usually housed in Speech, Communication, and/or Rhetoric Departments (Jackson 9) and was regarded as a performing art, a communicative act, and a method of literary study (Pelias Performance Studies 39). The shift from “Oral Interpretation” to “Performance Studies” came from a desire to expand the limits of oral interpretation, and a recognition that the new label would better reflect performance as an evolving practice that explores “all forms of aesthetic speech...views performance as an art and recognizes its communicative potential and function” (Pelias 40). The field of Performance Studies was (re)named and eventually became a division within the National Communication Association. Performance Studies, with its “two-pronged

story,” can be “resituated” as the “integration of theatrical and oral/rhetorical traditions” (Jackson 10). Dwight Conquergood captures the evolution of the performance studies discipline through his summary of the “semantic genealogy” of the word *performance*: “the movement from performance as mimesis to poesis to kinesis, performance as imitation, construction, dynamism” (“Beyond the Text” 31).

The field of Performance Studies utilizes performance as both a method and an object of study, a process and event. As a method of inquiry, the performer’s body becomes a tool for knowing (Gingrich-Philbrook 2001, Lockford 2001, Madison 1999, Pineau 1995, Zarilli 2004); writing about one’s own performance and coming to know through that performance serves as another method of inquiry (Lockford 2002, Pineau 2003, Shaffer 2004, Spry 2000); as does the performance of ethnography (Turner and Turner 1986, Conquergood 1991, Jones 2002), and autoethnography and performative writing, sometimes called performative autoethnography (Pelias and Miller 2001, Pollock 1998, Ellis 2004). Performance as an object of study includes the study of everyday performance events (for examples, see Bell’s “Weddings and Pornography” and Russell’s “A Long Way Toward Compassion”), and heightened aesthetic events, such as theatrical productions (Conquergood’s “Health Theatre” and Faber’s “Saint Orlan”). As an explanatory model, performance is utilized as a theatrical metaphor that views human action as drama in order to critically theorize performances of cultures and identities, including gender, sex, sexuality, race (Alexander 1999, Bell 1993, Corey and Nakayama 1997, Madison 1993, Jones 1997). Narrative also functions as performance (Langellier 1989, Pollock 1999, Holman Jones 2005) and political praxis. “Personal narrative as

political praxis begins with the notion that narratives make meaning (Langellier, “Personal Narratives” 267).

In this dissertation, I utilize methods and metaphors of performance as I tell stories of homeplace and theorize my identities to communicate a praxis of vulnerable resistance. Borrowing from Langellier, “I use the term *praxis* to suggest its double sense as the practical application of knowledge and as habitual or established practice” (266). Additionally, my “act of telling a story is the act of organizing experience” (267), which I term fractal performativity. Key elements to fractal performativity are the methods of autoethnography and performative writing, which I discuss later in this chapter in my discussion of fractal performativity as an integrative performance methodology. Next, I discuss fractals as a unifying schema and offer a definition of fractal performativity.

Fractal Performativity as a Unifying Schema

Fractals are a unifying metaphor for my personal standpoint of intersecting identities, my interdisciplinary background, and my affinity for/reliance upon multi-genre texts. In this dissertation I story my own experiences and reference writers across genres to engage strategies of compassion in the struggle for social justice. I write from the intersections (Crenshaw, Collins, Lorde, hooks, Davis) of my personal, academic, spiritual, and creative identities. I am a Lebanese-American ecospiritual feminist activist writer-performer who embraces the erotic in my everyday actions and interactions. My academic studies span communication, literature, poetry, psychology, women’s studies, and performance studies.

Similarly, Mandelbrot's life itself has "followed a path as jagged as any fractal" ("A Fractal Life" 1) with a career path that has taken an interdisciplinary trajectory across math, physics, geometry, economics, information theory, and fluid dynamics. In his own words:

By the mid-1960s my record of publications was substantial but presented a serious flaw. Those publications' topics ranged all too widely and was perceived as an aimless juxtaposition of studies of noise, turbulence, galaxy clustering, prices and river discharges. Few persons realized that, to the contrary, I did not deserve to be criticized for immature aimlessness but for increasingly acute single-mindedness. ("How Long is the Coast of Britain" 638)

Eventually, he was able to name each of his studies' common roots as fractal dimensions. My own path has had its fractal unfolding and interdisciplinary trajectories that I attempt to bring together in this single document.

In a fractal sense, I do meaning-making, sense-making in the way Anzaldua describes as "poetic association—another way of organizing experience, one that reflects our lives and the ways our minds work" (xvii-xviii). I do sensemaking with my own kind of "geometric intuition" (Mandelbrot). I have learned-- and am still learning with increasing acuity--how to *see differently*. The fractal aesthetic of this dissertation is an expression of my personal standpoint, or way of seeing I call fractal performativity. Fractal performativity is a representation of how I see the world, displayed as a fractal aesthetic in method, content, and structure. While the visual image of a fractal is often created from a mathematical equation, fractal performativity is the visual image and the act of creating the visual image with words, specifically with embodied language, from

the mixed genres of prose, poetry, and storytelling. Fractal performativity collectively utilizes fractal geometry and performative autoethnography and brings together multiethnic literature, feminist theory, performance studies, personal story and poetry to communicate vulnerable resistance as a strategy for social transformation and selfhood.

I coin the term fractal performativity drawing from the concepts of *fractal*, *performance*, *performative*, and *performativity*. In brief, the word “performative” comes from J.L. Austin’s speech act theory in which he designates “performative utterances” as performing the actions they describe, in contrast to “constative utterances” which describe a state of affairs (How to Do Things with Words, 1962). Performative utterances are actually *doing* the thing said. For example, if I say, “I promise,” I am actually promising. Words, then, have the capacity to not merely report or reflect a world, but are dynamic enough to *create* a world. In the field of performance studies, performance scholars utilize performative writing with the same “faith that language inked on a page can ‘do’ as well as ‘be’ (Stucky, The Green Window xii).

In general, the word “performative”— as in “performative writing”— functions as an adjective, whereas “performativity” functions as a noun. Structurally, fractal performativity draws from Judith Butler’s definition of performativity as “a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 270). In this way, performativity is an example of a fractal aesthetic in the sense that fractals are self-repeating, as is the structure of the dissertation. In content, fractal performativity is similar to the way Jill Dolan refers to performativity “to describe the nonessentialized constructions of marginalized identities, like white and ethnic women, gays and lesbians, men and women of color, and various conflicting combinations and intersections of these categories and positionalities” (Dolan 419).

Dolan's definition of performativity follows the aesthetic of the random fractal in that there are multiple constructions and ways of seeing/being. These ways of seeing/being are represented in the content of this dissertation through the construction of intersecting identities, categories and stories.

Both terms, *fractals* and *performativity*, refer to repetitions and iterations. Fractals refer to repeating patterns. Performativity refers to repeating actions and enactments of identity. Both refer to both process and product: while fractals occur as an object and a process occurring over time, performativity refers to an object or product of expression and the historicity of repeated enactments that have created that expression. Both embody similarity and difference. Both embody a way of seeing. Together, as *fractal performativity*, they are an expression of a way of seeing brought by the epiphanies, the breaking through to *seeing new*, that come to me when I story performances of repetition and repetitions of performance. For example, fractal performativity as this dissertation, as the process and the product of writing and rewriting the stories of my experiences, requires me to see the patterns and repetitions I embody in my daily actions, in my relationships, and in my family across generations. I write stories of my life experiences, organized across the modes of vulnerable resistance correlating to aspects of my identities in a display of fractal performativity, a representation of how I have made sense of these patterns and have learned how to see, or recognize, them from new and multiple perspectives. Fractal performativity integrates performance, performative, performativity, and writing.

Fractal performativity came about as an organizing logic for this dissertation as I recognized it would allow me to map the parts of my intersecting and overlapping

identities in a structure that holds infinite possibilities yet is integrated and contained. In the same way that fractals are non-linear (“Fractals” 6) and infinite (Fractal Geometry 1) even as they possess linear and finite qualities, fractal performativity allows me to organize my sense of self, and at the same time, it allows for limitless intersections of these parts of myself.

I have associated the areas of my identity with the modes of being: nurturance, sustenance, maintenance, performance, and alliance. I associate my ethnic identity with the mode of nurturance; my identity as a spiritual ecofeminist with the mode of sustenance; my writing-self with the mode of maintenance; my performing-self with the mode of performance; and my erotic sensibility with the mode of alliance. I am never only “Lebanese” or “a writer” or “a spiritual ecofeminist” or “a performer” or “erotic” but an intersection of all of these identities. In my life experiences and personal narrations of these experiences, specific intersections of particular identities are often foregrounded. Fractal performativity as a structural logic for the dissertation allows me to pattern narratives according to the multiple ways my identities shift, repeat, and intersect as I work toward living in vulnerable resistance.

Fractal performativity is a conscious alignment of form and content and is in keeping with Laurel Richardson’s assertion, “[Q]ualitative work carries its meaning in its entire text....Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading” (“Writing: A Method of Inquiry” 924). Methodologically, I term fractal performativity as an integrative qualitative method that utilizes autoethnography and performative writing to illustrate my fractal hand creating and recreating homeplace.

Fractal performativity enables me to self-reflexively display “the inter-faces, the

very spaces and places where our multiple-surfaced, colored, racially gendered bodies intersect and interconnect” (Anzaldua, Making Face, Making Soul xvi), and enact what Homi Bhabha refers to as an “interstitial intimacy” (“The World and the Home” 148) to bridge identities within myself and with others. Fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance is an embodied, repetitive enactment of fluid stability. Within the spatial structure of the fractal hand, I can begin to define myself and my ways of being, yet avoid writing myself into rigid identity boxes. Fractal performativity is an enactment of vulnerable resistance that allows me to fluidly cross categories (of nurturance, sustenance, etc.) while I simultaneously stand rooted in the homeplace of my being. Fractal performativity works beyond binaristic traps of essentialism and abstraction by enacting a simultaneity, fluidity, and expansion within a clearly mapped space that is the pattern of my way of seeing. In this way fractal performativity traces “its own limits while going beyond the limits of its assigned role as expression or communication, it... more precisely, allows the emergence of a new reality” (Mihn-Ha 22). Fractal performativity, as a way of seeing, brings the fragments of myself together in a pattern that demonstrates vulnerable resistance as a way of being.

Examples of Scholars Using Fractals as an Organizing Theme

Fractals have been incorporated into literary genres and theories. Alice Fulton plays off Mandelbrot’s “fractal ambition” of finding a middle ground between chaos and order, likening chaos to free verse and order to formal poetry. She coined the phrase “fractal poetry” as a method of revisioning the value of both formal and free verse, calling the “poetry of irregular form *fractal verse*” (“Of Formal, Free, and Fractal Verse” 1986).

The term responds to the 1980s critique by American poets that free verse was “formless and lacking in the devices of poetry” (“Fractal Poetics” 2005). Fulton writes how Mandelbrot’s fractals can help us see the world—and poetry—differently. Fulton utilizes fractal poetry to expand our ways of recognizing the mutuality between formal and random patterns, much the same way I utilize fractal performativity to expand upon our simultaneously stable and fluid ways of being. Unlike fractal poetry, which refers to a single genre, fractal performativity is multi-genre.

Fulton develops her evolving theory of fractals in her essay “Fractal Poetics.” She cites feminist physicist Karen Barad’s conceptualization of ‘agential realism’ which offers a model for locating meaning in the space between traditional dualisms. Barad’s agential realism is another example of a call for a third space, not unlike LaDuke’s, Anzaldua’s, Collins’s, Munoz’s, Bhabha’s, and Mandelbrot’s, and I recognize it as a kind of vulnerable resistance. Barad’s theory of agential realism calls for “knowledges that reject transcendental, universal, unifying master theories in favor of understandings that are embodied and contextual.” Her valuing of the “embodied and contextual” echoes intersectional feminists, performance methodologists, and autoethnographers who call for valuing embodied epistemologies. In this way her model adds a dimension to Fulton’s fractal poetics similar to the fractal performativity I display through the selection and arrangement of the multiethnic, contextually embodied, feminist voices that I bring together to create a collective, yet polyphonic, disruption of master narratives (Beardslee).

In her essay “Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents” Wai Chee Dimock employs fractal geometry in her discussion of the ways we might understand literary history if we were to reconceptualize literary genre (2006). Playing off

Mandelbrot's "fractal kin," Dimock calls fractal geometry "the lost twin of literary history, especially the study of genre." (89). Dimock echoes the trope of seeing differently associated with fractals. Fractal geometry allows one to see "a tangle of relations, one that counts as a 'system.'" Similarly, she argues, "literary forms that look quite different at first sight turn out to have these quirks in common" (89). She writes that "this family resemblance can be extended, modified, and recombined in any number of ways" (89). Dimock likens the survival of the epic poetic genre, for example, to its fractal ability of "spilling into other dimensions of literature, becoming a *fraction* of prose" (96). Dimock's conceptualization connects to my own study as I bring together a 'family' of methodologies of autoethnography, performative writing, and family narratives that I write in genres of prose, poetry, academic narrative, and personal story; it is this collective methodology that I have named fractal performativity.

In her essay "World Systems and the Creole," Gayatri C. Spivak responds to Dimock's essay, proposing "creolity rather than kinship as a model for comparativist practice" (109). Spivak is critical of Dimock's fractal metaphor: "I am suspicious of humanists metaphorizing the latest developments in science" (107). Yet, Spivak's proposal of 'creolity' is resonant with Mandelbrot's fractal ambition of finding the third space between chaos and order.

The texts Dimock features in her essay have African influence, such as texts by Amiri Baraka and J.M. Coetzee. This is not the first time that a fractal aesthetic was identified in African and African American literature. In 2002, Nina Mikkelsen published "Diamonds within Diamonds within Diamonds: Ethnic Literature and the Fractal Aesthetic." In this essay Mikkelsen identifies in Toni Morrison's novels the "mathematical

‘fractal’ visual pattern seen in African architecture and in de-centered *kente* cloth patterns as a scaling, infinitely repeating design, which corresponds to the social structure prevalent in pre-colonial African culture” (97). She observes that the fractal design reflects

the need members of oral cultures have of initiating new generations into the culture through storytelling, the endlessly repeated stream of stories keeping heritage and ancestral properties intact. The contrapuntal style of storytelling Morrison uses reflects the fractal design (many voices or many ways of seeing versus one character as the central consciousness). (97)

In this fractal aesthetic there is no single correct view, no single version, rather “each is a part of the whole fabric of black folklore that she is embedding and recasting, to produce new insights on black history, culture, and folklore” (98). This fractal aesthetic is echoed in my family culture through the “stream of stories” that keep my own ancestral heritage “intact.” I add my own voice to my family’s stream of oral stories as I bring them together in this dissertation. Mikkelsen observes that the painting on the apron in Virginia Hamilton’s *Magical Adventures* is a story that “becomes both a survival strategy...and a way to preserve heritage and culture” (106). In many ways my stories serve as ‘a survival strategy’ and ‘a way to preserve culture,’ not only related to my Lebanese heritage but to the ecospiritual and feminist and activist components of my way of being. Additionally, I have my own storytelling methods that have been ‘handed down’ to me by my Lebanese family members, and I resonate with and draw upon multiethnic literature and fold it into this dissertation. I utilize fractal performativity “to keep heritage and ancestral properties intact” and to “produce new insights” into identity and culture.

Fractal Performativity: An Integrative Performance Methodology

Words matter to me. I hold them in the palm of my hand and press them into my heart. Sometimes, I feel the words pulsing out from inside my heart, pulsing against my skin with the beat of each breath, pushing out like a child, open palms pressing the window pane, breathing impressions onto frosted glass. In those times, my heart melts into opening and I write the stories, word by word, and arrange them with intention. I “drop down to a place where words and the world intersect in active interpretation, where each pushes, cajoles, entrances the other into alternative formations, where words press into and are deeply impressed...” (Pollock, “Performing Writing” 81). In these stories I’m performing writing and “making *writing* perform” (75, italics in original), “not only to make meaning but to make writing meaningful,” (97). The stories are my lifelines, connecting me to future and past, connecting me to the matter of words and material worlds. As Pollock observes, “The writer and the world’s bodies intertwine in evocative writing, in intimate copformance of language and experience” (81).

Performative writing has been shared, embraced, and theorized by many scholars. A few who particularly have influenced my own writing include Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, Ron Pelias, Elyse Pineau, Della Pollock, and Tami Spry. Emerging from the performance studies paradigm (Pelias and VanOosting, 1987), performative writing came into being through groundbreaking works such as Ronald Pelias’s Writing Performance (1999) and Della Pollock’s “Performing Writing” (1998), germinal in providing a synthesizing ground for the discourse on performative writing and inspiring further scholarship, including the pivotal conference and its presentation of performative writings that were subsequently anthologized in The Green Window: Proceedings of the Giant City Conference on Performative Writing

(2001). Around that same time, definitions of autoethnography and conceptualizations of the “self” in writing and performance were burgeoning, including works by Gingrich-Philbrook, Madison, Park-Fuller, Pelias, and Pineau. Methods of autoethnography, autoethnographic performance, new ethnography and performative writing inform my method of fractal performativity, and I review those methods in this section, beginning with a discussion of works by Pollock and Spry.

Performative writing evokes the emotion of a moment, conjures the scent, taste and feel of a memory, *makes* stories tangible, visceral, present, and connects particular contexts to broader social phenomena. As Pollock claims, “Performative writing is not a genre or fixed form (as a textual model might suggest) but a way of describing what some good writing *does*” (75). Pollock invokes six criteria in her “suggestive framework” for performative writing (80). Performative writing is *evocative*, “allying itself with logics of possibility rather than of validity or causality” (80-81). It is *metonymic*, as it “un/does itself...to make the word mean at least two things at once” (82-83). It is *subjective*, in the sense of a self shifting from ‘me’ to ‘we’ and emerging as “a possibility rather than a fact” (87). Performative writing is *nervous*, in that it “follows the body’s model: it operates by synaptic relay... constituting knowledge in an ongoing process of transmission and transferal” (90-91). It is *citational*, figuring “writing as rewriting, as the repetition of given discursive forms” (92). And it is *consequential* in that it “recasts rhetoric as a constitutive aesthetic” (94-95).

Pollock’s discussion of performative writing echoes and affirms fractals’ capacity to engage multiplicity and work beyond binaries: “Writing performatively opens the field of writing to incursion, permeation, multiplicity” (96) and exceeds the binary trap of two

ideological pitfalls pitted against each other: “textual self-reference” and “unreflexive commitment” (97). Performative writing emphasizes the possibilities that live in the tension between “lines of difference” (87), possibilities that live in the relational, the contextual, and the multiple, particularly as embodied in the dynamics of writing performative subjectivity: “Entanglement, ravishment, love, writing: what I want to call performative writing does not project a self, even a radically destabilized one, as much as a relation of being and knowing that cuts back and forth across multiple ‘divisions’ among selves, contexts, affiliations...” (86). These themes of possibility, multiplicity and relationality are useful to me, particularly as they resonate with my own non-binariad themes of being, knowing and writing. Importantly, they echo qualities of the fractal aesthetic. That is to say, in this dissertation, I illustrate performative writing’s ‘relation of being and knowing’ as fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance, the third space that holds those fluid connections across selves and contexts.

In her article “The Performative ‘I,’” Pollock proposes that through performance and performativity the first-person can be expanded beyond the limits of the self-referencing ‘I’. Pollock’s performative ‘I’ “moves beyond...the authorial self toward new points of identification and alliance” (252). It is an ‘I’ that writes itself into ways of knowing through embodiment and reflexivity (251) and gains authority by “dispersion in and through the representation of experiences” (252). I encounter this identification, expansion, and dispersion as I weave, for example, my favorite writers’ voices and my mother’s stories. These voices and stories are mine and not mine simultaneously and new ways of knowing emerge as I read/write their coalescences of meanings.

In her article “A ‘Performative-I’ Copresence,” Tami Spry argues that the *performative-I* is “a researcher positionality that seeks to embody the copresence of performance and ethnography” (Spry 340). Pollock and Spry echo each other, their performative I’s displaying the very folding and unfolding of subjectivities from which they write. We see this, for example, when Spry writes of her fragmented self: “my subject position went from a destabilized ‘me’ to a chaotic but oddly comforting ‘we’ ... a sense of self that seemed to navigate the interrelations between self/other/bodies/language” (340). Just as Pollock’s performative ‘I’ “makes a perfect mess of conventional scholarly forms” to invite possibility (252), Spry’s performative-I “approaches the auto/ethnographic process/text as wreckage or rupture of linear concepts... allowing fragments of experiences to be articulated and arranged in a collage or bricolage form” (341). Both concern the relationship(s) between selves and the meanings that emerge in the dynamic. Both model a performative-I that reminds me that performative writing’s theoretical inspiration is grounded in the sensuality of the body and bodies relating and, as Craig Gingrich-Philbrook emphasizes, “the mutuality of language and the body” (“Bite Your Tongue” 1). This synergy of bodies and words emerges in the stories I share of my mother and the stories she shares of her mother. Generations entwine in the narratives passed through the mother-line, and I attempt to honor their meanings by embodying “knowledges forged in the copresence of the other” (Spry 343).

I write self in the context of others through self-reflexive narratives that enact a dynamic praxis of embodied theory and everyday actions. Through autoethnography I am able to culturally contextualize myself in my writing. Carolyn Ellis defines

autoethnography as “writing about the personal and its relationship to culture,” and refers to it as an “autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (The Ethnographic I 37). The stories that emerge “inspire conversation from the point of view of the readers, who enter from the perspective of their own lives” (Ellis and Bochner 748). With Ron Pelias, I believe in the value and “the desire to write from the heart, to put on display a researcher who, instead of hiding behind the illusion of objectivity, brings himself forward in the belief that an emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic voice can place us closer to the subjects we wish to study” (Methodology of the Heart 1).

Many autoethnographers have taken their work to the stage, and then subsequently documented the performance experience on the page from their different approaches, in order to bridge the personal and political through embodied performance and to expand genre boundaries (for examples, see Gingrich-Philbrook 1998, Jones 1997, Lockford 2002, Pineau 2000, Spry 2000). With autoethnographic performance there is a theoretical and methodological focus on bodies knowing. The body performing autoethnography experiences and displays kinesthetic awareness through dialogic engagement with another. In “Performing Autoethnography,” Spry writes of the semantic/somatic knowing that emerges about self and culture through embodied autoethnographic performance (716). Spry materializes the body in autoethnography recognizing that “Performing autoethnography provides a space for the emancipation of the voice and body in academic discourse through breaking the boundaries of stylistic form” (719). Fractal performativity allows me to create that emancipatory space in this dissertation; some of the autoethnographic narratives I display in this document are narratives I’ve performed on stage, and I format them in this document to embody the rhythm of breath during delivery of the lines,

to recreate the energy of a performance across contexts, and for aesthetic display on the page. Performances enacted and engaged in repetition from stages and pages offer multiple moments for meaning-making.

Performance methodologists also utilize performance as a form of critical activism. For example, Craig Gingrich-Philbrook performs personal narratives, a style he has referred to as autoperformance. Gingrich-Philbrook's performance work emphasizes sociopolitical themes and displays the strategy of "stand up theory." A stand up theorist refers to performance artists who reclaim "the responsibility of the critic by reinserting their own bodies into untested theoretical positions so the public can scrutinize the fit" (Linwood 16, also cited by Gingrich-Philbrook in "Autobiographical Performance Scripts" 353). Gingrich-Philbrook's work "frequently accepts the responsibility of a cultural critic, testing theoretical language's ability to 'unpack' everyday experience" (353). In this dissertation, I offer personal narratives of my everyday experiences of, for example, cooking and mothering, to 'unpack' the theoretical underpinnings of the relationship between the war machine and agriculture industries.

The term autoethnography has been allied with the phrase 'new ethnography.' The two methods share similar elements in that they both emphasize self-reflexivity and a dialogic sensibility. In New Ethnography the researcher seeks to speak with the people and culture s/he studies and to be aware of how one stands in relation with others (Goodall). Feminist scholar Joey Sprague suggests working to "retain the personhood and subjectivity of research subjects in the text, for example, by using extended quotes and samples..." (Feminist Methodologies 194). In that spirit, rather than summarizing texts, I often honor writers' voices by quoting full excerpts as well as brief fragments, and

intertwine, juxtapose, and pattern them with my own and other writers' voices as a way to examine how we 'stand in relation' with each other.

Critiques of qualitative methods often arise regarding questions of validity, particularly with regard to postmodern relativity. How can Truth be validated in research methods that foreground the relativity of personal experience, such as autoethnographic writing and third wave feminisms that emphasize personal choice in everyday situations? As one response to these critiques, Laurel Richardson proposes "crystallization" as "the central imaginary for 'validity' of postmodernist texts" ("Writing: A Method of Inquiry" 934). Richardson writes, "Crystallization...deconstructs the traditional idea of 'validity' (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic" (934). Fractals share qualities similar to Richardson's crystal. Richardson characterizes crystals as having an infinite variety of shapes and multiple dimensions and angles of approach, as do fractals. In this way, both fractal performativity and crystallization are qualitative methods that value multiple truths and personal stories as "texts [that] validate themselves" (934). Fractal performativity is a way of seeing informed by qualitative methods that value a holistic integration of mind *and* body and spirit.

The quality of fractals intensifying with magnification to simultaneously reveal "truths" across particulars and universals provides a metaphoric illustration of important tenets of qualitative methods that value embodied knowing. Autoethnography studies the dynamic influences of self and culture, in much the same way that feminist praxis examines the ways in which the personal is political. Still, questions arise: if everybody

perceives their personal choices as their rights and their truths, how do we hold individuals accountable for what could be construed as the “right” to “choose” to perform, for example, acts of violence? Zimmerman, McDermott, and Gould offer clarification with the firm assertion, “Feminism does not mean ‘anything goes;’ it is about responsible choice rooted in an intent to heal” (“The Local is Global” 88). Autoethnography emphasizes this critical self-reflexivity and accountability regarding choices we make, especially as choice intersects with the specific location of our material bodies. Tami Spry speaks about the role of the body in autoethnography, calling the writing that emerges from one’s own body of experience a “felt text” (“Performing Autoethnography” 714). She, along with the many feminist writers and performers named throughout this document, utilize feminist autoethnographic methods in order to address and heal wounds, personal and societal, through embodiment and personal stories. These methods value multiple ways of knowing, and they enact and embrace vulnerable resistance from a place of awareness and compassion. As feminist autoethnographer Amber Zimmerman states, “[A]utoethnography allows me to vulnerably engage ways of knowing that currently reside in the margins” (“Autoethnography as Vessel” 131).

As groups, women hold what Collins refers to as a “collective body of wisdom” (Black Feminist Thought 24) based on shared experiences. At the same time, despite a group’s common challenges, individuals do not necessarily have “identical experiences nor interpret experiences in a similar fashion” (27). Writing myself and beyond my writing self, the particular and universal intersect on my body. Perceiving from my place of being and embodied experiences, from my self-reflexive, personal standpoint

(Collins), I agree with Arundhati Roy, “There can never be a single story. There are only ways of seeing. So when I tell a story, I tell it not as an ideologue who wants to pit one absolutist ideology against another, but as a storyteller who wants to share her way of seeing.” (46).

My stories are personal and universal in the way Craig Gingrich-Philbrook reminds me: “Autobiographical performers cannot speak for an absolutely unique experience. The reported experience always occurs in a shared world, rooted in that world and inextricable in isolation” (353). He suggests “autobiographical performers can speak for a particular confluence of shared events and can call the others assembled there to witness a pattern...” (353). In that vein, I invite readers to witness the pattern of my way of being as it is revealed in these pages as fractal performativity. As Mandelbrot has said, “The beauty of geometry is that it is a language of extraordinary subtlety that serves many purposes” (“A Fractal Life” 1).

Writing is my pleasure, my burden, my life force, my passion. Writing matters to me. As Pollock says, “writing becomes itself, becomes its own means and ends” (“Performing Writing” 75). Ron Pelias writes that “finding the exact word, crafting the elegant sentence, and constructing the intricate paragraph is a pleasure unlike any other. Such pleasure comes from a struggle against confusion; it comes from a commitment to hope; it comes from a belief in the possible” (Methodology of the Heart 130). With Art Bochner, “I want [to write] a story that moves me, my heart and belly as well as my head” (“Criteria Against Ourselves” 263). With Amber Zimmerman, I write “to freely extend my hands toward healing, and to honor the ground I walk upon” (“Autoethnography as Vessel” 134). Performative writing demonstrates a praxis of vulnerable resistance. Through sharing stories of homeplace, my

“writing figures in the iteration of performance and performativity, bodies and embodiment” (Holman Jones 127). It is my integrated sense-making pattern expressed as fractal performativity and embodied as vulnerable resistance.

Craig Gingrich-Philbrook’s performative writing style often utilizes a strategic repetition of tropes that I argue is not unlike the repetitions and (re)iterations of fractal forms. One particular phenomenon Gingrich-Philbrook identifies in his essay “What I Know About the Story...” is that “The story comes, after the accident, to identify the body” (298). Like a fractal pattern, the body makes words to remake the body. Words keep the body alive, long after the body has died. Words help us to cope with the loss of bodies, “to begin the work of grief” that comes after loss (Gingrich-Philbrook, “Bite Your Tongue” 6). Words and stories facilitate, follow, endure the coping, the grieving, the reconciling. Words and stories, reappear, reiterate, repattern themselves like fractals throughout the healing process. The stories I’m writing for my dissertation relate to this idea, as those stories, too, come “after the accident,” to collect the bodies of my ancestors and release generations of grief patterns made solid through silences; the words come to transform grief by giving love to ghosts of memories through the storying of tears and reconfiguring the sacred patterns of cultural/familial “heart-memories” through fractal performativity.

The communities of writers whom I cite throughout this document are my scholarly kin. As I write through generations, I borrow useful fragments performance scholars writing autoethnography have ‘handed down’ to me from their larger bodies of work. I’m reminded of Elyse Pineau’s proposal of “generational autobiography” to “accommodate the intergenerational family of persons and tales that spin themselves out

from encounters with the storied selves of their kin” (“Intimate Partners” 42). Ron Pelias’s “Poet’s Self” writes, “I become who I am, by writing, over and over again, my father...I write for my daughter...I write for our roots, for the sap that circulates within us...” (Methodology of the Heart 77). With D. Soyini Madison, “I hear voices rising up from beneath, they say: ‘Reach for the stories...the lessons of mothering and daughtering and good work and loneliness...’” (“Performing Theory/Embodied Writing” 121). And with Craig Gingrich-Philbrook I am able to identify with a “snaking temporality” expressed as a fractal through “a forty-four year-old’s reflection on his twenty-one-year-old reflection on his grandmother’s sixty-two-year-old reflection on her childhood immersion in her own grandmother’s ethic of care” (“Family Values” 305).

I draw upon performative autoethnography, folding and unfolding family stories in a “kinesthetically evocative, stylistically poetic, and theoretically infused kind of text” (Pineau “Nursing Mother” 4). I sketch out my fractal hand and “my body makes language....The sentences come out like fingernails” (Gingrich-Philbrook, “Bite Your Tongue” 3). As I performatively story the ethnographic details of daily handwork in my repetitive, fractal enactment of memories made manifest in the rituals of, for example, preparing food, I “textualize the bodily presence” (Pineau 4) and embody generations of cultural practices that exceed the boundaries surrounding single lifetimes, and I come to believe “in hope, both past and future” (Tan, The Hundred Secret Senses 357).

These methodologies come together to encourage me to be a credible ‘I’ in my own exploration of family stories in which I reflect on the cultural implications of the narratives and my choice to tell them (Langellier and Peterson). When I utilize performative autoethnography—that is, when I own my own words by writing critically

reflexive first-person narratives—I am at my most ethically accountable, dialogically responsive, emotionally honest, observationally thorough, and empathically engaged. I experience the world in daily moments that are particular to my contextualized embodiedness, and I write with a heightened sensitivity from where I stand in relation with others.

As I draw from these methodologies and infuse them into my methodological design of fractal performativity, one of my intentions is to meet the demands of the creative double-bind in autoethnography identified by Gingrich-Philbrook as “a demand to create knowledge (epistemic) and a demand to create art (aesthetic)” (“Family Values” 303). The methodologies I work with value (1) the aesthetic power of subjective voice, (2) the material politics of knowing bodies, (3) the epistemological gifts of reflexive writing, (4) the transformative potential of social justice, and (5) the deployment of multiple, partial, and ‘co-presence’ points-of-view.

Drawing upon the methods of performative autoethnographic writing, embodied autoethnography and new ethnography, I display fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as I narrate the multiple ways I create homeplace. Here is where I drop down into lines of my hand, drawing breath with my words; where scented fingertips imprint memories, and lemon garlic on my tongue stimulates stories semantically, somatically, culturally, and particularly in the present day (con)textualities of my everyday life. Here is where I breathe open the window of my heart and unfold my hands.

CHAPTER 2

VULNERABLE RESISTANCE AS NURTURANCE

Homeplace of Nurturance

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance creates homeplace through sharing food, providing comfort, transforming grief. My experience and conceptualization of nurturance is related to family, food, and grief contextualized within everyday themes of living and dying. In this chapter I share my mother's stories and my father's stories to enact vulnerable resistance as a means to end the passing on of generational grief.

I come from a family of Lebanese immigrants. Through their struggles to create homeplace in America and assimilate into American culture, they left language behind but held onto their culinary traditions to bridge the span of their hearts across memory and culture. In 1914, Lebanese immigrants in Peoria established the Itoo Society. Itoo is the Americanized spelling of Aitu, the village in Lebanon that was my ancestors' home. The Itoo Society was founded to assist relatives back home in Aitu by sending food and money, to aid relatives making the journey to the United States, and to assist each other, the Lebanese community of Peoria, in making a homeplace in the United States.

A major source of income for the Itoo Society, to this day, is the annual fundraising dinner. These dinners have been happening for decades and draw hundreds and hundreds of people who love Lebanese food. In the fall they host their Annual Itoo Supper, featuring a menu of *mah-shi mul-foof* (stuffed cabbage rolls), *chicken mah-shi* (stuffed chicken with rice), *kibba sa-nee-ya* (baked meat spiced with cumin), *loob-ya*

yak-hneh (stewed Lebanese green beans), and *sal-ata* (Lebanese salad). In the summer they host their Annual Shish-ka-bob, complete with sliding the meat off the skewers using Lebanese bread to absorb the juices. Dozens of Itoo women and men spend dozens of hours preparing these meals from scratch—from the butchering of the chickens to the finishing touches of the gourmet presentation of the platters artfully arranged in characteristic fractal patterns of diamonds and triangles. The food preparation is a social and community event as much as the dinner itself. An editorial in the city newspaper, Peoria Journal Star, dated November 10, 1941, celebrates the hospitality of the Lebanese community of Peoria, “exemplifying the...integrity that their homeland has put forth” through their “annual dinners” that “draw thousands.” Sharing food as a means of nurturing community and homeplace remains the centerpiece of the Itoo Society and the Lebanese community to this day.

The Itoo Hall, the actual building that houses these events, is Lebanon away from Lebanon, home away from home, the place my family returns to again and again to preserve, experience and cocreate homeplace. The food events that take place at the Itoo Hall extend to the joys of weddings, baby showers, and baptisms, to the griefs of extended illnesses and deaths. For my family, food is at the heart of the community that creates homeplace by gathering people together to collectively nurture and grieve. I view these moments as vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance in that these are daily acts necessary for the survival of a culture that has always been faced with erasure through war, political pawnings, famine, disease, tragedy, and basic assimilation. For me, food, grief, nurturance, living and dying are all entwined, with food being a direct link to homeplace. I need to write these stories to nurture the connections and transform the

grief. Vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance to create homeplace is not unique to my family culture. I turn to examples from writers sharing their own stories demonstrating vulnerable resistance as it relates to food, nurturance, and homeplace.

Edwidge Danticat links food and grief in her book Brother, I'm Dying in a way that is particularly resonant to my story. Brother, I'm Dying is a true story about deep family love laced with unspoken fears of losses that accompanied their exile from the Haiti they love. Haitian food had always functioned for Edwidge's father as "something that had buffered his transition to immigrant life." He felt that "one could easily return home, simply by lifting a fork to one's lips" (259). But now, Edwidge's father is dying and has no appetite. During one of his final days, he found himself hungry for rice, a hunger I interpret as desire for final connection to his homeland before he dies. As Edwidge writes, "maybe he was desperately trying to nourish himself with something recognizable and familiar" (263). During that meal, he offers Edwidge some of his rice and she eats from his spoon, in a symbolic sharing of homeplace.

Linda Husa writes of the gifts of communion and nurturance in her story "The Antelope Kid." Husa witnesses how, when a baby animal gets separated from its mother, the mother and baby each return to the place they last nursed. They "return by code to a shared place," she writes. "A place could be significant. Safe. Important beyond the birth. Important through a bond of nourishment" (223). Husa saw this happen with a baby antelope and its mother, and then again with a calf. Unbeknownst to the cowherders who busily gathered up the cows to move them to graze in a different pasture sixty miles east, a mother had just given birth and her calf was left behind. When Husa discovered the baby calf, bawling for its mother, and realized the situation, her partner "looked at his

watch and did some figuring. ‘She’ll be back by about two in the morning’” (225). Sure enough, the mother walked the sixty miles across the desert and up the mountain pass, following “the pledge of an internal map to a place anchored in an event” (225), and by 2:30 she had returned “to the holy ground where nourishment was given” (225).

I appreciate this story because it teaches me that we might witness this kind of return, not only between mothers and children, but between humans sharing nourishment. We return to the people (and sometimes the foods) who nourish us. Our metaphorical nursing grounds are the kitchen tables, the picnic blankets, the open arms, the embrace of hugs. We return to the places of nourishment, and from that nourishing place, we are able to form sustaining relationships and long-lasting alliances. As Hussa writes, we “strengthen our comfort in communion—talk, nearness as nourishing as food. *A place* can satisfy our needs” (225, italics in original). The intimacy and love we share with one another creates a homeplace that provides sustenance and nurturance, a shared embrace that creates a safe space, a necessary place for us to return for comfort and healing, to be ourselves and to survive.

Jennifer Kayl Soule captures this communion in her poem “Banana Bread and Coffee:” “Moved by some natural rhythm, they gravitate/... /toward one home,/these busy women who believe/that banana bread and coffee/are the basic ingredients for communion/in South Dakota, where women hold/together families, neighborhoods,/communities, and each other with food...” (3). When we gather together to share food we feel nourishment and camaraderie.

In sharing meals we also create trust. Nawal el Saadawi, while in the women’s prison, observes just how deeply these bonds of trust are. Dhuba, one of the prisoners

from the prostitute's cell, tearfully told Nawal, "They want me to spy on all of you, and I refused. I can't turn on you, not after we've had meals together" (81). Saadawi explains in her Memoirs that "This phrase refers to a norm linked to notions of hospitality and trust in Egyptian society: once you have partaken in a meal with someone, a mutual trust is established which cannot be broken" (81). Generally speaking, when a person offers hospitality to another person or people, s/he is offering shelter, safety, food, and homeplace, however temporary.

Where there is food, there are stories. In "The Lay of the Land," Paula Gunn Allen writes of the relationship between food, place, and story and their significance in the continuance of a region's or culture's tradition or identity. "Food...may be the single most definitive aspect of a sense of place, [and] stories provide a deep sense of continuity within a psychespace...." (234). Allen's quote particularly relates to my own experiences at the Itoo Hall, hearing my relatives' stories, hearing about Lebanon as a place and a psychespace, while tasting the food of my ancestry. As Homi Bhaba stated, "We carry where we came from in the stories we tell and the food we cook" ("Defining 'Home,'" 2003).

Dorothy Allison captures the phenomenon of how certain foods provide a history, a geographical menu-mapping, of particular relationships. She uses food imagery to reveal how she creates memories and associations with people through meals, their textures and sauces and spices: "Food is more than sustenance; it is history. I remember women by what we ate together, what they dug out of the freezer after we'd made love for hours ("A Lesbian Appetite" 285).

Cookbooks themselves demonstrate vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance, with some recipes representing ongoing connection to a cultural history and others marking the negotiations of settling into a new culture by substituting ingredients (Theophano 50). We see vulnerable resistance not only in the preparation and sharing of food, but in the act of preserving a culture through the recording of recipes, an act that details the power and agency possessed by the author of that recipe. In her book Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote, Janet Theophano writes, "As we taste one woman's interpretation of a culinary creation, we remember that it is the result of many minds and many hands" (48). Theophano observes the writing of cookbooks as a "process of memorializing a place through its food" (267). She writes, "Women write a place into being...And they do so in everyday places like the homely cookbook" (268).

The women of the Lebanese community of Peoria compiled a cookbook many years ago, and I treasure this cookbook, both as history and nostalgia, and also as a practical collection of recipes that I cook regularly. Another cookbook came into being about three years ago, in my mother's immediate family, when my cousin decided to compile a cookbook of recipes from my mother, aunts, cousins and me. These are the very personalized versions of recipes for the foods I grew up on. My aunts contributed their specialties, so among the many of my favorite foods, I also now have my Aunt Terry's recipe for *shish barak* and my Aunt Didi's recipe for *fasulya* and my mother's recipe for *baklawa*. My cousin, Monica, who compiled the cookbook, dedicated it to our Tita, the matriarch of our family, who Monica writes, "was strong yet gentle," words that embody vulnerable resistance. Indeed my Tita practiced vulnerable resistance, especially

in the mode of nurturance. Monica further captures vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance when she writes, “There are things you do because they feel right and they may make no sense and they may not make any money and it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other, to eat each other’s cooking and say it was good” (Our Family Cookbook).

Michelle Obama said in an interview with Oprah Winfrey, “I think we should all have to get to know one another around kitchen tables” because it allows us to see “our shared values,” (O, The Oprah Magazine, April 2009). It’s a simple wisdom. I often wonder what would happen, if around the table at United Nations conferences and other global decision making gatherings, there sat a group of women representing every country, nation, and nation-state, and if each one brought to that table their voice—to be counted in the decision-making process— and a food representing their homeplace. By the end of the meal, would the world leaders have satiated the hunger, the gnawing ache for power long enough to recognize the need to stop bombing the sources of their sustenance, their nurturance, their alliances? Would every nation have its own soil, with boundaries clear and agreed as fair?

I do not mean to simplify the complexities of power-sharing and boundary-drawing. Indeed I acknowledge that between Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, the Palestinian camps in Lebanon (comprised of Palestinians who have lived there for generations yet remain “homeless” with no national rights nor welcoming from the otherwise “hospitable” Lebanon), and the tensions between Hezbollah and Israel—not to even mention Iraq, Iran, Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and every other warring country in this world, it is a complicated and delicate matter because at the very heart of the

embroilment is desire for homeplace and reconnection to the ancestral, spiritual lands they all feel connection to. Each group rightfully wants agency to peacefully make homeplace on their sacred grounds and to restore a clean connection with the land.

I do not have easy answers. And, referring back to my example, I do not mean to suggest that only women are capable of bringing that food. The truth of the matter is that the majority of the people at that particular and powerful table are men, and they must break for lunch. They are indeed being served food—food prepared by a majority of whom are likely silent, invisible, underpaid women. I'm just saying, perhaps if more women were in attendance at these meetings and had a voice in the decision making process, and if these meetings were a cross-cultural feast in the deepest sense of sharing culture and building trust by appreciating each other's flavors and traditions, then we might better be able to find a way to begin seeing each other as human, and seeing lands not as territories or entities, but as homeplaces where people live, and can share space together.

Marilou Awiakta envisions it fully: "Imagine that the Grandmothers—the female ancestors—have returned to sit in council.... Undoubtedly, they would put these questions first on their agenda: 'Who will take care of the children? Who will feed, clothe, shelter, educate, protect—nurture them to maturity?'..." (Selu 196). This quote is revolutionary in the sense that if children's needs were top priority at these meetings, many of the present-day strategies would be immediately struck down because these strategies do not account for, and indeed disregard, the children's needs, and so children are the most severely harmed. A more creative approach would be mandatory because, as Awiakta reminds us, "Children are the seeds of the people. Seed corn must not be

ground” (196). As a result, *new ways of seeing* would manifest. But meanwhile, because this paradigm is not in play at these highest levels, Awiakta asks: “What can women do to prevent our disempowerment and the ‘grinding’ of our children?... For myself, I am a poet, a writer...And I do remember the Grandmothers’ stories...I must tell it to my children” (197). The personal is political, and so Awiakta begins at the level of seed, at the level of personal story.

In the following five sections of this chapter, I will “tell it to my children” by sharing my own grandmothers’ stories to preserve empowerment by demonstrating vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance. I cannot bring about Middle East peace any more than my mothers and grandmothers can. Homeplace for members of my family, generationally speaking, is a place that has been bombarded by war and grief and religious persecution. My ancestors grieve for their Lebanon homeplace and they recreate it through food and story. And in doing so, they make a homeplace of peace. At the same time, many stories of grief remain unspoken and are passed on generationally, unhealed, denied, unacknowledged. I share what I know of these family stories—my mother’s stories, my father’s stories, and my grandparents’ stories, as a way to begin to understand some of the patterns of grief and fear that repeat themselves generationally in my family.

Nurturing Hands Embodying Nurturance

The following fractal section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as nurturance within the mode of nurturance. Vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance is demonstrated by the women cited throughout this piece as they

continue to preserve the stories of the motherline through food and hands. The piece centers on my Tita to celebrate the legacy she has created through her many years of nurturance and survival. Tita's nurturance created homeplace that is kept alive through fractal performativity, an integration of taste, scent, preparation and sharing of Lebanese food.

Tita's Hands

According to my own family legend, hundreds of years ago three brothers came upon Aitu, Lebanon, and settled. Their names were Sleiman, B'sharra, and Yunus. They dug terraces into the limestone mountain and carried up soil from below to plant their food. This tradition was extended generation by generation for centuries. My father's father was a descendent of one of the first three settlers of Aitu: Yunus, and, as was customary, my father's father took the name of his father as his last name. Today, my family name is Unes (an Americanized spelling of Yunus).

Like many recorded histories, the story of the three brothers emphasizes the lineage of my forefathers. I appreciate these stories. However, I desire stories of the motherline as well. I find it frustrating that I cannot know my grandmothers' grandmothers' family lines except through their fathers' names. "The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken.... It is terrible how much has been forgotten, which is why, I suppose, remembering seems a holy thing" (Diamant 2-3). And so I re-member the motherline by re-visioning (Rich), by seeing new, and I've come to know: My grandmothers store and story their lines in the palms of their hands like a seed. Perhaps it

is why we say sole of foot, but we don't say sole of hand. We say palm. We say palms of hands: hands' palms are a psalm, a song, a story shared.

While I have my own stories and memories of Tita, my mother's mother, I'm realizing many of the stories that I tell of my Tita are stories passed on to me by my mother. Like Alice Walker I have discovered, "So many of the stories that I write... are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realize... the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories—like her life—must be recorded" (In Search 240). Diamant writes, "If you want to understand any woman you must first ask about her mother and then listen carefully... The more a daughter knows the details of her mother's life... the stronger the daughter...." (Red Tent 1-2).

My mother's stories are becoming more frequent as she ages, and I think about my daughter, wondering which stories she's absorbed and which ones I've consciously shared. I realize I am a seed sprouting both radicals and roots, "a pool of light that plays with the colors of birth and death, I am both mother and daughter, agent and witness of this trick-of-time" (Pineau, "Nursing Mother" 16). Because my memory of Tita and the stories I choose to tell are intertwined with my mother's narration of Tita, in my storytelling I become "a sensual synergy of selves living together in the writing self" (Pollock 88). Margaret Atwood poeticizes this synergistic passage of stories through the maternal line: "How little I know/about you finally/Finally I know you/ through your daughters,/my mother, her sisters,/and through myself./Goodbye, mother/of my mother, old bone/tunnel through which I came./You are sinking down into/your own veins, fingers/folding back into the hand...." ("Five Poems" "iii" 1-2, 33-36; "v" lines 1-6).

My own hand unfolds stories and folds them back into the hand of my Tita, “one story folding into another...one story uttering another” (Pollock 89), “as I alternately protect and expose, sacralize and sacrifice the folds of my own mother(‘s)-flesh” (Pineau 7). My hands are the hands of my mother, of her mother’s and hers. I search for our stories we share in the texture of my hand, the terrain of my veins, crossroads of creases, lifelines. I want to know *first-hand* the texture of the soil in Lebanon, my mother’s mother’s Lebanon, Tita’s Lebanon, where she lived in the mountains, in a village named Aitu, where she tended the handwork daily--until the day she was obligated to join her hand to another, in marriage arranged at age sixteen. That day, she left the only soil she’d ever known and came to America, and when she spoke, her hands faltered in the dance of new soil, new language as syllables crumbled like clay on her tongue.

I share these stories through my third-hand knowledge. I do not *know* Tita’s story of the day she first touched American soil. Nor have I held Lebanese soil in my hands. I have never conversed in Arabic, but I have held and studied my Tita’s hands, and my mother’s hands like Tita’s have held and studied mine, and my hands, like my mother’s and hers, have held and studied the hands of my daughter. And like the seed held between thumb and forefinger, passed palm to palm and planted in soil, stories flourish and nourish. From the energy of potential held in the single kernel, stories live in the lines of the hand, grow in the soil of palms, are tasted by the tongues in the telling. “Our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower...” (Walker 240).

These stories of the hand, these “sparks” and “seeds” passed on by our mothers are their narratives of vulnerable resistance. Alice Walker finds these narratives of

vulnerable resistance ‘preserved’ by her mother in the quilts of her childhood. As Walker’s mother storied her daily labors into the quilts, Walker stories a Smithsonian quilt “...made by ‘an anonymous Black woman in Alabama, a hundred years ago’” and compares this woman to her mother as “...an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use” (In Search 239).

Like the daily work artfully storied, like the energy infused into the quilt, Marilou Awiakta tells the story of how stories and energy are held through generations through the handwork infused into a bowl of the Pueblo Southwest: “an artistic and aesthetic tradition that stretches back thousands of years, a tradition in which the potters have been women. They have passed the secrets of how to mold pots by hand (not by wheel) from mother to daughter... ‘Clay is like dough is like people...Clay remembers...’” (Selu 137). Each fingerprint ridged in the clay, each scrap of fabric stitched into the quilt are a tangible mnemonic triggering a memory of a day, an occasion, a story.

Like stories woven into quilts or textured in clay, Tita “preserved” the memory of her mother by daily reenacting Lebanese culinary traditions of preparing and sharing food: each meal a material, tangible, sensual event, yet impermanent, ephemeral, a becoming into memory, repeated daily through rituals passed on like stories, or prayers. Poetry, too, is just as visceral, palpable as clay or fabric or food. Like “poetry lingering” (Harjo 71), my lineage lives in the palm of my hand I story and pass on as a poem, a palm poem.

Slowly, I’m coming to know my *hands* as my native tongue. I story my image of Tita into poetic prose of my palm, recognizing like Awiakta, “All I will ever have of

Maria's work is the image of her bowl. I carry it in my spirit. Clay remembers. Like dough. Like people. Like poetry" (Selu 140). Like food and tongue. Embodied and expressed as fractal performativity, these memories are stor(y)ed in the palm-lines of my hand, inscripted as story-lines on paper skins and patterned as veins of family stories, personal narratives, literary prose and poetry.

I follow lines of palms of hands on the family tree in order to find my roots. In Aitu soil, Tita grew citrus and apple trees. In Illinois soil, Tita grew apricot and apple trees. I remember very specifically the apple tree. Tita gathered apples, dull baby yellow with black bug holes, from the tree outside her back steps. She rolled them onto the kitchen table, sat with her knife in her right hand, peeled spiraling skins, offered me unblemished flesh. My own hands gathered bundles of mint and parsley from her backyard garden, and grapeleaves from her own vine and vines in the woods with my cousin while Tita pounded meat for *kibbee* and the burghol soaked. I watched her hands drape sheets of handrolled phyllo dough, thin as tissue membrane. I watched her stirring and stirring homemade yogurt, *laban*, at the stove, knowing when she dipped her pinky in the milky foam and could count to ten, it was time to mix the old laban with the new to begin a next generation. I watched her hands mashing garlic in mortar with pestle, tossing in cinnamon, measuring pepper in palms, squeezing lemons' last drops, her hands shiny with oil disappearing into the bowl, reemerging with a bouquet of endive greens dripping in lemon and oil blooming between thumb and forefingers feeding me, her fingers to my mouth, an offering of communion. My tongue recognizes home. *Perfect*, I think, savoring with my eyes closed. Then she feeds herself and says with her mouth full, "Needs more lemon."

Here in Tita's kitchen, my mother's kitchen, my own kitchen, I taste the smells of spices simmering, and the soil of Lebanon reaches my tongue as Tita holds her language of Lebanon in the articulation of her hands. I watched her hands dance her stories as I watched her hands mix spiced rice and raw meat and roll the mixture into grape leaves, deftly, hands busy talking, and in this way Tita's hands and my hands shared a native tongue. Around the table, all of us, Tita, Didi, Mimi, Terry, Rosie, Angie, Monica, Katie, Tina, all of us, cousins, sisters, aunts, talking with our hands; hands as tongues, as tools, terracing a history, rolling our stories into the future, into the grapeleaves; a culinary creation sustaining a heritage through a dance of soil, hand, and tongue; a cauldron of hands holding energy, expressing shape, stirring and feeding the stories; coring *kusa*, sealing *shish barak*, talking always talking, "Georgette's pregnant," folding spinach pies, chopping parsley; "Najeebe's getting married" mashing garlic, squeezing lemon; "Bahkos is coming over from the Old Country," mixing *hummus*, layering *baklawa*; "Houllia's been diagnosed with diabetes," arranging *kibbee*, garnishing eggplant, stitching tripe, pinching *tabbouli* between flat bread, "Rizk has died."

Food in hands and mouth, hands as tools for sharing, food as tools for celebration, food as tools for gossip, planning; hands as tools honoring birth and death. "This is the procession/of old leathery mothers," writes Margaret Atwood, "mothers like worn gloves/wrinkled to the shapes of their lives,/passing the work from hand to hand,/mother to daughter,/a long thread of red blood, not yet broken" ("A Red Shirt").

"I claim this round tradition," writes Awiakta, "True art creates harmony and healing. Its substance *is* its form" (140). My Tita created substance from the form of her

life. Tita lived in vulnerable resistance. She cultivated and sustained a strategic art of resistance out of her daily store of supplies.

Nurturing Hands Embodying Maintenance

The next fractal section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as maintenance within the mode of nurturance. I am writing these family stories, and by writing these stories I am ending the silence surrounding them. This act of writing is my form of nurturing vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance in that I am preserving homeplace through the permanency of written stories, and at the same time, I integrate stories, storytelling, and citation, utilizing the method of fractal performativity, as a way to understand grief patterns held for generations in my Lebanese ancestry.

Death Calls

When Tita left Lebanon she didn't know she'd never see her mother again. But Tita's mother died before Tita was ever able to return to Lebanon. 'Goodbye' was a whisper that rolled off her tongue like a tear, falling into the ocean between two soils, between fingertips.

My mom tells me Tita often lamented how she missed Lebanon. Missed her mother. Missed her apple trees. Missed her mountains. "But she never complained," my mother would add stoically. "Never. Mom was truly a saint." And every time, my mother pretended like she wasn't about to begin sobbing, would efficiently transition into composure and then seamlessly change the subject.

My mom tells me her greatest desire is to go to Tita's birthplace in Lebanon with my daughter Raynah and me, a statement of desire that embodies five generations: my mother at the generational center, surrounded by her mother and grandmother, daughter and granddaughter. We are five generations of fractals, each a fractal section of a fractal set. I believe my mother feels that in completing Tita's journey home to her motherland, she will be able to bury a psychic, generational grief. Or, perhaps, that is my belief. Perhaps it is a vulnerable resistance that projects my desire for these stories, in order to allow me to merge with a mythically tragic past as I re-vision a future. I desire to go to Lebanon and bury grief in Tita's soil, make the return journey to her birthplace in order to bury death and let new life live. Once there, I will palm soil; plant stories; bury tears and seeds.

But I'm not in Lebanon. My soil is this page. My daily task is symbolic journey, flowing stillness, vulnerable resistance. I collect and bury shriveled words, unspoken seeds of Tita's grief, my mother's grief, so they may absorb moisture, sprout life, transform into flowers. Tita's stories, and so too, my mother's and mine, become my "autoethnographic texts reveal[ing] the fractures, sutures, and seams of self interacting with others in the context of researching lived experience"(Spry, "Performing" 712). The lived experiences of my Tita and mother, and so too, mine, have been a series of death-calls. I take seriously Craig Gingrich-Philbrook's cautions against writing the death-call ("Family Values" 305). I do not wish to "compel a response" (308) from the audience based on assumptions of shared experience, and I do not wish to write sentimental clichés. I do not want to recreate grief. I want to transform grief through sense-making and storying. I desire reconceptualizations that might generate beyond me and ripple

outward, in an economy of giving, in a fractal pattern of healing. Concerned I may succeed only in replicating (not transforming) grief, I resist telling these family stories.

Gingrich-Philbrook invites us to write the complexities through a “snaking temporality,” a suggestion I wish to honor as I attempt generational storying. At the same time, I’m finding I must also write the snake eating its tail. I must write the cycle of death for its transformative power. I must tell these stories to catalyze the snaking line of grief handed down from Tita to my mother to me so that I do not pass on generations of unspoken grief to my own daughter. My experiences have been a family line of closed fists clutching grief in solidarity, handing down unspoken tragedy and secrets in swollen silence. Edwidge Danticat writes of her ancestors, “It is not our way to let our grief silence us” (Brother, I’m Dying 267). But my family, my ancestry, has been silenced by grief, and that silence has functioned as a denial of life. I am choosing to speak the unspoken stories in order to disrupt the passing down of generational grief. For me, writing the death-call together with life’s snaking temporality becomes a process of midwifing stories, catching life with open hands.

Perhaps this is the gift of vulnerable resistance, both in the cycle of the exchange and the linearity of the continuance, grounded in love to honor the viscosity of each moment’s varied emotions. I see my family’s generational grief as a fractal pattern of grief that can be lifted, shifted, and transformed into a pattern of healing. In writing these stories, I might come to better understand my mother’s grief as a way to know and develop my own vulnerable resistance for survival.

Amy Tan demonstrates vulnerable resistance in The Joy Luck Club during a lesson by the Aunties to June about food and flesh and the importance of story in

honoring the motherline and transforming grief. Auntie An-Mei says to June “Your mother is in your bones!” (40), and Auntie Ying says to June, “Tell them stories she told you, lessons she taught, what you know about her mind that has become your mind” (40). Then we see An-Mei as a young girl, watching her mother cut a piece of flesh from her arm and put it in the soup to try to cure her mother. An-Mei’s mother teaches her:

This is how a daughter honors her mother. It is *shou* so deep it is in your bones. The pain of the flesh is nothing. The pain you must forget. Because sometimes that is the only way to remember what is in your bones. You must peel off your skin, and that of your mother, and her mother before her. Until there is nothing. No scar, no skin, no flesh. (48)

This passage teaches me that we must face, examine, and handle the bones of our history through the lives of our ancestors in order to stop embodying grief from generations past. And in this way, we can fully embody a clean relationship with our ancestors. To end generational grief requires a kind of composting of the past, so that it doesn’t disappear but becomes a healthy soil in which new things can grow. This is the work of vulnerable resistance. I recognize vulnerable resistance as open, grounded, flowing strength, and I believe in its possibilities for transformation. Like Terry Tempest Williams, “I am slowly, painfully discovering that my refuge is not found in my mother, my grandmother, or even the birds of Bear River. My refuge exists in my capacity to love. If I can learn to love death then I can begin to find refuge in change” (Refuge 178).

When my mom was nine-years old, her twelve-year old sister--Tita’s second of (eventually) seven children, was killed by a car while walking back to school from lunch

with her friends. The car, driven by a fellow schoolboy, swiped her body as he bent down behind the wheel to retrieve his pencil. My mother was standing outside in line with her classmates waiting for the bell to ring. Before school officials could notify my mom, a girl in line said to her, “Did you hear what just happened? Your sister got hit by a car and they think she’s dead.” This is how the story comes to me from my mother, antiseptic, stripped of grief despite its horror.

With a similar voice, she tells me that on the night she was on her first date with the man who would one day be my dad, she returned home to find all the lights on and Tita waiting at the door to tell my mom that Uncle Joe had been held at gunpoint and got shot in the head. Uncle Joe was Gidu’s brother. Gidu was my grandfather, Tita’s husband. Uncle Joe lived across the street with his wife and daughters, my mother’s cousins. Gidu and Uncle Joe owned a tavern together and that’s where the murder occurred. Later that same night, Uncle Joe’s daughter, my cousin Laurice, alone washed her dead father’s blood off the walls.

Gidu lived a double life with a second family. He was in a relationship with an ‘American’ woman, as she was referred. I do not know her name, nor do I know if she was his wife, mistress, lover, or partner, but together they had five children. To this day it is a family secret “confessed” to me only a few years ago by my mother, who had been told to keep this a secret to protect her family’s reputation as good Catholics, good assimilated immigrants (Langellier and Peterson, Storytelling Ch.4). My mother told me she carried this secret all these years with deep shame and only is disclosing the secret to me because she’s unwilling to carry the secret to her grave. In her eyes, her dad was a

monster. How could he do this to her mother, who *was* a good Catholic? These were my mom's 'words under the words' (Nye) as she disclosed the secret to me. I recognize that my own "revealing of what has been kept hidden, a speaking of what has been silenced" (Park-Fuller 26), may or may not be a "transgressive act" (26). I'm asking myself what purpose does this disclosure really serve? I'm hoping it will serve as a way for me to understand the shame my mother carried her entire life and to begin healing. I am also trying to cultivate forgiveness and compassion.

I don't cast judgment on the fact of Gidu's dual relationship because I believe in healthy possibilities for doing multiple relationships and families successfully when grounded in dialogue and trust; however, this particular situation was clearly harmful because it was cloaked in secrecy and shame that deeply wounded my mom and simultaneously, unfortunately, reinforced the "normalizing powers of the state" (Butler 104) that figure such variations as "dangerous for the child [and] perilous to the putative natural and cultural laws" (Butler 104). No doubt Tita's and Gidu's already fragile negotiations of ethnic and religious identities and challenges of assimilation created an increased need for secrecy of yet another non-normative, Gidu's double-life. I don't know Tita's and Gidu's interpersonal negotiations of love, jealousy, desire, energy, and I certainly acknowledge these complexities exist even in the most honest relationships. I'm simply pointing to the harm of silence induced by heteronormative structures that cause damage in the end.

The tragedy for my mother was born in the way she first learned about Gidu. Because Gidu's double life was unbeknownst to Tita's children, they did not know, or even suspect, that Gidu—their father-- had a combined total of twelve children living in

the same town. But one of Gidu's sons purposefully, and underhandedly, revealed his identity to my unsuspecting mother at a social event. He, a stranger to my mother, asked her to dance and then, making conversation on the dance floor, asked her, "What is your dad's name?"

"Clem Joseph."

"Really? That's my dad's name, too! Where does your dad work?"

"He owns a tavern."

"So does my dad! What is the name of his tavern?" and so on, until my mom very slowly began to realize the full impact of what she was learning while the boy laughed at her stunned disbelief and sneered that he wasn't lying. She bolted from the dance floor, shattered, ashamed, betrayed.

Though it is quite possible the boy likely felt as hurt and betrayed by his (their) father as she, it was impossible for my mother to see this, not then and not when she narrated the story to me. All of her woundedness, stored all of these years in the hunch of her shoulders, she hurled as hate in memory of the boy. They were two strangers sharing wounds and blood, lacking a vocabulary, a place for dialogue, a space for healing in this "unreal" situation (Butler 26) that "den[ied] reality and truth to the relations at issue" (27). Long ago my mom internalized the pain of her mother and held her up as a martyr. And when she told me this story, I finally began to understand the face my mother has always made, that ugly expression in the back of her throat, the shrink of her mouth, the shrivel of her aura whenever I would mention my Gidu.

I do not want to recreate grief without transforming it. I want to “remak[e] and rewrit[e] a dominant script” (Munoz 23). I desire reconceptualizations that might generate beyond me and ripple outward, in an economy of giving. I want the fire, and the fire again, as Wivermene’s Spider might say (Gingrich-Philbrook “The Phrenologist’s Daughter”). “To search one’s memory for the past’s residues...To scrutinize the sky ...To hear the phone ring, to look at the snow...” (Adnan In the Heart 110).

I was in bed that morning, New Years Day of 1987, when the phone call came. I wasn’t asleep and I wasn’t awake and as soon as I heard the ring, I knew two things. First, I knew when I pulled back my curtains and looked out the window there would be snow on the ground. There was no reason I should know or suspect there would be snow, but I was certain and the certainty came as immediately and simply as opening my eyes, or falling. Second, I knew the phone call would bring deadly news. There was no reason for me to suspect this. It was already mid-morning, not too early for a phone call, and with all of our many relatives it was more likely someone calling to say “Happy New Year.” But somehow I knew the ‘new’ would not be happy.

My dad answered the phone before the third ring. I heard silence, then efficient monosyllables that curved into the punctuation of a question, a mark that betrayed his attempt at neutrality. His tone conveyed gravity. He hung up the phone. Silence continued ringing. He called to my brother and me.

My mom’s eyes were frozen open, watching him. “Dave, what’s wrong? Tell me what’s wrong! Tell me what it is, what happened?” The four of us gathered in my

parents' bedroom, at the foot of the bed, crowded in the space between the bed and the dresser. A heavy pause within the hesitation. "There's been a bad accident."

The words emerged thick and slow, like tar on pavement bubbling in summer heat.

"There's been a bad accident."

"Tell me, Dave. Please." Their eyes locked on the hysteria that would begin to define the rest of their lives.

"There's been a bad accident and Tita and Rosie are dead."

The tar bubble popped and a cold breath lodged itself like a gap in my heart and my mother's immediate wailing, an eternal "NOOOOOOOOOOH" emerged from her deep core, her well of grief baptizing me with tears of death as she fell to her knees clinging to me screaming "NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!" and my younger brother, "It's okay mommy, mommy it's okay mommymommy itsokaymommymommyitsokay..."

Evette Hornsby Minor was our department's visiting artist for a week, a performance scholar who studies the motherline of her ancestry and embodies her grandmothers' narratives through movement and dance. We introduced ourselves and developed an immediate rapport. Within our first five minutes of talking, she looked me in my eyes, unblinking and direct, brought down a question from the ethers and aimed it at my heart, "Are you carrying your mother's grief?"

"Forgive me when I answer you/in a voice so swollen/it won't fit your ears./I'm thinking about apples and histories,/the hands I broke off/my mother's praying statue/when I was four/how she tearfully repaired them,/but the hairline cracks/in the

wrists/were all she said/she could see//the unannounced blur/of something passing/out of a life” (Nye “Breaking my Favorite Bowl” 8-22).

After the accident, my mother turned to me for support. She would have gone to her mother to grieve, but now her mother was gone. I mothered my mother while she grieved her mother. I held her while she sobbed. She clung to me like a pillar. I was the “human form outlined in steel” (Dufferrena). While my mother had “fall[en] into a handful of unrecognizable fragments from/the speed of the blow,” I was the “shard...smoothed in its turn: the seeds of ...daughters” (Dufferrena). But was this vulnerable resistance? Reflecting upon it, I don’t think I was smooth, just *too* hard. During this time I may have been denying my own need to grieve. Maybe it was necessarily the best I could do at that age for my mother who needed a mother. Or maybe that’s a harmful sentimentality that has allowed me to deny my deep needs for intimate vulnerability, creating a hardness within me. This was not vulnerable resistance. The seed of vulnerable resistance is smooth, plump, viable with swellings of tears, cradled in an open palm of soil. But this was a withered resistance, my grief still encased in the hardest of dry seeds buried deep within a clenched fist, in a deep place of resistance. In this writing I am trying to unearth that withered seed and water it with vulnerability. I am trying to plant seeds of vulnerable resistance.

When Tita and Rosie died, my mom’s friend gave Mom a porcelain egg and told her that after my mom grieved through every season of the year, a cycle will have completed itself and something new will have room to birth. Mom placed the egg in a special place in the kitchen. Before the year was up, I accidentally knocked the egg from

its place and it shattered into a thousand pieces. Mom did her best not to weep and then wept. I swept the fragments, each shard a blade of my unshed tears shredding me: I destroyed my mother's symbol for healing! I spent painstaking days piecing together fragments, but realized it felt wrong to glue back into place a holding pattern of grief. I tried to convince myself the premature shatter was needed release. That the egg was so swollen with death it was necessarily forced into entropy. I had barely touched it, but it had responded to the mere whisper of my touch like the ready seed-pod of a touch-me-not exploding into birth. As Awiakta writes, "Sometimes, in spite of all you do things go awry,--pots explode, dough falls, relationships rupture. But we can begin again. That is the great thing, to keep taking care" (140).

Rosie was my mom's youngest sister, just ten years older than me, my favorite aunt, my proxy big sister. Rosie was the one who understood me, who accepted me. She taught me a song that spelled "happy"; she taught me how to draw three-dimensional stars and told me my face was beautiful. At her funeral, they pancaked her face with makeup and stitched her mouth closed. I stared at her body, waiting for her to breathe, but she laid there, a present absence in the blue dress with the distorted mouth and the fake face. The deep violation of her smile still haunts me. I have forgotten the sound of her voice.

Hundreds came to the funeral, a snaking procession of generational bodies wrapping around the corner in the January cold. Old Lebanese women came cloaked in black perfume, grieving in Arabic, kissing me on each cheek, burying my face in their breasts, their coats smelling of cumin and garlic. The ones who spoke English clutched me by the shoulders and said, "Take care of your mother."

I remember one night, late, I was alone in my bedroom with the door closed “when grieving call[ed] down the darkness and no one [was] present to witness” (Pineau “Nursing Mother” 13). I buried my face in my pillow to muffle the violent sobs rocking my body--rocking but not cradling. There was nobody to cradle my body. I wanted nobody to hear me, especially not my mother. “This dance in the darkness is private...This dance in the darkness is archetypal. Who does not know, truly, the particularity of sensation that is loss, longing, and loneliness” (Pineau 13). To this day, I’ve never been able to let my mom know the intensity of who I am. I cannot cry with her and this pains me dearly. I know that “crying is acceptance, coping, a release” (Stucky 129). I know that “the *feel* of our grieving is the depth of our knowing” (Pineau 13) and to share that would be healing. But I cannot. The way I close myself off to my mother is *not* an example of vulnerable resistance. It is unhealthy, because the unexpressed energy clogs our shared aura and the grief sits on my heart like granite, heavy, impenetrable, dissolved only by decades of tears I’m reluctant to release. It is a grief I know I must transform. It is my present work. I inhale...exhale... ask myself, as Nye asks, “How do you know if you are going to die?/.../When you can no longer make a fist./.../I...am still living/.../clenching and opening one small hand” (“Making a Fist”).

Movement comes to me and through me and I am swayed and jostled and jolted and I carry the movement like a breeze holds a leaf for a moment, for an eternity, and I become the movement; I am fluid, fire, stone; I am breathing together my core, fastening with breath each prayer, each hope, each moment of love. I am breathing together the pieces, realizing now for the first time that when Tita and Rosie died, I had not yet known that my mom had a sister named Theresa who got hit by a car, nor did I know the story of

mom's uncle being shot, nor the story of Gidu's double-life. My mom was holding these stories inside her body, and I was holding my mother's body, resisting against falling apart so I could hold my mother together.

My mother has not yet finished grieving and the welling wailing rhythm of her immediate eternal keening at the moment of the news twenty-two years ago remains energetically imprinted into my aural fabric.

I stand in place. I write from where I am. Conquest perpetuates cycles of pain; vulnerable resistance sustains survival. And so I am fiercely vulnerable.

Nurturing Hands Embodying Alliance

This third fractal section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as alliance within the mode of nurturance. Within this section I am developing alliance with my mother and compassion for my father to create homeplace in my relationships with them. This alliance finds homeplace in the mode of nurturance through its themes of generational grief and my attempt to disrupt the repetition of grief patterns. I utilize fractal performativity as a method to "see" how multiple family lines of grief intersect on my body so that I can integrate and transform that grief through vulnerable resistance.

Transforming Generational Grief

Writing these stories of my mothers' grief, I felt the ethical and emotional desire to share with my mother that I was revealing her personal stories, and I asked her how

she felt about me disclosing her stories in these pages. She said these stories need to be written and she's glad I'm writing them.

I was hesitant to show her what I had written because I was concerned my stories might hurt her or trigger old grief, but she told me she wanted to read them, so I emailed them to her. Later, she thanked me for the stories. She said I handled her stories with care. I felt deep relief and admitted to her I'd been concerned how she'd react to reading about Gidu since she held that story with shame for so many years. Her response surprised me, "I'm over that." She went on to say that in the years since she disclosed to me the story about Gidu, she has "made peace" with her dad and has been able to let go. To my concerns that reading the part about Tita's and Rosie's death might be hard for her, she replied, "Well, I've already lived through it. Reading about it could never be any worse."

A few months later, I read Amy Tan writing her experience of her mother seeing Tan's film The Joy Luck Club, based on her semi-autobiographical novel by the same name. I was struck by the similarity of my exchange with my mother to Tan's experience. Like me, Tan was concerned about hurting her mom. She writes, "I'm nervous about what my mother will think. I'm afraid she'll be overwhelmed by some of the scenes that are taken from her life, especially the one that depicts the suicide of her mother" (Tan, Opposite of Fate 202). Later, her mother's reaction captures the sensibility of my own mother's. Tan writes, "She told me after the movie ended that the movie was "pretty good. In real life, everything so much sadder. So this, already much better" (202).

Showing my mother the stories enacted a healing between us I wasn't expecting. The stories opened up a dialogue in which she told me many more stories of grief and

tragedy from her life that I'd never known. A few days after we had that first conversation, she called to tell me that she had read the stories again and again and felt as though a burden had been lifted. She said she realized that the act of saying aloud to me that she's made peace with her dad enabled her to truly feel peace in a way she hadn't felt it before, and that she began to feel compassion for Gidu, genuine compassion, for the first time. She told me Gidu's dad had committed suicide and Gidu's brother was killed riding his bike—two more stories of tragedy I had never before heard, but that I was likely holding in my own body as generational grief. It was my act of vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance—that is, vulnerable resistance through the act of writing these stories in an exhale of silences, that enabled healing to occur for my mother, and subsequently for me.

The healing continues. A couple years ago I was sitting at the kitchen table in my parents' house talking with my mom and she gave me a particular artifact which I am now able to connect to this larger story of generational grief. She said, "I was going through my closet and I found some old letters from Dad when he was in the army. Here's one he sent when you were just a baby." She handed it to me. I held the envelope in my hand, astonished. I hadn't known my dad was in the army when I was a baby, and I had never known of any letters from my dad to my mom.

My dad is a quiet man, not much of a talker and rarely disclosive. What would his writing reveal to me that his private demeanor conceals? How does he translate his innermost thinking to the page? What would he be disclosing to my mom? How does he talk to her?

"Are you sure it's okay for me to read this?" I asked my mom.

“Sure. It’s about you, about how much he cares for you.”

“Really?” I said, surprised and touched. I looked at the envelope. It was addressed to “Mrs. David A. Unes” in his handwriting, a narrow, slanting script with a conservative hint of flourish. A six-cent and a two-cent postage stamp bearing the respective heads of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Frank Lloyd Wright were in the top right corner. The envelope was post-marked from Virginia on 12 August 1971.

“August 12, 1971!” I exclaimed. “But that’s just a few days after I was born!” My birth had been two weeks prior, on July 27, 1971. “I didn’t know he left so soon after I was born.”

“Diana, he had to go, he didn’t have a choice. But, yeah, he left one week after you were born.” Until that moment, I had not been aware that my mother raised me single-handedly during those newborn weeks of my life and that my father had been physically absent.

I opened the envelope and found two handwritten pages written on narrow paper:

Thur 3:50 P.M.

Hi Honey,

We just finished class &
since I have to go to the gas
chambers tonight I thought I would
write you now since we will
be returning late.

We saw some real good films
in school today. They were actual

films of the Ohio highway patrol.

It was all accident victims.

It about made me sick.

One short film reminded
me of us. Young
parents with a 5 ½ mo. old
daughter. They were all killed.
Hon, it showed everything
the mangled bodies
and the wreckage. It made me
think. I sure wish you could have
saw it.

You're all Diana & I have
so please be careful and drive
slow. I never want to hear you
say it makes you nervous to drive
slow. We would rather have you
nervous than to be in an accident
and get hurt or maybe even die.

Also think of your passenger
"Diana." We can't let anything
happen to her. How would we forgive
ourselves? We couldn't.

We both love you & need you
much. We can't make it without
you. Drive slow.

Give Diana a big kiss for me

With Love

David.

I stared at the letter for a quiet moment before I re-folded it and put it back into the envelope. Fifteen years after he wrote that letter to my mom, my dad would be the person designated to “identify the [mangled] bodies” of Tita and Rosie “after the accident” (Gingrich-Philbrook “What I Know”). For my dad “the story” came not in words but in a series of nightmares that have never ended. His nightmares continue to this day. He has had difficulty healing from the trauma of that task. He has never, ever, mentioned any part of it to me, but I have watched him over and over again, my entire life from that time period onward, bolt awake from a nap in jolting terror and severe disorientation. My mother simply told me once that he was called to identify the bodies and that it has given him nightmares. This knowledge, now compounded with the content of his letter, leaves me nearly speechless. This letter reveals a layer that I’d never been aware of: my father’s fears of losing me in a car accident did not begin when I was 15—the age I was at the time of the accident—but when I was born. I find a remarkable synchronicity in that when I was a newborn, my father: 1) was shown this video of a car accident with mangled bodies, which deeply imprinted into his third eye, so that 2) he lived his life in deep terror that this would materialize in his own life—a fear that resulted in ongoing lecturing to my mother, for as long as I can remember, to drive slow, and 3)

having this terror actually manifest in his life, not through my mom or me, but through my mom's family. Finally, he had to be the one to tell my mom, brother, and me about the car accident, and then he was the one asked to identify the mangled bodies of my mother's mother and sister at the morgue.

The letter also captures my father's painfully indirect way of communicating love. He has always conflated, or perhaps concealed, love with fear of loss. In my dad's own way, this is a love letter to my mother: he proclaims he cannot live without her; but it reads less as a profession of passion than a lecture on safety. The letter reveals my father's early days of intensifying anxiety and his sincere protective quality manifesting itself both in this letter and throughout my entire lifetime as well-intentioned yet fear-driven, guilt-inducing control.

The car accident happened the year I was getting my driver's permit; consequently, my parents were terrified to let me drive. Their trauma of unexpected loss of my aunt and grandma translated into their deep fear of losing me unexpectedly. They became painfully overprotective of me, more than before. To add to the situation, my father's father had a stroke a few weeks later and died shortly after that. Simultaneously, my mother and father were experiencing deepening depression and extreme anxiety.

I turn toward my father. Can I begin to trace the roots of these deep fears for my father? What generational grief is he carrying? Here are the stories I know about my father and his parents' stories.

This first story is about my grandfather coming to America, a story which I'd never heard until this past spring, 2009, when I learned that in the summer of 2008, my

grandfather's brother's daughter, Evelyn Unes, now in her seventies, wrote down the story. I summarize it here.

My father's father was three years old when his parents, my great-grandparents made the difficult decision to leave their homeland of Lebanon. With extended family, they prepared and packed food and provisions for the six-week boat journey. They had entrusted their money to a Lebanese man to secure them a place on a ship in *steerage*, the cheapest passenger rate. But the man, betraying their trust, bought them an even cheaper ticket on a cattle freighter and pocketed the difference. To my relatives' horror, they found themselves traveling in a confined, sweltering ship where animal cargo was a higher priority than human passengers. Even worse, a shipment of sick cows brought smallpox to the ship. My great-grandmother watched helplessly as her brother's two daughters, ages six and nine, were struck violently by the disease, perished brutally, and were buried at sea. My grandfather (age three) and his brother, a six-month old baby, survived the epidemic, but their mother, my great-grandmother, was grief-stricken at the loss of her nieces. I excerpt Evelyn Unes's words as she reflects upon the impacts of this grief from the perspective of her father:

The bleak image of that heartbreak...taught me, as a very young child, the lasting burden of family grief. As an infant of six months, my father was shielded from experiencing the emotional trauma the adults suffered, and yet...it remained a tender subject for him to talk about, as it called up the pain its searing memory gave to his mother, and the scar it left. "All of her life," he said, "Grandmother Budwiya never forgot their frightful entrapment on the 'ship of no exit, on the trip from *jahannim* (hell)'" ("My Father Comes to America" 1900)

Her remark upon “the lasting burden of family grief” reminds me what I’ve been calling ‘generational grief.’ She reflects on the grief as passed from Budwiya to her father to her, leaving me to ask, in what way does my great-grandmother Budwiya’s grief pass down to me, through my own father and grandfather?

I found a newspaper clipping that reveals another story and a glimpse into Budwiya’s life. Budwiya would suffer another tragedy twenty-four years later. On the day after Christmas, 1924, her husband—my father’s father’s father—who was employed as a yardman at the Keystone plant, was cleaning snow off the railroad switches when a switching engine and train car backed onto him, knocked him down, and decapitated him. According to the newspaper clipping of the incident, when my great-grandmother heard the news of my great-grandfather’s death she “became hysterical and ran screaming from her home.” She was found hours later in “critical condition due to hysteria” and taken home. My grandfather was twenty-seven years old at this time that his father was killed. How did he deal with this tragedy? Did this grief pass from my father’s father to my father? Is the trauma of this accident, this “mangled” decapitated body, the same trauma felt by my own father (and revealed in his letter)? My grandfather had, at that time, a three-year old daughter from a previous marriage. This young girl is my Aunt Helen, who died this past year at age 87 (whose death was foreshadowed to me by an owl). A few years ago while at a mercy dinner for another funeral, Aunt Helen retold the story from her perspective as the three year old, howling with laughter all the while. This dark humor is a signature form of storytelling and narration of tragedy on my dad’s side of the family. (And really, it does sound like the beginning of a bad joke: My great-grandfather was decapitated while working on the railroad, a Cartesian corpse, divided against an

acoustic landscape of Lebanese keening and traumatized hands.) Aunt Helen explained that the decapitated head had been retrieved but not re-attached. Because an unattached head was considered better than no head at all, an open casket was justified. My then-three-year old aunt watched her grandmother—the grieving widow—continue to caress her dead husband’s face throughout the viewing, while the mortician agitatedly stood by, looked on, and intermittently yelled in a hushed tone through clenched teeth, “Please, *stop* touching the head!” and then he would hastily scurry over to reposition the unattached head which kept rolling off to the side.

Dark humor aside, I find it noteworthy that both my great-grandfathers died prematurely: my paternal great-grandfather by decapitation and my maternal great-grandfather by suicide. How do these tragedies from two father lines intersect on my body? Regarding my paternal great-grandfather, how did this tragedy affect my father’s father? Did he grieve? Did he internalize sorrow, or guilt? He worked at the same plant, but he wasn’t at work that day when the accident happened. I do know that three years later he went to North Dakota to marry my grandmother. And I do know they returned to Peoria to start a family. And I do know my great-grandmother Budwiya moved in with them at some point and there was tension between my grandmother and her mother-in-law in the mix of my grandmother’s eight children and the crowded house.

I don’t know many stories about my father’s mother, my Sitdy. In all her life, my Sitdy only told me a single story and it was a story about a gypsy woman who sat down before my grandmother in the dusty street. My Sitdy told me the story about how the gypsy flourished her colorful skirts as she sat down to allow my grandmother to admire her. In Sitdy’s rememory (Morrison) of her moment with the gypsy, I saw an expression

on my grandmother's face that I'd never seen before or since. She looked happy and serene, nearly youthful, contented and hopeful; her eyes focused far, yet present. I try to see the gypsy as my Sitdy perceived her, an embodiment of colorful freedom in contrast to my grandmother's dusty, duty-bound, burdened existence.

Sitdy birthed eight children, the first few on the kitchen table; the last few in the hospital. Apparently, she'd been told that hospital births were more appropriate than homebirths. I wonder how my Sitdy would respond to that belief today if I could ask her, especially given the events surrounding my father's birth. My father was her youngest, her eighth and last child, and he was her only child born in a taxi. The story is that she had sent my Aunt Lorraine walking the several blocks necessary to find my grandpa at the tavern. By the time my grandpa and the taxi arrived, Sitdy was well into her labor. While the taxi sped to the hospital, my father was born in the taxi's backseat. They arrived at the hospital, but the hospital wouldn't admit my grandma and her baby because the hospital was full. My grandfather angrily persuaded them to take them in. The hospital staff agreed but said my grandmother wouldn't be able to stay the night. She left her newborn, my father, at the hospital and returned home to care for her other seven kids. Because the hospital was full, the staff housed my father in a dresser drawer. The drawer tipped out of the dresser, crashed to the ground, and my father—at less than one day old, tumbled out of the drawer with a broken leg. Hospital personnel put a cast on his newborn leg and called my grandparents to come pick him up from the hospital.

Perhaps my father held the grief in his body of his father's mother, his father, and his own newborn trauma. Perhaps this, combined with growing up the youngest of eight in a dirt-poor family in the tough streets of the South Side of Peoria, has something to do

with my father's own overprotective anxieties, fears, and unprocessed anger. At his core, my father has a very soft heart and an eccentric way of being. He's intuitive and deeply kind. But these were not valued traits for a man of his ethnicity and class. So he began performing a masculinity of "toughness" that suppressed his emotions and left him aloof. Success among his siblings was measured by how well they could conform to mainstream ways of being, so my father went into sales and began wearing suits. He raised his family on a commissioned salary and lived by the bootstrap myth of hard work. As this was his paradigm, and his salary and livelihood depended upon his success within it, he taught me all my life to "play the game" and "conform" and was disappointed that I didn't want to. I honestly tried, but I just couldn't do it very well. It hurt my spirit.

I knew he had my best interests in mind. There is a significant moment in my life, where I am exceedingly grateful for my dad's adherence to institutions and perseverance. It was my senior year in college. I had one more semester before graduating but, for a myriad of reasons, felt overwhelmed and didn't think I could finish my degree. Devastated by self-doubt, I called home. My dad answered. I told him I was going to quit school. He asked me why, and he listened as I told him. He somehow, very calmly, persuaded me to finish. I graduated *magna cum laude* and was awarded a graduate assistantship to the master's program in English. Years later, I am completing my doctorate degree.

While I've struggled over these years to find a way to live in vulnerable resistance, to honor my spirit while at the same time navigating and negotiating contexts that do not always align with my ways of being, my father more fully denied his spirit. He had thought he was doing what he'd been taught was 'right.' However, in recent

years, it became apparent how deeply his denial of self had hurt him. He became acutely ill and has been working hard to heal. He's trying to unbury his soft heart and eccentric soul that have been burdened from these years of denying his spirit in the name of patriarchal success. A few weeks ago, he called me. This is a very big deal. My father rarely calls me. He asked me how I was doing. We made very brief chit-chat. And then he said, "Okay, well, that's all I wanted." And then he said, "I love you." It was the first time he ever told me he loved me, and it marked the beginning of a new pattern in our lives.

Nurturing Hands Embodying Performance

This next fractal section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as performance within the mode of nurturance. The mode of performance facilitates a healing of splits in order to access one's personal power. I name this section performance because the events I recount in these stories required me to step fully into my power, heal the uncertainties and fears within myself and trust in my own strength. The performances in this section are everyday performances in the sense that they are not staged performances. However, they are nonetheless 'heightened' and not typical everyday performances: I told my father my name, I midwived goats, and I learned that my daughter was in a car accident. The events, or actions, of this section create a trinity of dying, birthing, living occurring across three consecutive days, integrated through a pattern of fractal performativity that I put on display and analyze. My performance of self-empowerment in these stories is an act of vulnerable resistance creating homeplace by healing splits within my self that had been rooted in the same fractal pattern of fears

and imbalances passed onto me generationally. This fractal section of performance is in the mode of nurturance because it addresses themes of living and dying, grief and birth.

A Trinity of Birth, Life, Death

In a course of three consecutive days, three significant things happened regarding my spirit: I was born, I midwifed life, I nearly died. These recent events were about me stepping into my power. Yes, it's a phrase I overuse, but I'm beginning to understand what I mean by it. I mean opening myself to my most vulnerable place, where I feel the deepest love and deepest fear and deepest strength; the place where love and fear crash into one another and I muster my deepest strength to survive the moment. That moment of strength amidst openness and fear is vulnerable resistance.

The first day: I was born

I needed to tell my parents that I was legally changing my name to Diana Lynn Tigerlily. I knew they would be upset about it. I called my mom and told her. Her response surprised me and made me happy. She said that while it's hard for her to understand my ways of being, she also recognizes that it's okay our ways are different from each other. "I've evolved quite a bit, and honestly, it's because of you. You've taught me so much." She said, "Your name is yours. No matter what, you'll always be my Diana Lynn." Then she said, "Dad's probably not going to be too happy about you dropping Unes." I told her not to mention it to him because I wanted to tell him myself, and she agreed that'd be best. That night, my mom called and said, "Diana, I couldn't help it. I told Dad. He's upset and wants to talk to you." My dad got on the phone. He

asked me why I was dropping Unes from my name. I explained to him that if I had taken Greg's last name in the traditional way, then my last name wouldn't be Unes anyway. He said that I should have taken Greg's name because to take his last name shows that we're one. I said, "No, it shows I've disappeared." He said, "But if you change your name to Tigerlily out of the blue like that, nobody will know who you are." I explained to him that I've been Tigerlily for eleven years and that most people know me as Tigerlily. The only ones who don't know this are a few family members in Peoria, and they've simply assumed my last name is Reid since every other married woman in the family took her husband's name. Our conversation continued for a long time, with him asking me to reconsider. Finally, he said, "Well, you'll always be Diana Lynn Unes to me. That's how I'll always introduce you." I said that was perfectly fine with me. And it is. My dad is the one person in the world who can call me Diana Lynn Unes. After we hung up, I considered not changing my name, just because I knew how much it would make my dad happy. But then I remembered that this was my name. Not anybody else's.

From a very deep and old place I still embody but long forgot, recognition swirled up and around me, like a fragrance, a scent of memory, and I saw myself—my ancient self, my timeless self, my spirit self—in my name, Tigerlily, rooted in my earth spirituality and way of being, the homeplace of my higher self, transcending time and space. I understood that by naming myself I am enacting agency and power that is uniquely my own, a vulnerable resistance in the deepest sense.

The second day: I midwived life

The very next day I went out to feed the goats. Pink was in labor. She was pushing out a three-inch diameter water sac, but the membranous globe was stuck. She pushed and pushed. I tried to help and it burst like a water balloon. She immediately made a nest by brushing away a circle of straw with her hoof and sat down. I sat down on the strawbale beside her. This was my first time being present during anybody's labor—human, goat, cat or otherwise—beside my own. I'd seen my cat, Artemisia, give birth to her five kittens, but I didn't see the labor leading up to it. I just saw the one-hour during which Artemisia successfully, and seemingly effortlessly, birthed five kittens, one after another, while she lay quietly on her side. As for my goats, so far there had been three birthings, all successful and without human intervention. My timing was such that I had always arrived just after the birth, while the babies were still wet.

But now, here I was, and Pink was in labor. How long had she been in labor before I arrived? What is a "normal" labor for a goat? She was pushing at regular intervals, but I could tell the babies hadn't yet moved down. I stayed with her and watched to make sure her labor progressed. She was vocal, and she was restless. For about an hour and a half she labored, changing positions continually to get comfortable. I was trying to ascertain whether she was in distress, or if her pacing and bleating and movement was normal birthing stress. At one point she quickly, even frantically, made a new nest and squatted, and I thought, *okay. here we go*. She pushed a long hard push accompanied by a loud bleating. The baby had moved down. Her vulva was bulging but her vagina was barely open. She continued pushing and the bulging pressure was building behind her vulva. The vaginal opening was a little bigger, but it didn't open as much as it seemed it should. Something was not right. I felt myself begin to breathe rapidly. I was

nervous. This was completely new to me. I didn't want to be invasive if I didn't need to be. But I didn't want to do *nothing* if Pink needed my help.

Suddenly, I remembered the dream I had the night before. I had gone out to feed the goats and something was wrong with Pink. She didn't look right. Her face was long, like a horse's face, and her expression was vacant. I was terrified and woke up.

I took one of the deepest breaths I've ever taken and told myself that I was strong. Pink let out another push, bleating loudly. She pushed hard. She opened a tiny bit more, but the bulging pressure increased. It became clear to me that the baby was stuck and no amount of pushing was going to help. I knew I needed to reach in and see if I could turn the baby.

I was calm, but I was also tentative. I slipped two fingers into Pink, between the baby and the tightly stretched thin skin of Pink's vaginal opening. I tried to feel for the head, but what I was feeling was fleshy, delicate with tiny bones, not a skull. I was disoriented, blindly trying to visualize the baby's position, trying to orient to its body, trying to grip but not crush this fragile, slippery baby. I let go of the baby and removed my hand. Pink was bleating loudly. "It's going to be okay, Pink," I said to her while wondering, How was I going to secure my hands around this baby? I entered into Pink again and realized I was feeling the baby's back and stomach. I pulled out my hand and took another deep breath.

I knew what I needed to do. I no longer felt fear, and I no longer felt tentative. I had moved into the sublime place of certainty with confidence that my singular task was to bring this baby out of Pink. Working from instinct, I slipped my hand into Pink until it disappeared. I slipped in my other hand so that I could cradle the baby firmly without

hurting it. I could feel that the baby was completely sideways, perpendicular to the opening, folded in half and twisted. Pink gave a loud push and I held onto the baby with all my softest might, turning the baby held between my slippery hands pressed loosely into the shape of praying hands, and I pulled gently and strongly, continually, until the baby slipped out completely. Pink immediately collapsed to her knees, and I hurriedly cleared away the gelatin membranes covering the baby's mouth and nose. The baby was completely limp and not breathing, not responding. The baby was not alive. No matter how much I willed it to breathe, it could not. I burst into deep sobbing, sobbing for this small life, this delicate body. Was it my fault the baby was dead? Had I waited too long to intervene? Had I hurt it with my hands?

As I cried and questioned, Pink sat quietly, calm for the first time since her labor had begun. She yawned a giant relieving yawn. She was worn out, but not fatigued. I suspected she was still carrying another baby. Suddenly, another baby slipped out of Pink, quick and slick, right before my eyes, and spiraled to my knees. Ahh, now that's more like it, that ease. I quickly cleared away the membranes and the baby made a loud strong gasp for air and immediately began struggling to move toward its mother. I continued to clean this strong little baby and helped it make its way to Pink, who began nuzzling and cleaning it right away. A few minutes later, another baby slipped out, effortlessly again. This baby, too, gasped, healthy, for its first breath, as I cleaned away the membranes. Then, with a bit of help, it found its way to its mother, who began nurturing her baby. Triplets. Oh, Pink.

I was as relieved for these two healthy babies as I was mournful for the loss of the first baby's life. I was mournful that my first experience as a midwife was met with

death. But I knew I would be unfair to myself if I were to look at the moment only from the perspective of loss. I began slowly to realize that if I hadn't been there, and able to help Pink, she very likely might have died. Her baby was stuck; her labor had stalled. I helped alleviate the pain of her labor and made space for two more lives to slip into this world. It's awkward to think about, or even to admit, because it sounds dramatic when the act was acutely mundane, but I think I saved Pink's life. The more dramatic truth is that in my helping Pink give birth, Pink helped me give birth to myself. The baby that died was like my angel or spirit guide, arriving in complication to signal me that it's time for me to exercise self-certainty, self-confidence, to believe in myself. It was time for me to fully learn how to be assertive and caring, to be strong and soft. The baby taught me what it means to be fiercely vulnerable. I was Pink's midwife, and I performed vulnerable resistance in the action of opening myself to the uncertainty and resisting against fear while simultaneously being assertive, confident, strong, and gentle. In the act of vulnerable resistance, I was both giving and receiving. I was both active—entering Pink's body and grabbing the baby; and receptive—working with Pink to “catch this baby.” This is vulnerable resistance in the mode of nurturance.

An interesting side note to this story is that I had plans for that evening to attend the opening night of The Vagina Monologues. So, I stayed with Pink and her babies a bit longer until I was certain that they were all going to be just fine, and then I rushed inside. I shrugged out of my goat clothes, showered, and put on my Tigerlily attire: black velvet and a carnelian pendant, because I felt powerful. Yes. On the opening of The Vagina Monologues, I reached into the vagina of a goat that wasn't opening. On the night I listened to women reclaim their strength, I had found my strength. On the night that my

dear friend and mentor was awarded The Vagina Warrior Award, I had become a midwife.

The third day: I nearly died

The very next morning, I was to drive Raynah a mere three minutes from my house to the town square so she could catch a ride to rehearsal with one of her dance instructors. We'd recently realized that we all lived in Marion, and so Sydelle offered to take Raynah with her to their rehearsal in Carbondale. This favor was such a relief and a luxury. Rather than spending an hour on the road, I would spend less than ten minutes. On days like this, in which Raynah had a lengthy rehearsal in the morning, a gap of time, and then a performance in the evening, it was not uncommon for us to either make 3 to 4 round trips a day to Carbondale and back or choose to find ways to spend hours in Carbondale, which was neither fun nor easy. So, Sydelle's offering to drive Raynah on this early Saturday morning was quite a gift. Admittedly, I'd felt a momentary twinge of anxiety in my gut about the arrangement, but I told myself that this was not an intuitive response, but a learned and leftover response from living with years of my parents' car anxieties stemming from the car accident that killed my aunt and grandmother. Raynah would be just fine.

That morning it was lightly sleeting, but nothing that looked problematic. The roads were warm enough that the sleet melted when it hit the pavement, so the roads were wet but clear. Out of the blue Raynah said she didn't want to ride with Sydelle. I asked, how come? and she mumbled something and then said because she would feel awkward. I told her she'd be fine. We got in the car and Raynah repeated that she really didn't want

to go with Sydelle. I wondered to myself if she was having an intuitive response or normal anticipation. Then she said, “What will we talk about it in the car?” I told her that all she had to do was thank her for the ride and that if Sydelle wanted to make chit chat she would probably just ask her about school or dance. We arrived to the Square, and I told Raynah to have fun at rehearsal. As I pulled away, I noticed that Sydelle didn’t turn onto Main Street, but went South on Market, heading to the backroads. I thought that was a strange choice, only in that it would take them longer to get there. But then, three minutes later, I was back home and jubilant that I wouldn’t be spending this Saturday in my car. Today, my plan was to sit in front of the fireplace and write. I poured myself some coffee and was going to check on the baby goats, when the phone rang.

“Diana? This is Sydelle. Are you there?”

“Yes, it’s me.”

“We’re fine,” she said, slowly. “But we’ve been in an accident.”

My heart froze.

“Is everybody okay?”

“Yes.”

From Sydelle’s calm voice and from the way she narrated the story, I was under the impression that this was a minor accident, more inconvenient than traumatic. So I was not properly prepared for what I saw when Greg and I arrived at the scene of the crash. Muddy-grooved car tracks traveled for about seventy-five feet, down into a deep ditch, through the fence, up an embankment, into the field, where the car stopped less than one foot away from a three foot diameter telephone pole. The car had just missed the telephone pole. The rear end of the car was completely smashed.

Sydelle came over when we parked the car, “It turns out we have friends who live nearby so we were able to get out of the cold and sit in their house.” She looked at me, “I’m so sorry. I offer your child a ride and then I get into a wreck.”

“I’m just glad everybody is okay.”

“Yes, me too.”

We looked at the car and the deeply grooved tracks, and she proceeded to explain what happened. When she swerved to avoid the animal, the car went into a tailspin and spun multiple times before it started skidding backwards. It went off the road and, still facing backwards, went through the fence and smashed into the embankment. The impact of the crash instantly shattered the entire back windshield, and the glass fell on Raynah, where she was sitting in the backseat. The car continued up the embankment, and the entire axle was torn off the bottom of her car. Still the car continued until it swerved a half-circle around the pole, miraculously missing it, and finally coming to a halt.

The stark reality hit me that this was nearly a tragedy.

I found Raynah and followed her into the bathroom as she changed out of her dance clothes into warm clothes. We hugged. I looked into her eyes, trying to read her emotions. “How do you feel?” I asked her.

“I’m fine,” she said. “I held on really tight. I told myself just to hang on and not let go.”

We got into our car and drove home. When we got home, Raynah said that her back hurt but that she couldn’t tell if it was her bones or her muscles. We took her to the emergency room to make sure everything was okay. Greg and I were worried about the force of the impact, but everything tested out fine.

With relief, we arrived back at home, and I began making cookies for the bake sale. We had to leave in an hour for The Women's Center benefit in which Raynah was performing with her Dance Company from Willow Street Studios. While I was dropping cookie dough onto the trays, Raynah came into the kitchen and announced, "I can remember all the details now. Before, I couldn't remember what was going through my mind when the car started spinning, but I can remember now."

"Would you like to tell me about it?" I asked, hoping that she would. She hadn't spoken much and I was concerned.

"No. I will only talk about it when I want to, and I don't want to talk about it." Then she said, "All I know is when the car started spinning, I thought to myself 'You are dead meat' but then I thought, 'No way, because you have to dance tonight.'" She stopped talking and looked at me. "I don't want to talk about it anymore." And she left the room.

My heart broke. She just turned twelve, only five days ago, and here she was facing her mortality. And if I know her like I think I do, she was probably thinking about Greg and me, too, in those moments. She was probably thinking to herself, "I have to live so that my Mama won't be sad." But she couldn't tell me that she was thinking that because she wouldn't want me to worry that she was worrying about me worrying. It's the classic pattern of my own relationship with my mother, with my entire family. It's the pattern I'm trying to break. Edwidge Danticat captures it so well in her book, Brother, I'm Dying. The patterns of fear, loyalties, protection, worrying fueled by love and grief and resulting in silences, unspoken stories. And here, at age twelve, Raynah is doing it to me, in the same way I did it to my own mother. And I still do. I protect my mother. For

example, I had no intention of even telling my mom about this accident. What would be the point? Raynah is fine. But as I was covering the cookie platter and ready to dash out the door, my phone started to ring. Reading the phone, I said aloud, "It's my mom."

Raynah said, "Oh, she probably saw my email. I told her about the accident."

"You did?" I said, surprised. Then, I answered the phone, "Hi Mom."

"Diana?" Her voice was frantic, anxious, near hysterics. "Were you in a car accident? Was there a car accident?"

"Everybody is fine, Mom. Raynah was riding with somebody to Carbondale and their car slipped off the road, but nobody got hurt."

"Jesusmaryandjoseph. Oh, thank God. Is she really okay? She's not hurt at all? I just opened my email and there was an email from her saying that she was in a car accident at 8:30 this morning, but that's all she said. I about had a heart attack."

"Oh, mom, I'm so sorry."

"That's okay, that's okay, I want her to tell me these things. I'm just glad she's fine. Nobody got hurt?"

"No, everybody is fine. In fact, we're on our way out the door. Raynah's dancing tonight for The Women's Center benefit."

"Oh, good. Okay, I'll let you go. Have her call me tomorrow, okay? I love you, honey."

"Okay, Mom. I love you, too." I hung up the phone and marveled at my effortless protective mode, the nonchalant story about a car simply "slipping" off a road and now we're going dancing.

When we arrived at the studio, everyone had already heard about the accident. Two concerned mothers asked me how bad it was. “Did you see the car? How’s Raynah? How are *you* doing?”

I realized this was my first time narrating, and therefore my first time processing, the story. I also realized this was the first time I’d been asked how *I* was doing, which made me realize that I was experiencing intense inner emotion, but was holding myself together externally.

The intensity comes from that reminder of the ephemerality of life. Just the day before, I had midwived a dead baby goat into the world while the mother lived. What is the meaning of this strange juxtaposition, where my only baby was in a car wreck that only fate or luck or angels or karma or physics, could manipulate to safety. My baby lived. And so our life goes on unchanged, so undisrupted that I baked the cookies for the fundraiser. Yet, an interruption did occur. Like an announcer blasting a public service announcement in the middle of an arena event, “Please remember to appreciate your life and the people you love, because everything changes.”

I’m learning that the bigger I open my heart, the more deeply I’m able to love; and the more deeply I love, the more vulnerable I am to loss. Vulnerable resistance is loving at the risk of loss. Loving in the face of fear. Vulnerable resistance is being strong enough to survive the moments where love and fear collide. Vulnerable resistance is hope. Hope reminds us that life happens, even in death, even in loss, even in fear. Vulnerable resistance shows us that death yields life, loss yields opening, fear yields strength, and hope fuels love.

What does this have to do with Raynah? Only that I have to remember to not confuse love and fear. My parents loved me so much they feared they'd lose me and short of locking me in my room, they tethered me to safety. As much as I would like to keep Raynah safe, I know that a short leash only creates strain. I want to break the pattern of fear. Vulnerable resistance means stepping openly into the world in confident love. So that we can tell our stories and not let "grief silence us" (Danticat) and not let fear paralyze us. So that we can somehow be honest with each other without being afraid of hurting one another.

Nurturing Hands Embodying Sustenance

This fifth fractal section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as sustenance within the mode of nurturance. Here I recount the mystical connections to places, birds, and dreams that sustain healing and connection to Lebanon despite the physical distance. These connections occur as metaphysical patterns of communication with animals and through dreams, and the patterns are integrated, repeated, and expressed through the method of fractal performativity. Accepting these magical connections, believing in and opening to them, is vulnerable resistance as sustenance. The connection to the living world around us sustains homeplace.

Doves, Cardinals and a Mountain Mystic

Shortly after Tita and Rosie died, my mom began hearing two birds calling to her. She said they were the spirits of Tita and Rosie. They are Mourning Doves, present wherever she goes. I still see and hear them with my mother at multiple times and places.

Everyone in the family understands their significance. The doves' presence is unquestioned, unremarkable, accepted.

A decade ago, a female Cardinal swooped down and hovered at my face. I knew in that moment this cardinal was my spirit child and that I was pregnant with a being named Raynah Genevieve. As I walked across campus, she flew beside me, landing from tree to tree. Genevieve is Tita's first name.

A few years ago, on December 24, 2005, my mother called and told me Rizk died. He was 84. Rizk and Tita were cousins, close in age and raised in the same house as brother and sister after Tita's father died when she was three. Rizk eventually left Aitu and moved to Peoria, emerging as a quiet spiritual leader in our Lebanese community. Silently, I hung up the phone. Raynah pointed out the window, "Look, Mama, a Cardinal!" There was an entire flock, about two-dozen male and female cardinals. No birdfeeder, no birdseed, just a flock of cardinals gathered directly outside the window where I was sitting. I'd never before seen a flock of cardinals. I burst into tears.

I journaled the story of Rizk and the cardinals, and the entry ended on the last page of my journal, as had my journal entry eight years before, the night I'd later birthed Raynah and met her cardinal spirit enfleshed. With this entry of Rizk, my journal ended not with a story of death, but with a story of cardinals, a story of trusting the signs, of trusting the forces of birthing and dying, knowing they hold simultaneity, like a seed, like vulnerable resistance. Rizk died on the anniversary of St. Sharbel's death, December 24, 1898. Sharbel was the Lebanese prophet with whom Rizk identified. They both died December 24. They were both born in the month of May.

A couple summers later, finally, my mother and I said to each other, yes, we will go to Lebanon. Two days later Israel bombed the Beirut airport. Some time later I said, “Mom, if we’re really going to go to Lebanon we have to start making plans. She said, “Let’s do it,” and she sent off for her birth certificate to start the passport/visa process. She was serious. Later she called me. “I talked to my cousin Georgette and she told me about this woman from the Lebanon mountains who has visions—and we’re related to her somehow, Georgette can tell you more—and last month this woman was visited by St. Sharbel, St. Maron, and the Virgin Mary, and they told her to tell everyone she knows to pray for Lebanon because it’s going to get really bad in four months. So Georgette and everybody cancelled their plans.”

“They cancelled their plans?”

“Yes.”

“Because of this woman’s dream?”

“Yes. They had tickets and everything and had made arrangements to meet our cousins from Australia in Aitu, and now our cousins from Australia aren’t going either. And Laurice told me Jebrine had plans but he cancelled, and that Habib’s mother in Lebanon is really sick, she’s dying, so he made arrangements to go see her, but then his family called and said don’t come; it’s too dangerous; even his mother begged him not to come, so reluctantly he cancelled. And *then*, Father Elia was going to take a group of people with him this summer and he’s not going to go now. And he goes every summer. And Laurice’s niece, Lena, was going to go, but she cancelled her trip, too. Then Naiia called me and told me more of the same. Everybody’s cancelled. Nobody’s going.”

There was nothing to say. I was somewhere between stunned and laughing. The mystic in the mountains had a dream and delivered the message, so mote it be. These are the daily details, the matter of facts. Tempting as it may be for me to dismiss this woman and all my relatives as crazy, I can't, because I recognize their ways of knowing as similar to my own. I've just never had my ways mirrored back to me until now, and I was unaware I share this similarity with my relatives.

Exactly four months after the woman's dream, as she had predicted, fighting broke out in Northern Lebanon when the Lebanese Army invaded a Palestinian refugee camp near Tripoli to fight the militia group Fatah Al-Islam. Tripoli is near Aitu. The fighting lasted 105 days—the entire summer-- killing hundreds and displacing thousands, and was reported as being the worst internal strife in Lebanon since the 1975-1991 civil war.

And so here I am, standing with my own hand-woven baskets of magic dreams, talking to birds, listening to trees, and learning that apparently I've descended from a mystic in the mountains, from a woman whose words hold power, respect, reverence even among the most conservative in her Lebanese culture. It's in my motherline, this way of being. I hold this knowledge in the palm of my hand. "Genealogy writes a body always already written by history," writes Pollock, "But centered in the body, it also writes that history in breaks and ruptures, not as a text per se but as the story of living bodies always already contesting, at both macro- and micro-political levels, the social texts to which they are otherwise indentured" (91). And "within the stories...the dimensions of human sensation, perception, conception, and experience come together"

(Gunn Allen, "Lay" 234), and I come to know vulnerable resistance all over again through patterns of fractal performativity.

Vulnerable resistance allows me to keep from drowning in the love I feel for a hurting world I believe in. The affirmation exists in the fact of the shiver; in the opening of my eyes, ears, heart; in the unfolding of my hand; in the caress of the stories that are the creases of my life, lifelines of my hands holding vulnerable resistance in my open palms, transforming death into life like a ready seed.

In my yard, a grapevine is growing. The grapevine stems from a start from the grapevine of my mother's yard. Her grapevine stems as a start from the grapevine of her mother's. Tita's grapevine stems from Lebanon. In fractal performativity, generations entwine, connect, reconnect time. I plant apple trees in my yard and think of Tita. Tita's limestone mountains of Northern Lebanon are my sandstone cliffs of Southern Illinois. Tita's chalky soil is my wet clay. Our hands share the knowledge of soil alchemy. Our roots palm moist, rich soil. Tita dug a hole and buried a language and a mother with her tongue. I dig a hole and cover the transplanted roots with my palms of hands. These roots, too, will make a home here. These hands, too, root me to earth. I thrust my hands, my roots, my tongue into the soil, lines of my palms, terrains of my veins, backs of my hands branch into trees, families of valleys, labyrinths of terraced limestone. Hands are my eyes and ears. I *feel* my way through worlds, storying palm poems.

CHAPTER 3

VULNERABLE RESISTANCE AS SUSTENANCE

Homeplace of Sustenance

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance creates homeplace through connection to place: mystical, geographical, or physical. The hand sustains. The sustaining hand builds the garden, holds the soil, develops relationship with the land and the animal, plant, and spirit worlds. The sustaining hand creates homeplace by preparing a nutrient rich, renewable soil for all life so the seeds of vulnerable resistance can sustain themselves perennially, without depleting their vitality. Home exists in that perennial, sustaining connection, and often one's identity is linked with that sense of place. This is a sense of homeplace that often exists beyond familial homeplace. Though it does not exclude family homeplace, vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance includes physical places and psychic spaces not necessarily tied to genealogy.

This chapter examines the ways selected writers enact vulnerable resistance by sustaining their connections to place and preserving identity, especially in the face of displacement. I marshal their writings in this chapter introduction to display the variety of ways they sustain their relationship with soils by staying attuned with, and reading the signs of, the living world through embodied vulnerable resistance, especially in the face of growing environmental exploitation. The fractal relationship of, and the mutuality between, earth bodies and human bodies is emphasized in these examples. In keeping with fractal performativity, the landscape of these writers' works are diverse yet grounded in a shared terrain: in this case, a commitment to egalitarian relationship and

interconnection loosely categorized as ecofeminist. Ecofeminism's basic premise "is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature... Ecofeminism's theoretical base is a sense of self...that is interconnected with all life" (Gaard 1). An ecofeminist theme is present throughout this chapter, and my ecospirituality is foregrounded in the chapter's fractal sections as I reveal my relationships to place and my reading of signs in the living world surrounding me as a way of sustaining connection and homeplace through vulnerable resistance.

Ecofeminists Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva illustrate the depth of the interconnections between soil, identity, and homeplace in tribal societies. "Cultural and religious identity derive from the soil, which is perceived...as the very soul of society...it epitomizes all the sources of sustenance and is 'home' in the deepest sense" (102). Mies and Shiva explain that *bhum*, or soil, is considered home by the Hill Maris tribe, and that *Shringar Bhum* is the universe of plants, animals, and humans. It is the "cultural spiritual space which constitutes memory, myths, stories and songs that make the daily life of the community" (102). We form a sustaining relationship to place through *Shringar Bhum*, not only through the soil, but through the signs communicated to us from the animal world, the spirit world, and the dream world. Living in vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance enhances our ability to read and trust these signs.

Many have written about the different ways we form a relationship with place. In The Lure of the Local, Lucy Lippard writes, "The intersections of nature, culture, history, and ideology form the ground on which we stand...the resonance of a specific location ...entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories..." (7). bell hooks

describes home as “a place where one is enclosed in endless stories. Like arms, they hold and embrace memory” (Where We Stand 16). hooks believes that remembering together is the highest form of communion, and her description of communion recognizes human’s relationship with soil, “Communion with life begins with the earth, and these people, my kin, are people of the earth. They grow things to live” (16).

Joy Harjo feels this sense of communion in the multiple places she experiences as homeplace. In her poem “we never say goodbye” Harjo reveals that she has found homeplace across a multitude of locations: “Tuscany is a place in the world that sustains me” (line 1); “In Cairo I felt I had come home, though it was far from anyplace or language/ that I knew...” (lines 5-6); “On the Saami lands in northern Norway I knew I could die and my spirit/ would be taken care of...” (lines 16-17); and “In Hawai’i when I stood...[I] knew that there would be no good-bye in this place of good/friends and beautiful aloha” (lines 23-24). These lines collectively express a *knowing* of home, of safety, sustenance, nurturance, and alliance grounded in the connection between self and place.

For some people, a specific location made tangible through the soil defines homeplace. In her essay “The Language of Flowers,” Isabel Allende describes how she was able to take very few things with her when she had to leave her family, friends, and “the incomparable landscape of my homeland” (25) in Chile following the 1973 military coup. One thing she managed to tuck into the bottom of her suitcase was “a little bag containing dirt from my garden” (25). For Allende, that soil represented a tangible symbol of homeplace that can hold roots and nurture her psyche. Similarly, Paula Gunn Allen writes, “We take some chunks of a strange stone we find...Hard dirt, caliche, most

likely...I want it with me. ...We will have a piece of the mountain in our new life.” (“My Lebanon” 219).

Many writers emphasize the relationship between bodies and soil in creating homeplace. When Terry Tempest Williams writes of being arrested for protesting the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, she marks the contrast between the officials’ disconnection with the land that the “trespassers” consider homeplace: “The officials thought it was a cruel joke to leave us stranded in the desert with no way to get home. What they didn’t realize was that we were home, soul-centered and strong, women who recognized the sweet smell of sage as fuel for our spirit” (290). Here, the reciprocity of respect between human bodies and earth bodies constitutes strength in the claiming of homeplace. The women’s spirits are fueled by the earth’s gift of sweet sage in return for their care and communion with the land. Harjo emphasizes this reciprocity between human bodies and earth bodies, illustrated through her relationships with “places in the world” that are as alive and intimate as they are with human beings. “I know when I arrive there/I will be taken care of, by the fig trees, the grapes, the sky, the kindnesses of the people.../Some places in the world respond to us as an intimate relative” (lines 1-4). The interconnection is sacred, relationally egalitarian and interdependent; Harjo can return to these places again and again and be nourished and sustained.

Throughout Refuge, Terry Tempest Williams articulates this interconnection with the land. She compares her own process of healing to that of the Refuge, and she further derives healing through the act of writing the elements of place. She opens her journals and “feathers fall from their pages, sand cracks their spines and sprigs of sage pressed between passages of pain heighten my sense of smell—and I remember the country I

come from and how it informs my life” (4). The Refuge becomes the embodiment of Williams’s own retreat and return. The elements of feathers, sand, and sage mixed with her words remind her of her intimate entwinement with the earth.

Annie Dillard’s Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is a testimony to “grace tangled in a rapture with violence” (10) based (loosely) on the seasons. While living for a year in a valley in Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains by Tinker Creek, Dillard wrote this collection of detailed observations of the fierce beauty of death and survival, horror and intricacy among the wildlife and wild landscape as she meditates on the cycles of living and dying. Dillard explains her relationship with Tinker Creek meditating on both ‘house’ and ‘home’: “I think of this house clamped to the side of Tinker Creek as an anchor-hold... I live there. But the mountains are home” (5). Similarly, Bitterbrush Country: Living on the Edge of the Land, by Diane Joseph Peavey, is a collection of personal essays arranged by the seasons that story her life as a rancher, the intimacy and heartache connected with the landscape of south-central Idaho. Peavey writes of humans’ most “primitive struggle—for home, for place, and for belonging.... After years of reluctance, I am finally at home in this landscape” (Peavey ix-xiv).

Vulnerable resistance requires sustained recognition of the mutuality between earth bodies and human bodies, an acknowledgement of the fractal relationship between humans and earth. In the following passage from Refuge, in the context of radioactive poisoning from nuclear testing in the desert, Williams personifies the earth body as an intimate relative giving birth. The women who are protesting the nuclear testing recognize the earth provides sustenance, healing and homeplace that they must reclaim. They enact vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance as a means of identifying

their mutuality with the earth, realizing that “to deny one’s genealogy with the earth was to commit treason against one’s soul” (288).

Starhawk, in Walking to Mercury reveals mutuality through her character, Maya, protesting at the Mercury Nevada Test Site. Whereas, the earth is personified in Refuge, Maya identifies as the earth embodied as she sustains her shared connection with the earth, “She could feel the rupture...the bombs dropped into the earth heart, like a pain in her gut, like a great bleeding wound” (461). Maya viscerally experiences violation then later finds healing in unity, embodying the fractal relationship between human bodies and earth bodies, “Maybe every mountain, every desert, was once somebody’s mother, somebody’s bones...calling us to awaken to their broken, enduring love” (489). This way of seeing, expressed as fractal performativity, fuels Maya’s strength necessary to enact vulnerable resistance.

The following passage from Ceremony expresses Tayo’s epiphany in “seeing the pattern of the story” regarding both the vulnerability and the endurance of the landscape, and its inability to be truly “owned” by humans. “The mountain could not be lost to them, because it was in their bones... nothing was ever lost as long as the love remained” (219-220). By sustaining connection with earth, the grounding strength of vulnerable resistance enables one to *see differently*, to see with clarity the interconnectedness of living beings and recognize the weaknesses of patriarchal constructions.

The bare sole of the foot touches the soul of the soil, and spirit of connection infuses through the sole, is the soul, and in this soul recognition between the earth body and human body, connection soul-idifies.

Challenges to Homeplace

The theme of soil provides common literal and metaphorical ground beneath these writings. If soil is regarded as homeplace (Mies and Shiva) and homeplace is a site of resistance (hooks), then as Mies and Shiva declare, “The soil is thus the conditions for the regeneration of nature’s and society’s life. The renewal of society therefore involves preserving the soil’s integrity; it involves treating the soil as sacred” (103). The word ecology is derived from *oikos*, which means the household; therefore, “ecological destruction in its essence is the destruction of the *bhum* [soil] as the spiritual and ecological household” (Mies and Shiva 104). This global destruction of our soil, our homeplace, creates challenges for survival. In Yearning, bell hooks names homeplace as “a site of resistance” (41) and states that the white subjugation of black people globally has deprived many people of the means to “make homeplace” (46).

In her book Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality, Joane Nagel reviews the domination of the “New World” and its dwellers, the American Indians, through an ethnosexual lens to deconstruct the forces of sexual conquest at the root of colonization and war as white men exoticized and raped American Indian women and enslaved and raped African women. Nagel speaks the “unspeakable” truths in revealing barbarous acts by the white “forefathers” to encapsulate the colonizing disrespect for human bodies and earth bodies that persists to this very day, in multiple forms, by patriarchal hands, which overwhelmingly belong to rich white men. Drawing from Faery’s “Cartographies of Desire” to show what happens when the relationship between earth bodies and human bodies is exploited, Nagel quotes Faery: “The desire of the colonizers for land was conflated with desire for a Native woman who was a representative or stand-in for the land itself” (70).

Nagel offers the story of Sacagawea as an example. According to multiple records, when Sacagawea was twelve or thirteen, her tribe was attacked by raiders and shortly thereafter, she was purchased and impregnated by a white trader and subsequently exalted as his “wife” and a “good mother” (70). These normalizing constructions of Sacagawea as a good wife and mother rather than a white man’s commodity, a purchased sex slave, were the lies that became our country’s Master Narratives, the Fairy Tales literally and metaphorically etched into our political currency. Her image was engraved into the United States one-dollar coin, year 2000. Sacagawea has been mythologized as a hero of the Lewis and Clark era and celebrated in elementary schools misleadingly as a woman with agency who chose her destiny. This is only one example of these atrocities and lies, deeply embedded as truths into generations of Americans’ history, identity, and collective (un)awareness and perpetuated through to the present day. I am left to wonder how Sacagawea conceptualized “home” and if she questioned her identity, given the collective displacement from her land, tribe, and culture. I would like to think she enacted her own version of what I call vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance to survive. That is, she drew upon her connection with the land, plants, animals, and spirit world to sustain a sense of homeplace and her sense of self. Many “Sacagawegas” exist today, sustaining a sense of place and self through vulnerable resistance.

Nawal el Saadawi recognizes that the construction of homeplace is often inextricably linked to constructions of identity. She shows us that the concepts of identity and place are not contained as easily as the neatly drawn boundaries on geographical maps. Definitions of self and place intersect differently on particular bodies in particular contexts, and the ways in which these writers map and define their experiences and sense-making is indeed ‘profoundly political’ (Mohanty). El Saadawi calls attention to situations where the

colonizers are creating their own definitions through displacement. She implies that when a person loses agency in naming self and homeplace, s/he may begin to lose a sense of identity and of belonging--especially when the applied labels have no connection to one's sense of self. "'Identity' is a discourse, and it is essential to know who is using it, who decides, who labels me, what all this interest in 'cultural identity' means, where does it lead" (118). Naming one's self and naming one's homeplace is an act of vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance, an act of agency that establishes safety and identity and sustains a connection to homeplace.

Vulnerable resistance is a necessary strength that allows a person to stand in place and sustain connection and identity in the face of the intersecting oppressions brought by the colonizers that create displacement, "the factor that defines a colonized or expropriated place" (Lippard 9). Shiva and Mies discuss how indigenous communities' sustainable earth-based way of living is dismissed by colonizers:

The fact that people did not move from their ancestral homelands, that they continued to reproduce life in nature and society in sustainable ways was not seen as the conservation of the earth and of the soil ethic. Instead, it was seen as evidence of stagnation, of an inability to move on—to 'progress'. (103)

Ecofeminists call the ecological destruction of homeplace by hands of colonizers around the world a kind of destruction equal to "the objectification, exploitation, and rape of women, animals and the earth" (Lorber 119). Winona LaDuke names it a "predator/prey relationship that industrial society has developed with the Earth and, subsequently, the people of the Earth" (210). Through lenses of colonialism and industrialism, she examines the relationship as an intersectional analysis of power in the context of class/nation/gender, not just gender

alone. She writes that in a predator society, we collectively find ourselves as prey “whether through sexual discrimination, exploitation, sterilization, absence of control over our bodies, or being the subjects of repressive laws and legislation in which we have no voice” (210).

Like humans, the earth is vulnerable to destruction and has been contaminated by nuclear testing and depleted uranium warfare, a contamination which has brought cancer, disease, and birth defects to increasingly record numbers across the globe. “These are problems that emanate from industrial society’s mistreatment and disrespect for our Mother Earth, and are reflected in the devastation of the collective health and well-being of women.... not only for indigenous women, but for all women,” states Winona LaDuke in her essay “Mothers of Our Nations” (216). “Simply stated, if we can no longer nurse our children, if we can no longer bear children, and if our bodies are wracked with poisons, we will have accomplished little in the way of determining our destiny or improving our conditions” (216). Marilou Awiakta writes, “Women represent the life force; children ensure its continuance. Any species that damages or kills its life-bearers and its children is doomed” (Selu 191).

LaDuke writes that there are an estimated 500 million indigenous peoples and 5000 indigenous nations that meet the criteria of nation states under international law. They each have a “common economic system, language, territory, history, culture, and governing institution—conditions which indicate nations of peoples. Despite this fact, indigenous nations are not allowed to participate in the United Nations” (“Mothers of Our Nations” 209). LaDuke states that nations of indigenous peoples are not represented at the United Nations, and of the attending 180 member states—in existence for only about 200 years—the actual world decision-making is made by “some of the 47 transnational

corporations and their international financiers” (209). LaDuke writes: “This is the centerpiece of the problem. Decision making is not made by those who are affected—people who live on the land—but the corporations with interests entirely different from that of the land and the people or the women of the land” (209). Saadawi extends the analysis, “Much effort goes into the drive, led by the United States, to break down boundaries, destroy frontiers, dissolve nation-states and national entities. But it is these multinational powers who decide which...should disappear and which should be maintained and injected with new strength” (Saadawi 120). Marilou Awiakta observes, “The gender that bears life must not be separated from the power to sustain it” (Selu 196), but this is exactly what happens and has been happening. LaDuke writes that matrilineal societies, “societies in which governance and decision making are largely controlled by women, have been obliterated from the face of the Earth by colonialism and industrialism” (210).

LaDuke gives examples of these destructive multinational decisions, such as two proposals to dump nuclear waste on reservation lands and 100 proposals for toxic waste dumps on the lands. She states, “We understand clearly the development for someone else and our own underdevelopment” (210). She writes that hospitalizations for cancer, birth defects and circulatory illnesses have increased between 123 percent and 600 percent in areas impacted by uranium mining. “We also understand clearly the relationship between the environmental impacts of types of development on our lands, and the environmental and subsequent health impacts on our bodies... (214).

Saadawi ties this power dynamic into struggles for identity, “It is those who possess military and nuclear and economic power, those who invade us and take away

our material and cultural sustenance, those who rob us of our own riches and our labour and our history, who tell us what our identity is” (127). Echoing Saadawi and LaDuke, Adrienne Rich acknowledges the importance of a sustainable voice in the decision-making process as a means of preventing erasure and creating a viable homeplace, “Let us insist on kinds of process which allow more women to speak; let us get back to earth—not as a paradigm for “women,” but as place of location (214).

LaDuke and Awiakta often refer specifically to female bodies and the planet as female, through symbolism and metaphoric language. While conceptualizations of earth as our “mother” are common, they are problematic when they reify traditional perceptions that equate women with nature and men with culture. These perceptions perpetuate the problematic hierarchical binaries of culture/nature and male/female which globally create suffering for women, who traditionally have been viewed within patriarchal culture as less fully human than men, as pointed out by many feminists and ecofeminists, including Susan Griffin and Carolyn Merchant.

Sustenance requires mutuality. Working towards sustainability by honoring interconnection, activist-scholars often deconstruct the nature/culture divide. Jonathan Gray “muddies” the line of this dichotomy in his solo performance Trail Mix: A Sojourn on the Muddy Divide between Nature and Culture. Gray’s performance emphasizes communion, relationship, diversity and simplicity as he enacts sustainability. Catherine Roach’s essay “Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation” critically examines the use of the Mother Earth slogan within the contemporary environmental movement and calls for a “biodegrading” of the “nature versus culture dichotomies” so that the concepts are “less rigid or fixed” and more “environmentally sound” (60). Roach

writes, “Perhaps at times we could understand the Earth as our mother and, at other times, in other situations, as our father or our parent or our sister or our child” (60) or even our neighborhood (61) as she saw one environmental poster suggest. She does not altogether dismiss the image of Earth as mother if the emphasis is on developing empowering images of the connection existing in many indigenous cultures and before the Western scientific revolution, where both the earth and women are seen as active teachers rather than submissive bodies: “The Earth has functioned in non-Western cultures as a very powerful and ancient center for worship and for seeing the divine as female” (61).

Ynestra King writes of the nature-culture divide in her work, “The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology” and reviews three approaches that have been suggested by feminists. One approach integrates women into the world of culture by severing the woman-nature connection, believing that men and women must be equally involved in creative acts. She notes that this approach still sees a divide between nature and culture and aligns women with men on the side of culture over nature. A second approach reinforces the woman-nature connection, celebrating the spiritual and intuitive. This approach also still reinforces a nature-culture divide, however, equating men with patriarchy and culture without taking into account that patriarchal culture socializes men and women both. King writes, “There is no reason to believe that women placed in positions of patriarchal power will act any differently from men” (472). The third approach outlined by King is an ecofeminist approach that recognizes the social construction of the nature-culture dualism at the same time that it honors the woman-nature connection, utilizing it as “a vantage point” for creating a culture and politics that “integrates intuitive spiritual, and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science

and magic insofar as they enable us to transform the nature-culture distinction and to envision and create a free, ecological society” (472).

LaDuke’s and Awiakta’s emphasis on women and the female body is rooted in their Native American cultures that value the interconnection between the human and natural world. Their perspective demonstrates King’s ecofeminist approach in that their valuing of the woman-nature connection is not an attempt to exclude male bodies but is more an attempt to repair the damage resulting from the historical lack of women’s support. LaDuke writes, “Historical processes...are inherently resulting in a decline of the status of women. We need to challenge these processes...” (“Mothers of our Nations” 212-213). Even radical feminists who emphasize the power of the feminine and women’s reproductive capacity generally agree that it is not productive to essentialize the earth as female when that gets equated with oppressive social beliefs that essentialize women as “naturally” able and therefore “expected” to burden the sole responsibility of reproducing and raising children—especially given that no appropriate social structures exist to support the practice of that ideology. The hegemony of mothering as biological necessity systematically perpetuates women’s oppression.

Ecofeminists agree that bodies matter and should be equally valued: male bodies, female bodies, intersex bodies, transgender bodies, all bodies. Period. We “read” bodies more than we read printed texts. We need to value each other’s bodies equitably across all our differences, across each person’s everyday social movement through the world, as well as one’s everyday rights to clean water and air. Butler writes, “To counter oppression requires that one understand that lives are supported and maintained

differentially, that there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe (Undoing Gender 24).

Thinking in these ways, it is important to deconstruct who is being exposed to what toxins and what are the impacts when it comes to reproducing healthy children. Environmental toxicity is gender neutral in the sense that it affects both men's and women's fertility. However, because more women in the world live in poverty and unsafe environments than do men as a result of years of patriarchy's privileging of men over women, more women are susceptible to malnutrition and disease. Further, many pregnant women often have to work physically laborious jobs up to the day they give birth, without having had time or resources for a nutritive prenatal period. Humans would better thrive in a paradigm that refuses to hierarchically value reproductive systems and organs of males and females and instead equitably value human health and earth health. Additionally, humans would better thrive in a paradigm that cares for the environment so all beings are healthy, provides pregnant women with resources for healthy prenatal care, and normalizes childcare as a shared responsibility between and among sexes and creates social structures to support that. Finally, humans would thrive in a paradigm that values parenting to such a degree that it values parents.

By "parents" I mean individuals and couples who have consciously chosen to take on the responsibility to raise a child/ren in safety, nourishment, and love. These parents do not have to be opposite sex nor do they have to be married. They can parent singly, or in same-sex or heterosex marriages, or as non-couples, or as triads, etc. The important point is that they desire to be parents from a place of sustaining love. "Family Values" in the contemporary, traditional, conservative mainstream sense of the phrase is as

problematic as the belief that every woman's sole purpose is to be pregnant and that Earth is meant to be infinitely exploited through ongoing wars, radioactive and chemical poisoning and seed-patenting. The reconceptualization of "family values" begins with our valuing of each other and the earth and our acknowledged mutuality.

This begins with a return to vulnerability, to an embracing of the feminine by both males and females. Let me be clear that I do not employ the terms "feminine" and "masculine" as biological labels; that is, I do not conflate feminine with female, and masculine with male. In fact, I would prefer a degendering of the terms with labels to the effect of "dynamic" and "receptive." However, for the purposes here, I wish to briefly deconstruct the traditional, essentializing conflation of gender and sex that historically points, for example, to vulnerability as feminine, and therefore weak, and therefore only socially acceptable when it is displayed by a female. The fact is that in today's hypermilitarized, hypermasculine global reality (Enloe), most everybody, all sexes, moves through the world with an imbalance weighted toward negative aspects of what has been traditionally deemed "masculine." Our everyday lives have become inundated with competition, aggression, war, and domination to the degree that we shrug that off as "just reality." I suggest that both males and females begin consciously reintegrating positive aspects of masculinity, such as dynamic action, as well as qualities that have traditionally been deemed feminine: vulnerability, receptivity, openness, respect, egalitarianism, mutuality, etc., into our daily existence. Integrating vulnerability, Silko's character Tayo recognizes his own capacity for love and earth's sustaining capacity for healing and return. In an echo of Ynestra King's ecofeminist position, he embodies vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance as he struggles to embrace the intuitive

patterns of his indigenous upbringing, trust these patterns as beneficial, and sustainably incorporate them into the modernity of his everyday “Western” reality without compromising their integrity. Marilou Awiakta claims, “It is time to reweave...As Native people often say, ‘...We know how to take diverse strands of life and spin them into a pattern’” (Selu 195). This integration of active and receptive qualities into a sustainable pattern is an example of fractal performativity, embodied as vulnerable resistance in the daily enactments of homeplace.

As evidenced in these literary narratives as well as in the realities of everyday life, the relationship between human bodies and earth bodies is one of mutuality, a mutuality that should be treated respectfully, as an intimate partner, because mutual respect yields sustaining goodness. I resonate with Susan Griffin’s words: “If human consciousness can be rejoined not only with the human body but with the body of earth, what seems incipient in the reunion is the recovery of meaning... in the most daily acts” (9).

In the following five fractal sections, I offer personal narratives to demonstrate my ways of creating homeplace through fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as sustenance, integrating the modes of alliance, sustenance, performance, maintenance, and nurturance.

Sustaining Hands Embodying Alliance

This first fractal section is an example of vulnerable resistance as alliance within the mode of sustenance. Alliance is demonstrated through the connections I made with people who felt like “home.” This story of alliance demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as sustenance through integration of the ecofeminist elements of the

experience: my newfound awareness of midwifery, wise womyn ways, the role of the women's gathering in establishing my connection with southern Illinois as a homeplace, and also the role that reading the signs and staying open played. In short, I make homeplace with my connection to people who are connected to earth. This story functions importantly to me for its instrumental significance in influencing my life path, including my development of vulnerable resistance as a way of being as I create homeplace.

Women's Gathering at Black Diamond Ranch

"Where to start is the problem," I consider alongside Margaret Atwood, "because nothing begins when it begins and nothing's over when it's over, and everything needs a preface: a preface, a postscript, a chart of simultaneous events. . . .Any point of entry is possible and all choices are arbitrary" (The Robber Bride 4).

I pause here. *Are* all choices arbitrary?

"Still," Atwood continues, "there are definitive moments, moments we use as references...We can look at these events and we can say that after them things were never the same again. They provide beginnings for us, and endings too. Births and deaths, for instance, and marriages. And wars" (4).

Okay, yes. I see the arbitrary significance, because I too have a "birth story" that marks a "definitive moment" in my life. This story would have to begin with my oldest friend, Elizabeth. She had been living in a spiritual community in northern New Mexico when one day, her inner voice told her it was time to leave and go east, to Vermont. So, she packed her bags and began her journey. On her way, she stopped in Carbondale, Illinois, to visit a friend and ended up crashing her truck into a telephone pole. She was

fine, but her truck was a mess. She took it as a sign that she was supposed to live in southern Illinois for awhile. I was living two hours north of Carbondale at the time and had never been to southern Illinois, but I was happy to know we'd be living in the same basic region. Elizabeth is one of those magical beings for whom life moves rapidly and synchronistically. She swiftly settled in, first moving into a house with a community of artists and musicians, and then finding a one-room cabin on acreage she helped farm organically in exchange for the cost of rent.

She called me up one day and said, with her usual persuasive authority, "Hey, there's going to be a women's gathering in the Shawnee Forest at the Black Diamond Ranch. It's going to be phenomenal. You can sleep in my tent."

I met her enthusiasm with pause. I'd never been to a women's gathering before, and the truth was, the thought of being in the middle of a forest with a group of intense women I'd never met intimidated me. I would feel too self-conscious and vulnerable in what I intuitively perceived would be a powerfully charged situation. I didn't consider myself to be daring enough. And driving by myself, in the dark, after work, for nearly three hours, into the unknown, felt daunting. And anyway, one of my headlights was out of position and didn't point to the road.

But even as I internally entertained these excuses, I simultaneously felt something equally as compelling, something deep telling me I needed to go. It wasn't a voice and it wasn't a thought. It was a feeling that was completely present yet tucked far away, so distant that I tried to dismiss it as a fabrication of my imagination. But the feeling wouldn't leave me, and I could not ignore it. And then *that feeling*--that compulsion to listen to a compulsion--in and of itself felt very scary to me.

In the next days I continued to fret about whether or not to go, and because Elizabeth tends to know what I'm thinking, no matter how many miles are between us, she called me again: "You *are* coming aren't you?"

I hesitated.

She made her exasperated sound.

And so, after still more days of fretting alongside the constant feeling in my gut that I really needed to go, I went. I drove with my crazy headlights into the woods, driving alone through winding forest roads into the pitch black, deeply remote, and parked my car. I took a deep breath and walked up to the building. Elizabeth was bustling in the kitchen. Women were mingling quietly in solitude and in conversation. Everyone was comfortably minding their own energy so that it did not spill or leak into another's space, and so the air felt clean. I immediately felt safe and relaxed. I had fretted for nothing.

Over the course of the weekend—while meeting some of the most empowered, talented women I'd ever met before; attending workshops from aromatherapy to ecofriendly living; eating bursting meals cooked fresh from some of the women's gardens; listening to Peg Millett sing her amazing voice a mere five feet away from me; and participating in giant drum circles—over and over again I marveled at how *home* I felt. I *recognized* these women. They physically looked and energetically felt familiar to me. Again and again, each person I met for the first time looked like somebody I already knew, and as we would begin talking, I would feel that I'd known her before. In each conversation, I experienced a feeling of liberation I had never before known. It was the most freeing thing to be in conversation with people who shared the same truths as me,

the truths I knew in the fibers of my being but of which I rarely spoke because until that moment I did not know there were others who felt as I did. For the first time, my personal truths required no explanations, no defenses, no definitions, because they were shared by others. I was accepted, understood, and respected for who I was. It is true and very important when I say I had never had this experience before. I had generally lived a socially naïve and sheltered life, surrounded by people who, however genuinely loving, were in many ways different from me ideologically, creatively, and spiritually. This experience of homeplace through relationships with people who shared my ideologies was a ‘first’ for me and profoundly awakening.

The weekend of the women’s gathering was life-path significant. I learned the importance of trusting the signs as a mode of sustenance. Here, my psychic awareness grew immensely. It was as though everything was in place and just needed to be given a small tap and dusted off. The weekend was transformational on several levels. Namely, I attended a workshop on homebirthing, something I had not been familiar with before, and because of that workshop, I chose to have a homebirth when I later became pregnant, which was significant in cultivating and sustaining my ecospiritual and feminist growth.

Another significant thing about this weekend was that it led me to move to southern Illinois. I realized at the gathering that I could be happy making homeplace in southern Illinois because it appeared to have the sustaining texture I craved, in both soil and people; plus, I would still be living within reasonable proximity to my extended family. Our moving fell into place with magical ease. With only three days to spare for Greg to give his current teaching employer notice without breaching the contract, a teaching position opened in Marion. He applied that day, was called for an interview the

following day, and was offered the job the day after that. To add to our awe of timing and luck, we learned that Marion hires Marion-area natives only. The hiring of Greg, an “outsider,” was an anomaly for the district.

Another sustaining affirmation occurred a few years after moving to Marion, when I decided I wanted to pursue a Ph.D. and discovered that I lived thirty minutes down the road from one of the most highly respected doctoral programs in the nation—one that would allow me to integrate my passions for writing, performance, literature, and gender studies—at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. I applied and was accepted.

The way these significant life events unfolded with such synchronicity reminds me of the importance of listening to one’s gut (or inner voice, etc.) and staying open to possibility. My gut had compelled me to go to the women’s gathering, and in an act of vulnerable resistance, I went, and I found homeplace in my ecofeminist spirituality through the modes of alliance with the women there, and sustenance in relationship with *Shringar Bhum*, the soil and signs of the living world revealed to me in an integrated pattern of fractal performativity.

Sustaining Hands Embodying Performance

The following section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance in the mode of performance as I tell the stories of performing homeplace through my everyday personal and political choices/actions that feel sustainable to my ways of being, my family’s health, and the health of the planet. Specifically, in this section, “performance” refers to daily performances of mothering, dialogue about family size, performances of gardening and cooking, and how all these performance choices help

create a sustainable way of being for my family and me. The stories detail a tension between what I call “coffee and granola.” ‘Granola’ is a metonym for my choices to homebirth, attachment-parent, breast-feed, not vaccinate, organic garden, and cook whole foods. The narrative tone of my granola stories reflects the everyday rhythm of this lifestyle as I detail my daily performances. ‘Coffee’ is my metonym for the more excessive, fast paced, plastic life of luxury I struggle against, viewing patriarchy as harmfully impacting the cycling continuum of life, from babies to soldiers, mothers to wetlands. The rantish tone of my coffee stories captures moments of frustration I often experience in trying to perform sustainability within larger systems (such as the medical institution) that don’t always support that. Fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance is my daily performance of trying to negotiate, moderate, integrate, and balance the tension I feel between these two aspects of my being as I work to create a sustainable homeplace.

Coffee and Granola

Pregnancy and motherhood radicalized me in many ways. First, I resisted the medicalization of my body by choosing to have a homebirth. While homebirth might not be the preference for all pregnant women, it was the best option for me. I wish that homebirthing was more normalized in our society so that more women could have access to services and information regarding the full spectrum of their birthing options, from homebirths, to clinic births with midwives, to waterbirths, to traditional hospital births. We need more books like Della Pollock’s Telling Bodies Performing Birth, a collection of women’s birth stories revealing a range of birth settings and situations, and Ina May

Gaskin's Spiritual Midwifery, a collection of women's homebirth stories from The Farm in Tennessee.

I chose homebirth because, while I absolutely value the use of medical technology when it's necessary, it is overused in the prenatal and birth process. The Medical Model of Care operates within a paradigm of fear, pathology, and time constraint built on a premise of avoiding malpractice suits. (A reason, for example, that obstetricians are no longer trained to deliver breech babies; if a baby is in breech position, they are required to automatically perform c-section. Midwives, on the other hand, are trained to deliver not just breech babies, but twins in breech.)

I saw the Medical Model of Care as metaphoric to old ethnographies: going in and *taking* stories from the people is similar to inducing labor and taking away the baby. In contrast to the Medical Model, the Midwifery Model of Care creates a dialogue with the mother, allows the mother to retain her voice and her power, and trusts the mother to know best what her body is doing, needing, wanting. The Midwifery Model is akin to new ethnography: it invites stories, it gives people/women space and support to birth their stories, and it allows the baby to stay in bed with the mother so everybody knows/respects exactly whose story it is and how she wants it to be held/told. Midwives practice the art of patience. The Midwifery Model of Care doesn't force life but catches life with open hands. Midwives step back and wait for the baby to be born.

Pregnancy and motherhood empowered me to make choices I felt were best for Raynah and me, and these choices happened to be outside the mainstream paradigms of mothering. I was and I wasn't the portrait of the stay-at-home mom. I nursed Raynah until she was two, used cloth diapers, and cooked with whole grains. I chose not to

vaccinate her, and to this day, she's very healthy. She's twelve years old and has needed antibiotics only twice in her entire life. We had a family bed because I felt it was healthier for Raynah to not be alone in those early years. Plus, it was a lot easier to roll over on my side in the middle of the night and offer my nipple to my fussy baby nestled beside me, rather than to drag myself to a cold kitchen with a crying baby, boil bottles and warm up formulated milk. If Raynah cried, I held her. I nursed her when she wanted me to, and she slept when she was tired. The routine that emerged, emerged organically, because I didn't want an arbitrarily imposed schedule to interfere with the fluidity of life. If she was hungry in a public venue, I nursed her right there. I realize now that I was performing a kind of mothering activism in my everyday choices of those early years. I mothered Raynah in the ways that I felt were most healthy for her, for myself, and for the environment, and today Raynah is healthy, independent, secure, creative, articulate, and happy.

Even though I was not a mainstream stay-at-home mom, I acknowledge that I was, indeed, privileged to stay home. I had a partner with a job, and that fact allowed me to stay home full-time to nurture our baby, which was a *choice* I had the *privilege* to make, *and* it was what I *wanted* to do. I want to make it clear that I'm aware that my privileged choices weren't necessarily the same choices that all privileged mothers would make. Nor should they be. I am also arguing that it should be a basic right—not a privilege—for every parent, male or female, to have the option to stay home and parent if s/he so chooses. Some European countries give up to a year paid maternity leave to parents, females and males, as well as provide universal childcare. In Sweden, for example, women receive a year's paid leave after childbirth, the right to a six hour work

day with full benefits until their child is old enough for school, plus a government stipend to help pay child-care expenses. Other countries have similar parent/child-friendly arrangements (Crittenden 108).

While I did have the privilege to stay home, we didn't have much money. We had one beat-up car, no health insurance and no savings. We didn't have a television or computer. We lived in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the Midwest and had no local friends or family to rely upon as companions and resources. Even so, we were able to sustain ourselves. We were renting a small house, and the first thing we did when we moved in was to dig up the entire yard and plant a garden. For the first year, we cooked on our camping stove because we didn't have a real stove, and we hung our laundry on the line—cloth diapers and all. Importantly, we had the basics: food, clothing, a warm house, a garden, and a good relationship.

When we moved to southern Illinois, I began performing with a local theatre collective, ranting poetry in coffeehouses, and free-lance writing for an alternative newsweekly. I was a stay-at-home mom, and working at home. Greg and I began dialoguing about whether or not we were going to have another baby, trying to determine what would be most sustainable for our way of being. I only knew three women with an only child, professors from my Master's program, while my cousins my age were on their second, third and fourth babies. I kept trying to imagine my future with multiple children, and I kept counting out the number of years until my body would be my own again—because I knew that if I had any more children, I would nurse them. And I knew I would use cloth diapers, and heal herbally, and cook wholesomely. I knew I would do it because it was what felt right to me. If I was going to bring a child into the world, I felt certain

body-health and earth-health obligations. It was part of my personal value system. But I also knew the hard work of holistic living in a prepackaged society. While I was questioning ‘the script’ and examining my desires, I felt overwhelmed by the familial pressures and the social pressures to have at least two children. Phrases like “only-child” and “selfish mother” swirled together, hissed at me, found me at the margins, coiled around my throat. Finally, after four years of dialoguing, I was certain that I wanted our family unit to stay just the three of us. I loved our little family. For Greg and I both, our family felt complete. Importantly, I came to realize that not only was I not being selfish in choosing to have one child, I felt confident I was making a sustainable choice that aligned with my values on many levels. This choice was an act of vulnerable resistance that would allow me to perform a sustainable lifestyle. While my choice resisted norms of my Catholic Lebanese upbringing, it was a healthy choice for my family and for the environment, and it would better enable me to have the emotional energy, financial energy, creative energy, physical energy—energy in general, to invest holistically in Raynah and to pursue my own creative goals outside mothering.

Meanwhile, we found a house for sale on four acres. The roof was caving in; the basement had a half-foot of standing water; there were heaping piles of rusted junk all over the property; and the inside of the house was a mess. The sellers—the surviving relatives of the person who used to live in the house—lived in Florida and just wanted to make the sale. Thrilled at our affordable find, we bought the farm—collapsing roof and all. Immediately, Greg and I began clearing out junk and hauling in shit: horse manure. We found a free source and hauled in load after load after load. We recycled the junk and composted the manure. Piles replaced piles. Ten monstrous mounds of manure rose up

steaming like holy nitrogen shrines. We looked at our shit and said that it was good. Satisfied, we put down our shovels and picked up our spades. Side by side in the sunshine, we took off our shirts, split the sod, double-dug the dirt, and raised the beds. I held patterns of mandala gardens in my third eye and sketched them into the earth. Our first garden we dug was the wheel of the zodiac, twelve triangular raised beds inside a circle, with the pathways as the encompassing circle and the spokes of the wheel. Our second garden was the pentacle, a star inside a circle, with the pathways as the encompassing circle and the body of the star, and the raised beds as the center pentagram and triangles nestling into the joints of the star. Our third, and largest garden we dug, was the spiral—a spiralling pathway wrapped by a spiraling raised bed. One of my favorite things I do with Greg is dream up our future together while walking the spiral with our morning coffee. So far, everything we've dreamed together has come true.

Over the years, we've dug other gardens, but the spiral, zodiac, and star have remained our main three. They contain a mix of herbs, flowers, vegetables, trees, and flowering shrubs. Over these years we've planted hundreds of trees over the four acres, fruiting, deciduous, and coniferous. I'm always on the lookout for volunteer oak trees to nurture, and Greg's favorite is the cypress. The next garden we're planning will be our largest one yet and will be a classical labyrinth, also recognized as the Hopi Mother Earth Symbol, an ancient symbol that has been found in cultures around the world. I envision our labyrinth as huge and bursting with life, color, scent and texture. I want to build it as a gift for people to walk through and find healing and homeplace.

While we try to live holistically and sustainably, we are learning as we go. The following writers have influenced my daily performance choices of sustainability. These

are examples of others' stories that I have found sustaining, especially during times where I've felt alone in my lifestyle choices. I identify with these writers and recognize their own performances of sustainability as acts of vulnerable resistance to create homeplace.

Barbara Kingsolver's Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life is an inspiring and practical account of her family's year-long experiment to eat food that is grown locally and seasonally, or that they grow themselves. When they bought year-round commodities such as flour, coffee, and chocolate they made sure it is was organic or fairly traded. Foods such as bananas and kiwis, they eliminated and found they didn't miss. At times they allowed concessions, for example, cranberries on Thanksgiving. They found a balance and were pleased not only with their success, but with how deliciously they ate throughout the year, and the fact that their yearly food bill decreased. Kingsolver also illustrates how this way of living is not limited to people who have access to land and money. She gives detailed illustrations of how her model might be successful across geographies and incomes. Finally, she, along with writers like Michael Pollan, validate my concerns for what I call the patriarchy of processed food. In his book The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals, Pollan takes on America's "national eating disorder" (2) and relates it to the disconnect between food product and food source that has come about from agricultural industrialization of food, beginning with corn. Pollan makes a return to the relationship between eating and the living world. Similarly, Deborah Barndt's Tangled Routes is an ethnography on the life of the globalized tomato, from the women picking tomatoes in the fields, to the factories, to the fast food chains. Barndt asks:

What factors compel us as consumers to continue to buy food that is unhealthy and whose production degrades the environment and threatens the health of workers? Again, the distance between us and the actual production practices keeps us less conscious of our connection to them. And the increasing speed of our lives seems to demand a “grazing” approach to food—filled perfectly by the market invading the home through fast food. (103)

Barndt’s observations affirm and echo my own observations, compelling me to offer my own critique of systemic performances that threaten sustainability. In the service of vulnerable resistance, I wish to note here that I recognize that the urgent “coffee” energy in the following deconstruction demonstrates fractal performativity of form and content alignment. That is to say, my frustrations that arise, in large part, from feeling too small to make a change in what has become a global dilemma, comes through in the voice and pace of my words. It is a marked contrast to my earlier “granola” stories of this section, stories that demonstrate the ways in which I sustain feelings of agency through the daily performances of mothering, gardening, etc. The display of the different energies of “coffee” and “granola” is fractal performativity and reflects the tensions I navigate as I try to live in vulnerable resistance. In the tensions I am reminded of the importance of performing daily actions to sustain homeplace.

I begin by asking, Why *do* we eat these foods? But I know the answer: because it’s *easier*, it’s what’s available. When the foods to avoid are major ingredients of the Standard American Diet (SAD): sugar, corn, wheat, and dairy, diet becomes not just an aside of daily existence, but a central theme that requires radical lifestyle shifts, conscious attention, and a significant dedication of time. Difficulties that arise involve

not only the challenge of intensity (cooking from scratch, planning ahead, etc.), but also the social challenges involved: many people find it difficult to understand what becomes perceived as a “crazy obsession” with food.

I get angry at this processed world built on poisoned soil, and how as a society we value production and speed. I’m guilty of it myself and struggle against it. Our busy lifestyles reflect and perpetuate this pattern. The abundant access to processed, packaged, and fast food is essential to being able to survive our own pace. The consumption, then, of food, becomes just as fast, mindless, and excessive as the lifestyle. This trickles into schools, where meals are greasy and lunchtime is rushed. The social aspect of sharing mealtime is slowly being erased, as students (young children) are asked to eat in fifteen minutes and are encouraged not to talk. “We’re all born immersed in the universal flow, but as we grow into kids we get socialized, intellectualized, homogenized, and often cut off from the source,” writes Gabrielle Roth (Sweat Your Prayers 53). Being cut off from the source, not understanding the relationship between the soil and the carrot, for example, perpetuates a downward spiral. Starhawk writes, “Today, as long as we remain cut off from the sources of deep feeling in our lives, we remain avid consumers of packaged substitutes for feeling that can be sold at a profit to a mass market” (Dreaming the Dark 137).

That nutrition and whole foods have become minimized or devalued I call the Patriarchy of Food. The traditional food pyramid, designed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a government agency with corporate ties to and a responsibility for promoting the agricultural industry and the large-scale chemical farming and biotech institutions, is a major component of the patriarchal food web. The standard American

diet is rooted in the consumption of processed, chemically laden food of poor quality, resulting in food allergies, illnesses, and mental and physical dis-ease. Consequently, the American diet, both because of and despite of its excesses, is creating an increasingly overweight-yet-malnourished society (Quillin) and fostering an increasing dependence on the American Medical institution and pharmaceutical consortiums, both of which are steeped historically in their own corrupt patriarchies.

While health and nutrition are undeniably linked, the medical association separates nutrition from medicine, a division that is metaphoric to the “disappearance” of the wise women healers/midwives whose medicine was herbs and nutrients, as well as wisdom and knowledge. The history of stealing herbs from midwives traces back to witchburnings in Europe and Salem, and was resumed with new force during the late 1800s/early 1900s. That systematic and documented campaign of publicly devaluing the art of midwifery, stripping the midwife of her rights/occupation/lifestyle, and making it unlawful for her to continue her healing practice, was instigated and carried out by medically untrained men attempting to invent themselves and their new institution, the American Medical Association (Ehrenreich and English, Rich, Starhawk). A more recent major wave of the elimination of the midwife continues today, state by state, through vague laws regarding midwifery, resulting in landmark numbers of midwives across states being served orders to “cease and desist” their practice.

While it might seem like a stretch, to me there is a distinct and direct relationship between eliminating the midwife and today’s medical, pharmaceutical, and war industries. Much like the medical industry of scheduled inductions and c-sections, the Patriarchy of Food is about production, and I believe it can be traced to origins involving

this elimination of the midwife, the stealing of women's birthing rights and choices, the corporately motivated sabotage of mother's milk, and the accompanying assertion that genetically modified soy formula is just as good, maybe better (the Nestle scandal in Africa, for one example, as well as American hospital protocol of distributing plastic nipples and soy formula). I parallel this to that logic that cheers artificial wetlands while draining precious wetlands irreplaceable and irreplicable as mother's milk, as essential to the health of the planet as breastmilk to the baby. The metaphors and the realities of this colonization of the woman's body extends beyond the woman and affects every human right down to the qualities of foods we eat and the soil in which they're grown.

We live in a climate where schools are underfunded and war is overfunded. Corporations take over the schools with vending machines, and the Agriculture industry makes a sweet profit by supplying schools with corn-syrup and hormone-injected, factory farmed beef and dairy; while in the meantime, diabetes among children is the highest it has ever been. The relationship between war and poor food quality is not as distant as it might seem. After World War II the government had a surplus of ammonium nitrate, the main ingredient in explosives. As Michael Pollan narrates, the Department of Agriculture recognized ammonium nitrate as a source of nitrogen for plants and decided to spread it on farmland as fertilizer. "The chemical fertilizer industry (along with that of pesticides, which are based on poison gases developed for the war) is the product of the government's effort to convert its war machine to peacetime purposes" (41). Pollan quotes Vandana Shiva "We're still eating the leftovers of World War II" (41). Rachel Carson's Silent Spring, written in 1962, still speaks a severe truth, "Every human being is

subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death” (15) and “yet new and more deadly chemicals are added to the list each year” (17).

It’s easy for me to feel overwhelmed, and even easier for me to feel like a failure. But Michael Pollan reminds me, “To eat with a fuller consciousness of all that is at stake might sound like a burden, but in practice few things in life can afford quite as much satisfaction” (11). Starhawk acknowledges the expense of organic food and emphasizes making conscious choices in moderation in order to balance out the long-term expenses of poor health of our bodies and soils (Earth Path 36). Kingsolver, too, models moderation and balance. She herself wanted to find that place between the extremes of what she identifies in people as making no lifestyle changes because they just don’t care and no lifestyle changes because they feel paralyzed by the overwhelming challenge of addressing the global climate issues. She learned that “Small, stepwise changes in personal habits aren’t trivial. Ultimately, they will, or won’t, add up to having been the thing that mattered” (Kingsolver 346). I strongly identify with Kingsolver’s frustrations and passions. Her words could be my own, and they remind me that my daily performances are acts of vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance, and that I enjoy making homeplace in ways that align with my value system and a better world. She reminds me that even though many don’t see it this way, the conscious efforts and small daily actions have value, and that I should give myself permission to value my way of being. She writes, “In a culture that assigns nil prestige to domestic work, I usually self-deprecate when anyone comments on my gardening and cooking-from-scratch lifestyle....But the truth is, I enjoy this so-called brainless work. I like the kind of family I can raise on this kind of food” (Kingsolver 305).

Sustaining Hands Embodying Maintenance

The following section displays a performance poem, “Sword and wordS,” that I wrote to simultaneously raise, maintain, and sustain awareness of and heal generations of wounds brought about by Catholic Church’s persecution of women healers; to maintain connection to generations of women before me; and to create a sense of homeplace/recognition for any woman of today who can identify with being displaced as a healer through patriarchal institutions. I performed this poem in a performance studies classroom, a women’s studies classroom, and as an ensemble on the Kleinau stage as part of BloodStar, a full-length theatre production that I cowrote and codirected with Amber Zimmerman and Janet Donoghue. I call this piece a performance poem but it doesn’t fit neatly into the genre of poetry and/or of performance scripts; it is not one or the other, but rather a genre of its own. Its presentation on the page functions as both a practical and aesthetic choice. My line breaks function to capture the rhythm of my embodied delivery, and the visual design of words echoes the energy of my performing body, so that when a reader meets these words on a page, some of its embodied intensity might still be communicated. The historical content of this poem, as it pertains to Malleus Maleficarum, was informed, in part, by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English’s For Her Own Good, particularly their section “The Witch Hunt” (35-39). I rhythmically distill their account and keep its integrity through direct quotes and phrases. The poem sketches the historical suppression of women’s power through the censoring of their embodied creative capacities: voice, healing profession, and reproductive capacity, and then reclaims that power by turning the oppressors’ strategies against themselves: transforming the weapon of the Sword to the tools of wordS, celebrating the power of

women's voice and hands, and maintaining the narrative of women's existence by writing her/us/them into the story. Sword and wordS, in form and content, displays fractal performativity and enacts vulnerable resistance as maintenance within the mode of sustenance, as I maintain the power of voice through the aesthetic act of creation using the transgressive tools of tongue and pen, sword and words, and by talking back to patriarchal powers that manipulated power through their destructive weapons of sword and words to destroy lives. I sustain a connection to a place of empowerment that is grounded in women's ownership of our bodies.

Sword and wordS

Once upon a time, before the printing press: Blood at the Tip of the Sword.

At the birth of the printing press: Blood at the Spin into wordS.

Sword and wordS; each have killed.

Shortly after its invention in 1450,

the printing press propagated propaganda massively.

Said, here's what a witch is, and here's how to kill her:

Malleus Maleficarum, or The Hammer of Witches, published in 1486,

the Catholic Church's official witch hunting guide for three hundred years,

classified witches as "women able to *heal*" and "*take away injury*." [qtd in E&E 36]

A healing ability *presenting* "greatest injury" to the Catholic Church, [36]

because you see, these wise women,

with their abundant herbal remedies tested by years of use,

were a threat to the newest trend of university-trained male physicians
 who, under the *Church's* support and approval
 were *practicing* medicine with guesswork, not experience or medical study,
 but Plato and Christian theology.

(So great was the witches' knowledge that in 1527,
 Paracelsus, the father of modern medicine,
 burned his text on pharmaceuticals, confessing
 he 'had learned from the *Sorceress* all he knew.')

[qtd in Ehrenreich and English 38]

And the Catholic Church fiercely declared,
 "If a woman dare to cure *without having studied* she is a witch and must die." [39]

And, of course coincidentally, women weren't allowed in university *to study*.

Systematically, thousands of women were murdered
 for healing, for loving and living
 a wisdom independent of male-expert forceps
 and thereby threatening the establishment of patriarchal dogma.

Wise women were deemed evil,
 unwelcome witches on the *wrong* side
 of God and Law, that new establishment
 built in women's pools of blood, pyres of bone and ash,
 our grandmothers who *knew* things:
 murdered by sword and words,
 murdered, not because they were witches

but because they were wise,
murdered
for living
truths rooted in bloodstone soil
births guided by hands of midwives
prayer grounded in mortar and pestle with
blue cohosh, elderberry, dandelion, digitalis.

And so it persisted, for too many years,
a calculated oppression of women,
a linear progression of wealthy old men, who,
from their gold encrusted stained glass balconies,
from above their pounding sound of gavels,
from behind the twisting of their forceps,
and with sweeping gestures of their pens,
made repeated declarations:

“Women have no right to an agency of any kind,
especially not over their reproductive lives.”

And today, there's nothing
fiction or finished about that story:
A woman's reproductive power is
still in the hands of wealthy men

bound by a religious, medical, and political discourse
 fueled by war metaphors and power-over paradigms.
 Our government's governed by man's God and Law.
 Men disproportionately dominate
 the airwaves, the ivory hallways,
 corporate media monopolies, *and* the healing profession:
 still *practicing* medicine.

BUT

one difference between then and now:
 all those witches who were
 hung, stabbed, drowned, and burned...
 we've returned
 with Sword transformed into wordS reborn
 re-membered, re-written, re-visioned, re-formed:
 lifetimes of stories, of poems and songs,
 sacred texts of voice and womb,
 word blood womb blood moon blood birth blood,
 our power we share with dignity.

Priests, presidents, and physicians,
 release my uterus from your grip!
 It is *not* yours to hold.

I grab the umbilical cord of generations,
 swing through the lifetimes to find my roots,
 to unlock the uterine blocks
 and release the flow of blood and words,
 dignity and power of our mothers and sisters,
 creative process of giving birth.

Words birth

from the cervix of my throat and

slip through the canal

on my red river tongue

I birth words

and watch them flow,

watch them grOW a life their own:

we come from

the grandmother placenta

Our umbilical cord is a lifeline,

snaking through the lifetimes,

spiraling

down

head

first

into

the
earth...
spiraling
like a
lava
serpent
entwining
its way to the
crystal core
then cradling
the iron cauldron
that collects and holds our stories,
our words
bleeding from our womb in a flood
ruby words of pomegranate love
words
bleeding
from
our
womb
like sea stars
that slip
away

like
 seed
 memories
 taking
 root

Sustaining Hands Embodying Sustenance

The following story is an example of vulnerable resistance as sustenance within the mode of sustenance. I sustain homeplace through my sustained connection to the mystical world around me, the *Shringar Bhum*, “the universe of plants, animals, and humans... the cultural spiritual space which constitutes memory, myths, stories and songs that make the daily life of the community” (Mies and Shiva 102). When I am attuned, in tune, intuitively connected to the world around me and open to the natural world, including the metaphysical world, I am able to *see* and interpret everyday signs of my everyday life with heightened understanding. I draw upon my deep connection with the natural world and living things and the wisdom that comes from that connection. When I connect in this way and honor the relationship that is created in that connection, I am living in vulnerable resistance, a way of being which enables me to access information that is particular to sustaining me on my life-path. Being open and connected to the world around me enables me to read a collection of signs that, in the following example, came together in fractal performativity that I display as this story of owls to reveal vulnerable resistance in the mode of sustenance.

Owls

Greg's mother, Ginny, died on September 14, 1998, three days before her 54th birthday. A few hours later, driving along the interstate to Greg's childhood home, I said to Greg, "I just wish that I could talk to her and know she heard me." Instantly, a huge bird with a giant wingspan soared out from nowhere and flew directly over our car, just above our windshield.

"Whoa!" we both shouted.

"That was an owl!" Greg cried.

"That was your mom! She wants us to know she *heard* us."

It wasn't until many years later that I learned that owls represent death and transformation. Their presence can signify the death of a loved one or announce that a family member is about to die.

Several months after seeing the owl, a white buffalo interrupted my dream. When I awoke, I immediately recorded the dream in my journal. The entire entry reads as follows:

She was glowing white light with a radiating aura. She walked toward me from out of some tall grasses. She was very calm and exuded an "all is well" feeling.

She walked past me and continued walking until she disappeared into the horizon.

From the moment she appeared in my dream, I had the very sure feeling that this

white buffalo was Virginia Reid, Greg's mother. (Journal entry, March 1999)

At the time of the dream I was unfamiliar with white buffalo symbolism. When some years later I researched the white buffalo, I discovered the legend of the White Buffalo Calf Woman in the Lakota tradition (Legend of the White Buffalo Calf Woman From Lame Deer

Seeker of Visions by John (Fire) Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes (1972)) and was struck by the presence of the high grasses and horizon in the legend, just as in my dream, as well as the reference to women's hands. According to the legend, the white buffalo appeared as a woman during the season of high grasses. She brought to the people the sacred pipe, known as the peacemaker in that it represents the interconnectedness of all things to the people. She taught them the circle without end and told the women it "was the work of their hands and the fruit of their wombs which kept the tribe alive." When the White Buffalo woman was finished speaking to the people, she turned into a white buffalo that "kept walking toward the horizon until it finally disappeared" (Lame Deer and Erdoes, 1972). It is significant to me that the white buffalo in my dream appeared from tall grasses and disappeared into the horizon, in the same way she does in the legend. The themes of interconnection, hands, and children ("fruit of wombs") resonate with the work I'm doing in this dissertation, emphasizing the work of the hands enacting vulnerable resistance to create homeplace, interconnection of all living beings, and egalitarianism and respect for all people, particularly those who have suffered most in patriarchal society: women and children. Finally, the circle without end, the circle of life and death, is emphasized in the white buffalo legend. This, too, is significant to the work I'm doing, as themes of living and dying are recurring themes I've been negotiating through acts of vulnerable resistance since I was a young child. I'm learning to see the living and dying cycle as a fractal in its pattern of repetitive intricacies. The following events demonstrate this fractal pattern of birthing and dying:

Ginny was buried on September 17, which was also the date of her birth. September 17 was also her mother Mary's birthday. Mary gave birth to Ginny on Mary's own birthday, and she buried her daughter on their shared birthday. Exactly 9 years later, on 9-17-2007,

Mary's husband, Wyndal, died. Wyndal died on the shared birth-date of his wife and daughter. The following July, on 7-28-2008, one day after my own birthday, Mary died.

Two months later, one day after Greg's birthday, we learned the tragic news that the day before, (on Greg's birthday), our friend had a sudden heart attack and died at age 40, leaving behind his wife, his 11-year old daughter, and 7-year old son. The day after his burial, which was my mother's birthday, I was driving along a country road and I saw something standing silhouetted in the twilight in the middle of the road. At first I thought it was a cat, but as I approached I thought it might be a large bird. I slowed down as I neared and I saw that it was an owl. An owl was standing just to the left of the center of the road. I pulled my car nearly right beside it. We stared at each other through my open window. We were no more than seven feet away from each other. Why was this owl not flying away? I wondered if it was injured. We stared at one another until the owl flew up to a post on the side of the road. It perched there and we continued to stare at each other. Finally, I drove away. Was this owl representing the spirit of Otmane, our friend who had just passed? Was this owl trying to tell me somebody else I knew was going to die?

The very next morning, the day after my mother's birthday, my mother called me and told me that my Aunt Helen died at 8:00 a.m. that morning.

It's a fractal pattern.

Later that same day Aunt Helen died, I was talking to my friend who was lamenting that sometimes she wishes she could be less sensitive, wondering if maybe she was crazy, does she make up all this stuff, why does she find herself talking to hawks?

Of course, I'd been wondering the same thing about myself. But I said to her, in a sort of identifying lament and simultaneous defense of our vulnerable resistance, of who we are,

“What do I do with the fact that the owl was standing in the middle of the road, right in the middle of two deaths? Right at the time of day between lightness and darkness? And there were no other cars or people around –so I could park my car in the middle of the road— and we just stared at each other. Am I supposed to just call it a secular coincidence?”

“Ooh, nice phrase.”

“Yes it is, isn’t? Secular coincidence. I just made that up just now. Should I just call it that? As though the owl is isolated from any symbolic or cosmic significance? As though I always see owls standing in the middle of streets? Or never see them, and either way, assume that the intersection of this owl and me, between the eve of Otmane’s and the dawn of Helen’s deaths is insignificantly random? As was the owl when Ginny died, and the white buffalo dream, and Louie Hill’s dream visit [which I share in chapter six], and the flock of cardinals when Rizk died, and the spirit cardinal of Raynah, and all the dreams I have of women I know becoming pregnant or giving birth? Should I disregard the fact that birthing and dying are two themes that significantly repeat in my life? Even if I wanted to, I don’t know that I could. It’s not like I scanned the sky or the trees looking for an owl. It’s not like I planned these deaths occurring on the days of births. The turn of the wheel is everywhere, and the owl is right there, physically manifest as its symbol.”

Sustaining Hands Embodying Nurturance

The following fractal section demonstrates vulnerable resistance as nurturance in the mode of sustenance as I reconcile elements of my Lebanese identity (nurturance) with my feminist earth spirituality (sustenance). The details I write in this section are an integration of the parts of my identity culminating in the subsequent naming of myself,

which represents the homeplace of my sense of self. Through my name I am able to access and sustain my spiritual homeplace that lives at the intersection of my ancestral, cosmic, past life and present day selves. In a display of fractal performativity, “The Story of My Name” is at the physical center of this dissertation, like the lifeline in my hand, to represent its centrality to my evolving self and the integration of my identities. In an embodiment of vulnerable resistance, by naming myself I am enacting agency in claiming my identity, and I am sustaining both my ethnic and spiritual identities by nurturing the roots of who I am.

Story of My Name

The story of my name begins with my mother, who told me that throughout her pregnancy she intended to name me Julie, but just moments after my birth she changed her mind and named me Diana.

A few years ago, a friend gave me a book called The Goddess Book of Days, a perpetual calendar with each day of the year listing the names of gods and goddesses associated with that particular month/day. I looked up the day I was born, July 27, and it says, "The twenty-seventh day of the Moon is dedicated to Diana" (Stein).

Artemis (Diana), Astarte, and Lebanah are all moon goddesses. Each of these goddesses overlap and intersect on my body, in name, genetics, and geography, a unique synchronicity that enhances my affinity to goddess cosmologies. The Cedar of Lebanon was associated with the Goddess Artemis (Diana), and the ancient Cedars of Lebanon forest is approximately a twenty-minute drive from my ancestral home in Aitu. A statue

of the Goddess Astarte was found near Beirut, where the ancient Phoenician Goddess-worshippers lived; and Lebanon shares a name with the moon goddess Lebanah.

While my first name seems to have come to from the goddess, my last name, or family name, most certainly comes from the father. “Unes” is correctly pronounced “You-ness” or “Eunice.” Strangers always pronounce it “Ooonz” or “Ooo-ness,” or “Yoonz,” and to this day I feel uncomfortable and ashamed when people mispronounce my name.

From a young age I was taught the script of my life: grow up, marry a (preferably Lebanese) man, give up your name for his name, have multiple children, be a martyr, die a good woman. So, barely grown up, I married a man and got rid of my name, changed it easily with a simple trip to the Social Security Administration, marriage certificate in hand. I got rid of my name without blinking an eye—until somebody called me Mrs. Reid and I had no idea they were talking to me. I told Greg I was going to change my name back to Unes. He felt uncomfortable about that. I invited him to change his name to mine, but he said no, that my name should reflect his, to show we’re a couple. I said maybe we would look more like a couple if we each hyphenated our names. But he didn’t want to do that. I understood his reluctance, of course, because I didn’t want to change my name or hyphenate my name either. So, even though I didn’t think it was right that, at least in mine and Greg’s families, women are expected to change or compromise our names while men are entitled to keep theirs, I hyphenated my name; and again, the name change process was easy.

Two years later, the name Diana Tigerlily swirled into my third eye while I was sitting at the table with my journal.

One of my earliest memories of childhood was waiting for my tigerlilies on the side of my house to bloom. My yearnings for bud and bloom were my first prayers; my learnings of seeds and cycles were my first religion. Today, over thirty springtimes later, I know nearly to the hour when the first tigerlily will bloom each summer. This *is* my religion. I recognized the name as *me*: my writer self, my performer self, my spiritual self, my way of being, who I was, am, became and am becoming. In that moment, I ritually named myself, and began identifying as Diana Tigerlily.

For years, I would continue to recognize and discover the ways Tigerlily symbolizes my way of being. The word tigerlily, semantically, is strong (as a tiger) and soft (as a lily). The plant tigerlily, botanically, has a strong stalk and bold look, but its petals are delicate. Tigerlily is the embodiment of vulnerable resistance in its bringing together of opposites to create a third thing; an embodiment representative of the tensions I negotiate between coffee and granola, city and soil, vulnerability and resistance, trying to unify beauty and resilience from within those spaces: to be at once the germinating seeds and the cracks in the concrete.

After about ten years of simultaneously living artistically as Diana Lynn Tigerlily and legally as Diana Lynn Unes-Reid, I decided to legally change my name to Diana Lynn Tigerlily. I thought it would be a simple process, as simple as it was to change my name when I married. But I was wrong. I learned that if I possess marriage or divorce papers, changing my name is a simple matter, because women have historically been men's property and so women's identity has always been determined by her relationship to a man, be he father or husband. However, to name myself, to claim myself as a woman with her own identity, is an arduous and expensive process consisting of public

newspaper announcements, petitioning the courts, and approximately one thousand dollars in fees and legal expenses.

While I am aware of the fact that to make a legal name change, every person—man or woman— has to follow the procedure of the court order and public announcement, my deep frustration is a response to the heteronormative structures and expectations still in place that yoke women’s identity to the status of her relationship with a man (consider titles such as Miss, Ms., and Mrs. in contrast to the age- and relationship-neutral “Mr.”). The irony of the marriage institution does not escape me—an institution that blocks out an entire group of people (same-sex couples) historically has “locked-in” an entire other group ([heterosexual] women).

In every country around the world, patrilineage has roots in power differentials. Ownership. The naming convention comes out of a tradition of men owning women. Since men could never be absolutely certain of their paternity, men named women and the women’s children as men’s legal property. The carryover into today’s America is the heteronormative practice and expectation of women to change their name to a man’s upon marriage. This norm is slowly changing among heterosexual couples, with some women keeping or hyphenating their names, a fraction of a percentage of men hyphenating their names with their female partner’s name, and a smaller number of progressive couples blending their names or inventing a completely new name to share. When it comes to naming their children, however, even in couples where the woman has kept her name, the majority still give the child the name of the father. *And* despite all the small shifts in cultural norms, the legal structures are still firmly in place.

A few years later, I was applying to graduate with my PhD and learned that, even though I authored my academic and artistic work as Diana Tigerlily, the Records Office could not print Tigerlily on my diploma, not even as a middle name, as long as my legal name remained Diana Unes-Reid. Angry, I asked myself, why did I care so much?

I thought about my name, and about my self—about my heritage, my roots, and the person I am becoming. Over the course of several emotional days, I reacquainted myself with the name of my first twenty-three years, Diana Lynn Unes and, for the first time, embraced my childhood awkwardness, shyness, self-consciousness, and self-loathing. I forgave myself for hating myself and began to feel compassion for the dorky and naïve person I always was. I also rekindled love and pride for my Unes name and Lebanese heritage. I realized how special my Unes name is to me as it carries an entire cultural history.

I thought about my hyphenated name, Unes-Reid. In some ways my hyphenated name accurately represented my Lebanese-American bicultural upbringing in that I've had one foot in western culture and one foot in the Lebanese culture embodied by my family. It symbolized those bicultural aspects of myself. But, the name had never felt comfortable. Like Edward Said writes about his own name, "For years, and depending on the exact circumstances, I would rush past "Edward" [Unes] and emphasize "Said" [Reid]; at other times I would do the reverse, or connect these two to each other so quickly that neither would be clear" (Out of Place 3). I made the decision to drop the hyphenated aspect. I love Greg dearly but don't need to 'wear' his name to prove it. Simply, "Reid" is a name that has never belonged to me.

I began to entertain the thought of returning to my original name, Diana Lynn Unes. It felt clean and simple. However, I learned that because I wasn't divorcing Greg, I couldn't delete the hyphenated part of my name without going through the entire process of a legal name change. The lawyer quipped over the phone that it would be easier to get a divorce.

I hung up the phone, outraged, and minutes later my mom called, knowing nothing about my name crisis, to tell me, "Grandpa's last name isn't really Unes. It's Sa'ad."

"What??"

She told me that she and my dad had just returned from visiting my dad's oldest sister. While they were there, Aunt Harriett showed my mom a letter she had just received from Evelyn Unes. Evelyn is my grandpa's brother's daughter, and she had been doing genealogy work on the family. "We knew grandpa as Harry Unes, but his name was Sarkis Yusuf Sa'ad. I'll send you a copy of the letter."

A couple of days later, I received the letter, which was a story of my grandpa's coming to America. I learned that my father's father's name is Sarkis Khanna Yusuf Sa'ad Yunus, which translates to Harry John Joseph Saad Unes. The first name in this string of names is my grandfather's given name at birth. The second name is his father's given name, the third name is his father's father's, then his father's father's father's. The last name is the "Greater Family Name," the first name of the patriarch of my family lineage. When my ancestors came to America, many of them dropped the Greater Family Name and kept the name of their father, which in this case would have been Sa'ad for my grandpa's parents. For awhile, my great-grandparents (and so too my grandpa) went by

Saad, and the Greater Family Name of Yunus was left unstated, as it was back in the village of Aitu, where everyone knew everybody's Greater Family Names but didn't speak it in daily discourse. Eventually, they took the Greater Family Name, Yunus, and adopted the Americanized spelling of it: Unes.

This is the tradition of Biblical and Middle Eastern cultures. Evelyn Unes writes: "The naming convention was designed to relate the patrilineal history of several generations. It served the tradition of preserving, by passing down, from one generation to the next, the family's genealogical heritage. To know one's name in full was to know one's history, to speak it with pride, and to protect its integrity" (2009).

I've held dear this ancestry of mine. I've held dear this lineage. At the same time I am, and always have been, upset that this family line is a series of male names, at the cost of erasure of the unnamed women. The women in my family have disappeared, have never appeared in the oral recitations and the official transmissions of names. I recognized that the patrilineal Middle Eastern biblical naming tradition is the origin of the western world's Tom, Dick, and Harry—and all subsequent incarnations of institutionalized "boys clubs." At some point this global patriarchy has become too overbearing. Nawal el Saadawi shares my sentiment:

I never carried the name of my mother. Her name was buried with her body and disappeared from history. Ever since I took hold of a pen in my fingers, I have fought against history.... It was she who taught me the letters of the alphabet... the four Arabic letters of my name. (Daughter of Isis 30)

From her mother she learned to write her name; from her mother she learned words and the political act of writing. Yet her mother's name, *our* mothers' names, have

disappeared. I've wanted the motherline. I've wanted the women to be named. I've wanted women to name themselves. I've wanted to trace back Sitty's name and Tita's, their grandma's grandma's grandma's grandma's names. But I have only known them through the names of the fathers. "Unes" might symbolically represent my Lebanese ancestry, but realistically it is a patrilineal record which has excluded every single one of my Lebanese foremothers. Even if the men, my grandfathers, were kind, the system from which I was named is not. My struggle to simultaneously embrace and challenge the history of my family name is an act of vulnerable resistance. I want to sustain my identity through time. I do not want to disappear.

I realized that naming myself might just be the only arena in my life in which I have complete agency to unshackle myself from patriarchal ties. Because the name I would give myself would not be legally recognized unless I went through the court system, I decided to use the tools of the system in order to legally name myself. I decided to act upon and against, simultaneously, as Jose Munoz would say. It is an action of vulnerable resistance. By changing my name legally I have performed the role of active agent in naming myself. I suppose Sered would proudly call me the 'Bad Woman' because "from the point of view of the patriarchal institution" I'm a "problematic symbol" because I've "turn[ed] into [an] agent" (Sered 195).

I find it odd that, generally speaking, we passively receive our names. I would think that we, as a society, would have developed cultural rituals by now to ensure that we would be active participants in our own naming (as in Marge Piercy's Woman at the Edge of Time where individuals name themselves as a rite of passage into adulthood.) But maybe there's too much power in naming ourselves for a patriarchal culture to feel

comfortable with. Patrilineage is about ownership, after all. The act of agency involved in naming ourselves necessarily begins to shift patriarchal culture. Institutions would need to shift to accommodate self-named people. We would need to develop nonpatriarchal, and multiple, methods of tracing and organizing family names so that a woman's identity would not be dependent on a male lineage--unless she chooses for it to be. Other heteronormative patriarchal institutions would necessarily begin crumbling, right down to the heterosexist language of legal documents. Any individuals who desire to, should name themselves. I am actively naming myself and sending the message that my name matters to me. I want it to go down on the records, throughout time, that I named myself.

I legally changed my name to Diana Lynn Tigerlily. The decision felt exhilarating. It's who I am. It represents me at my core. My first name is Diana, for the Goddess, and this is my true name. My second name is Lynn. Lynn is the name my mother gave me and that she loves, so I consider this my matrilineal name, a way of retaining an organic sense of the motherline. My third name is Tigerlily. It is the name I give myself. It means integration and balance, and it represents my wise woman self, myself empowered.

It's important for me to state that eliminating Unes from my name is not a denial of my Lebanese ancestry. I love my family and my heritage too much to ever deny my roots. The way I see it is that my Lebanese roots were planted long ago, and they grew into a flower. Like seeds in the soil of my palm, my Lebanese ancestry lives in the lines of my hand, the motherlines, all the work held here, all the nurturing held here. By formally removing "Unes" from my name, I have enacted agency in putting an end to

years of generational grief handed down through patriarchally-induced hardship, and I have embraced my wise womyn cosmology and goddess ancestry, both of which intersect in Lebanon. I have started my own motherline.

This is a motherline not forced on anyone. While it makes me happy to write “Diana Lynn Tigerlily, mother of Raynah Genevieve Waterlily” (Raynah, for the pure spirit that she is; Genevieve, named for my mother’s mother, and Waterlily, for her healing qualities), it makes me happier to know that my daughter has agency and might one day name herself. For now, her legal name is Raynah, the name I gave her; Genevieve, my Tita’s name and so the matrilineal aspect; and Unes-Reid, to reflect her embodiment of the family lines of both Greg and me. Perhaps one day she will name herself with a name that reflects her spirit. I will leave that for her to decide. The motherline I’ve started is a motherline that encourages individuals to name themselves.

My name, Diana Lynn Tigerlily, will be printed on my birth certificate. Additionally, in accordance with Illinois protocol, my birth certificate will be modified by interlineation, meaning that “Unes” will remain on the certificate, but it will have a line through it—which creates a beautiful performative moment. The line through Unes reminds me of Derrida’s typographical X that he marked, in a practice he called “erasure,” through words that signified appeals to authority or conventions, such as Western assertions of truth based on presumptions of a knowable origin. The purpose of the X is to call attention to the absence of a single meaning or knowable origin (Of Grammatology). In the context of the name change, “~~Unes~~” printed alongside “Tigerlily” calls attention to the hegemony of patriarchal naming conventions and signifies my self-naming as a deconstruction of patrilinearity. It is a display of fractal performativity that

decentralizes the power of patriarchy by revealing that not only is there more than one way to create names/meaning but, in fact, the iterations are infinite.

My court date was assigned for the full moon of April 9, 2009, at 9:00 a.m. As a reader of signs, I was delighted, for the full moon symbolizes completion of a cycle and nine is a number that represents the culmination that occurs just before transformation.

Naming myself was and is an act of vulnerable resistance. By naming myself I am healing the psychological splits within myself that I've always experienced regarding my name, the physical split of having two names, and the psychic split of my past life self, my ancestral past, and my wise woman cosmology, which all intersect in the Middle East. By naming myself I more fully sustain my connection to pre-patriarchal Middle East. "Tigerlily" demonstrates fractal performativity as it holds the intersections of my wise woman cosmology, my Phoenician genes, and my goddess spirituality. Tigerlily is a name that captures the lineage of my spirit. Like the palm of my hand, it holds these fractal aspects of myself, embodied at my soul level and my cellular level. My mitochondrial mother is from the Middle East. By naming myself, I am able to access and sustain a connection to my mitochondrial homeplace, my mythical motherland, my spiritual motherline.

CHAPTER 4

VULNERABLE RESISTANCE AS MAINTENANCE

Homeplace of Maintenance

Throughout time people have resisted against silencing and have persisted amidst struggle by faithfully continuing life's daily creative actions. I identify these creative acts as vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance, the creating of homeplace through everyday aesthetic acts of maintenance that also have a practical function such as cleaning, weeding, painting (as both refined art and housekeeping), building houses, and writing. I refer to these everyday acts of the hand as aesthetic in that these acts embody an aesthetic of utilitarian, everyday beauty. The hand maintains. The maintaining hand holds the pen and paintbrush, communicates a prayer, writes a poem, pulls the weeds. These are practical and aesthetic acts of maintenance. I'm particularly interested in the ways in which, by performing these actions of vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance, a person is creating a homeplace, a haven of safety, a sacred space, at the same time they are maintaining their existence and its continuance through the artworks and writings they leave behind, an embodied record of their voice that preserves their existence and carries it into the future. In this section I look at the way people maintain through daily necessary actions of maintaining homeplace while also creating aesthetic expressions that have personal and political impact. I also present stories reflective of my personal, preferred act of maintenance: writing. Writing is an activist act that joins the hand and tongue in vulnerable resistance. While the previous chapters in this dissertation might already be characterized as writing activism, the nuanced difference within this

chapter is that here I specifically write about writing as my preferred choice of activism, my desires to be a writer, how I maintain my confidence as a writer and how writing maintains me, word by word, breath by breath. When I'm able to write a poem, no matter how small, I am able to exhale. It is like the relief that cutters feel when they slice lines into their skin. Instead of a knife into my skin, I scratch the pen against the paper. Then I can breathe again. Writing maintains my existence, both through the process of writing and as a product of words preserved on the page.

I begin with other writers and how they've inspired me through their own activist writings. I categorize their writings as maintenance based on how they narrate their relationship between creative voice and attention to daily activism. The maintaining hand performs vulnerable resistance across genres and cultures, storying, transforming, and holding energy generationally, vibrationally, and pragmatically. For Laila Farah, these daily sparks of creative resistance are a "narrative of resistance...born in the dailiness of women's lives, in the way we think, in the way we work, in the way we dream..." (286). Pat Mora writes the aesthetic of daily maintenance grounded in the creation of homeplace: "Writing, gardening, and cooking are often solitary acts for personal and communal sustenance....for alchemy and transubstantiation, transforming what our hands touch and also ourselves" ("Layers" 154). Naomi Shihab Nye stitches alchemy, dailiness, and prayer into the handwork of maintaining family needs: "the pilgrimage occurred daily,/lugging water.../ or balancing the baskets of grapes//These were the ones present at births,/.../ The ones stitching intricate needlework into children's dresses,/forgetting how easily children soil clothes" ("Different Ways to Pray" from stanzas 4 and 5).

Farah writes, "...since women are the preservers of culture, and their nonwaged labor isn't valued, it is precisely at this moment that the 'preserves' must be made. I began to think about the ways in which culture and tradition had been handed down to me and I began to dream the women in my own history..." (286-287). Like Farah's, Nye's hands are 'preservers of culture' as well as 'churches that worship' as they daily nourish and sustain: "These shriveled seeds we plant,/corn kernel, dried bean,/poke into loosened soil,/cover over with measured fingertips//...// This bundle of clothes I wash and hang and wash again/like flags we share...//The hands are churches that worship the world. (Nye, "Daily" lines 1-4,16, 17, 20, 21).

Elizabeth Alexander's poem, delivered at Barack Obama's Presidential Inauguration, speaks to life's daily maintenance and how these acts facilitate the creation of safe space and trust, transformed into revisionings for justice and hope: "Someone is stitching up a hem, darning a hole in a uniform, patching a tire, repairing the things in need of repair.../Praise song for struggle; praise song for the day...The figuring it out at kitchen tables.../ praise song for walking forward in that light" (delivered January 20, 2009). She celebrates the hands' daily actions of vulnerable resistance maintaining homeplace, linking the handwork with voice, songs of hope and forward movement.

Gloria Anzaldua offers a mythology that connects these daily creative words and actions to one's body and soul. She writes, "According to the ancient Nahuas, one was put on earth to create one's "face" (body) and "heart" (soul). To them, the soul was a speaker of words and the body a doer of deeds. Soul and body, words and actions are embodied in Moyocoyani... 'the one who invents himself/herself...' (Making Face, Making Soul xvi). Sonoko Toyoda draws upon Japanese mythology to make a similar

claim that through the daily creative actions of our hands we embody both body and soul. Observing that in most religions around the world, people put their hands together to pray, Toyoda suggests that our hands are connected to our hearts and souls and invites us to consider that “our hands ‘connect’ our minds and bodies” (Toyoda 4).

Anzaldua makes tangible this concept and connects the creative power of one’s hands to the creative potential of one’s voice and the aesthetic act of maintenance: “The hand is an extension of our will, it holds the pen, the brush, the lump of clay. It is both a symbol and a vehicle of communication. Without the hand the voice is helpless... The tongue needs the hand to give thoughts life...” (Making Face xxiv). Jan Jagodzinski discusses the hand and tongue through a “texture” and “conversation” she calls “the language of poetry.” She writes that “Texture is the conversation with ‘things’... It is the potter in conversation with clay, it is the weaver in conversation with fiber, it is the lapidary maker in conversation with leather, it is the crafts tradition that is the very fabric of technology” (165). These are examples of artists enacting vulnerable resistance in the daily acts of aesthetic maintenance, using their creative tools at hand to express their voice through the tangibility of their work. Whether one’s preferred mode of maintenance is poetry or pottery, it is that “conversation” between hand and tongue, expressed as voice, that maintains the breath through which the stories travel. It is through that ongoing, daily action committed to creating a better world that, in the maintenance process, the artist creates a product that holds the stories and hands them to the future. Through this aesthetic activism of vulnerable resistance expressed through hands and tongue, the artist/activist/agent is able to maintain existence, and a heritage, for generations. The mode of maintenance is about the continuance of that agential voice.

The hands and tongue are powerful symbols of agency and voice, and have also been targets of destruction for millennia. The mutilation of sacred statues is carried out within and between warring factions of religions, in which specifically, the statues' heads (which hold the tongue) and the hands are destroyed. Michael Brose writes of this phenomenon in his article "The Buddhas of Bamiyan" stating it is believed that "destroying the head and hands... would take away the soul of the image" (2001). This destruction happens across religions, regions and time frames. In a study of the Bronze Age Hazor statues excavated from the site of Israel dated at the second millennium B.C.E., archeologist Amnon Ben-Tor concluded, "In all cases of mutilation, the heads and hands of the statues were the primary targets" ("The Sad Fate of Statues" 14). From Ancient Israel's religious wars of the second millennium B.C.E., to the current second millennium C.E. when the world watched the Taliban destroy the 2000 year old statues of Buddha by first mutilating the heads and hands, to the more recent November 24, 2008 thievery of the ivory head and hands from the statue of the religious idol St. Anthony of Padua in a cathedral in the Phillipines, we see statues of the world's major religions attacked with the same violent symbolism: the attempt to kill the spirit by silencing the creative power of the tongue and hands. The power of the hands and tongue as creative and spiritual tools also transcends tradition, time and place. Multiple religions worldwide voice their prayers with pressed palms.

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance is enacted through aesthetic acts, such as writing, that serve as political actions at the same time as they create safe space. Arundhati Roy demonstrates this strategy of vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance, celebrating the relationship between hand and tongue and resisting through

aesthetic tools rather than destructive weapons: “Our strategy should be not only to confront Empire, but to lay siege to it....with ...our ability to tell our own stories” (War Talk 112). And Anzaldua echoes, “For many of us the acts of writing, painting, performing and filming are acts of deliberate and desperate determination to subvert the status quo. Creative acts are forms of political activism employing definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms...” (Anzaldua xxiv).

Marilene Phipps is a Haitian-born painter and poet whose creative work provides an example of the resistance Anzaldua and Roy speak of. Extending their notions of strategy and resistance, I suggest that Phipps’s work is vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance in that she resists through aesthetic means, maintains by using tools instead of weapons, and cultivates a sense of home despite displacement. In her own words, “Painting and Poetry are my battlefields....Living in another country, I use my pen or my brush to voice incantations to a particular world that has created me and, to a certain extent, now uses me to re-create itself” (“Pour Water on My Head” 115, 118). Whereas “weapon” elicits images of war and destruction, “tool” becomes associated with embodied active-isms such as construction, teamwork, alliance, craft, handwork. Marilene Phipps’s work enacts this vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance to create homeplace through aesthetic painting. She no longer lives in Haiti, but when she returned there, she began to paint works that expressed “a kind of exile, a longing for an internal, mythical Haiti—my paradise lost” (116). Asked how she can paint “such a luminous and bright Haiti” (117) when Haiti is so full of distress, she responds, “The brightness in my images is a prayer for Haiti itself. Praying for the color of light is what I

am able to do for Haiti with my work as well as challenge the multitude of negative stereotypes the world has been taught about its people” (118).

The hand and tongue as artistic tools with spiritual intention also emerges in Toyoda’s discussion of Frida Kahlo, whose “Each brushstroke represents meditation and prayer” (67). In Toyoda’s study of Frida Kahlo’s art, she interprets Frida’s painting *Two Fridas* as a depiction of the Mexican Frida of her mother, and the German-Jewish Frida of her father. “Frida inherited her German-Jewish father’s sense of the Diaspora. As *Two Fridas* demonstrates, this part of Frida was not accepted by Diego, who admired only her Mexican blood. Thus Frida continually needed something to believe in while holding various inconsistencies within herself” (67). Kahlo’s painting is an act of vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance that creates a homeplace in which her exiled spirit and shattered body may live in peace. Toyoda writes, “This feminine spirituality in her words was, for her, the only way to bridge the internal contradictions she lived” (67). What Toyoda identifies in Kahlo’s handpainting as an act of feminine spirituality, I recognize as vulnerable resistance.

I identify the power of the hand and tongue in an artifact left behind by my Lebanese grandmother. Sitdy enacted vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance through her personal pen and tongue aesthetic: a margin-scribbled Book of Saints stuffed with bitter napkin prose. Sitdy’s ironic scrapbook was full of fragments, folded mementos. On many of these paper-scrap she had written, “The pen is mightier than the sword” and “The tongue is mightier than the sword.” Variations of this phrase appear repeatedly like a mantra on backs of envelopes, between recipes and letters, along with random photos and profane jokes, all held between the pages of the Book of Saints. I

view these poetic scraps as symbols of the fragments of herself, a fragmented poet bound by a linear spine, her fragments folded between the pages of the Book of Saints folded like her hands in prayer, holding each fragment as a moment of meditation folded between raising eight children and baking bread. Sitdy wrote these poetic fragments and folded them between the pages to hold the fragments of herself together. These writings were integral to her daily maintenance and survival in the same way Audre Lorde insists, “Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence” (Sister Outsider 37).

I hadn’t known of the scrapbook and didn’t see it until I was twenty-six, several years after my grandmother died. Even though I’d loved words for as long as I could remember and had begun keeping a journal when I was nine years old, it wasn’t until I saw the scrapbook that I first thought with specificity about the power of words, especially in context of the “pen and sword” metaphor. Through the years, I came to identify strongly with the values and ideology informing this phrase, believing with conviction that words matter and can make a difference.

But one morning, on a particularly cloudy, rainy depressing day, on the very day we were commemorating the fifth anniversary of the Iraq war, on the heels of a week I’d been drowning in grief reading the blog (arabwomanblues.blogspot.com) of an Iraqi woman who spares no details of hate and decay and depression, my convictions were challenged. I was scanning online news and read the words, “Anyone who believes that the pen is mightier than the sword doesn’t live in Iraq.” This was the opening sentence in a New York Times article about an anonymous Iraqi political cartoonist who uses caution about what he publishes to protect himself against “retribution from men more

accustomed to expressing themselves with guns than with strongly worded letters to the editor.”

I read that opening sentence and became painfully aware of my naïvete, acutely conscious of my ignorance. I realized with shame that it is a luxury and an ideal to wax poetic or metaphoric about the power of words amidst realities of violence and guns and bombs. I became angry at my audacity, my blind privilege that had allowed me even to dare to utter that the pen is mightier than the sword.

But as I berated myself, something else began to rise within me, something refusing to be diminished by my own negativity. Something saying, wait a minute: the reason the Iraqi women’s blog depressed me so immensely was *because* her writing was so viscerally real, so acutely concrete, present, emotional, evocative, embodied. And while maybe her words won’t protect her from a literal sword slicing her heart, her words are her tools, keeping her alive and sane, helping her to maintain. Her words are reaching out and pulling in, they are the exhale and the inhale of everyday living. They both implicate me and inspire my self-reflection on the extreme degree of my privilege living outside of a war zone, the ease with which I am able to step into my yard and stretch luxuriously and walk down the street. Her words integrate a power that must be preserved, remind me of the power of words to self-preserve amidst violence and grief.

Nawal el Saadawi is one of the fiercest enactors of vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance. Saadawi is the Egyptian feminist, novelist, medical doctor, and political writer who was thrown in jail under the rule of Anwar Sadat in 1981 for her alleged “crimes against the state”: her political writings. Saadawi was forcefully abducted from her home by state authorities and taken to prison where she was held with

other political activists and not released until after Sadat's death. In her Memoirs from the Women's Prison, Saadawi recounts a scene where one of her cellmates requests a piece of paper and a pen to write home to her mother. The prison official interrupted her sentence abruptly. "No pen and paper... That is utterly forbidden. Anything but pen and paper. Easier to give you a pistol than pen and paper" (49). Saadawi writes, "The comparison between a pistol and a pen and paper rang in my ears oddly.... I had not imagined that pen and paper could be more dangerous than pistols in the world of reality and fact" (49). Later she writes, "Danger has been a part of my life ever since I picked up a pen and wrote. Nothing is more perilous than truth in a world that lies" (203).

From inside the prison walls, Saadawi performed vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance by doing the very thing she was imprisoned for: writing. "Such has been my crime ever since I was a small child. To this day writing remains my crime" (200). While inside prison, because she didn't have paper and pen, she wrote daily in her imagination. She wrote her prison memoirs by visualizing her words on the wall and memorizing them. "By night I would reread from memory, reviewing my writing, adding sections and deleting others, as if I were putting pen to paper" (199). When she could no longer hold so many pages of words in her head, she acquired "with great effort... a stubby black eyebrow pencil... along with a small roll of old and tattered toilet paper" smuggled into her cell by one of the prostitutes in the cell next to hers (199).

Saadawi was in prison because of the threat posed by her words as tools, her tongue and hands, her pen as sword. And because "Nothing is more perilous than knowledge in a world that has considered knowledge a sin since Adam and Eve" (204), Saadawi used the double edge of the sword to write her Memoirs from the Women's

Prison— on toilet paper with eyeliner in the middle of every night when she wasn't being watched, straddling the hole in the ground that was the toilet in the little cramped space of semi-privacy in her shared cell— to inform the world of the abuse of power by the ruling factions. Her actions of vulnerable resistance demonstrate a fractal: she wrote and was imprisoned, then she wrote from within the prison about being in prison for having written. Her writing is an embodiment of vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance as a means of creating homeplace. Saadawi, who was in exile from her homeland, writes in her afterword to Memoirs: “Since childhood a dream has inhabited my imagination: I write my words and people read them....Those are the people who make a homeland, and my homeland has become those people” (204). Saadawi finds homeplace in the act of writing and through the people she reaches with her words. Even when she was arrested for writing and forbidden from writing, she wrote. She never stopped. She enacted vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance to create homeplace.

Reading Saadawi helps me to remember that by opening into vulnerable resistance through my own writing I can maintain awareness that feelings I might be feeling are not necessarily mine alone. Many other women echo this awareness. Adrienne Rich, in her letter to “Dearest Arturo” asserts the act of writing as a means “to feel our own ‘questions’ meeting the world’s ‘questions,’ to recognize how we are in the world and the world is in us” (What is Found There 26). Our humanity demonstrates fractal performativity. Our human interconnection “stops at no borders,” writes Starhawk (Truth or Dare 329), and Audre Lorde acknowledges, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own” (“Uses of Anger” 132-

133). Like a fractal reverberating outward in repetition to infinity, every warzone, despite its specific physical boundaries, has global reverberations, and in turn, each act of vulnerable resistance that individuals daily perform to maintain a sense of safety and homeplace, can make an impacting difference. “Each act cause[s] a shimmer in the labyrinth of suffering,” as Joy Harjo writes (“we never say goodbye” line 13). We impact each other, as strands in a web, and as Alice Walker tells me, “Though [my] body may have been spared, one psyche is shared by the body of the world and it is the world’s soul that has suffered damage, and suffers it daily” (Anything We Love 97).

When I feel the weight of grief burdening the psyche of the world and manifesting in various parts of my body, I write. I write from my body. I write from my heart. Embodied writing is my vulnerable resistance, my preferred method of enacting transformation, my mode of maintenance. Lorde calls it “a disciplined attention to the true meaning of ‘it feels right to me’” (“Poetry” 37). She says, “We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared” (37). I feel deeply into my body’s spectra of emotions and name them with language. I attempt to name the injustices as well as the kindnesses that I witness. I pour my heart into my hands using pen and tongue as my tools.

I utilize fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance through words, as a tool for building dialogue as well as a tool for facilitating a moment of clarity and centeredness in moments of anger, grief, doubt, and fear. Writing vulnerable resistance transforms the daily tensions that reside in my body, and I would argue, in the Iraqi blogger’s body, or Siddy’s body, or Saadawi’s body. The sources of our immediate tensions may be radically different, but our “act” of writing creates the “shimmer in the labyrinth of

suffering [of our “shared psyche”]” (Harjo, [Walker]). It is an act of that suggests, borrowing the words of Homi Bhabha, “a shift of attention from the political as a theory to politics as the activity of everyday life” (149). I hold the pen in my hands. It is a kind of prayer.

Maintaining Hands Embodying Performance

The following fractal section represents fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as performance within the mode of maintenance. The segment points to how we sometimes maintain a holistic sense of ourselves in times of acute stress by speaking words in a way that resembles prayer. Vulnerable to the stressors surrounding us and resisting against splitting apart, we perform vulnerable resistance through the embodiment of words to maintain a presence of self. Specifically, in the following example, a man creates homeplace within himself by muttering prayers in order to feel that he was holding himself together. The performance of word repetition heals the mind/body/spirit split and enables this man to maintain his existence through integration facilitated by fractal performativity.

Prayer as Anchoring Breath

I came to understand a purpose of prayer from a most unlikely source: Stephen King’s film 1408. This film is a psychological thriller in which supernatural forces haunt a particular hotel room and terrorize, literally to death, anyone who checks into the room. The current hotel room guest, a self-proclaimed skeptic, soon finds himself unable to differentiate between reality, hallucination, and (in)sanity as he struggles to escape from

the tortures of the room. It is during one of these moments of extreme uncertainty and fear--where I as viewer witness this man losing his frame of reference and ground of being as time and place shift violently around him—that he begins to mutter words to himself aloud, as though the words might help to anchor him, to pull him into his body/awareness. And that is when I had the simple epiphany that perhaps one purpose of prayer is for anchoring ourselves into present, material reality. It's a lifeline, a tether to sanity. The utterances become not necessarily a plea to an external force to save him/her, but a means for grounding one's own internal strength, of hearing one's own voice so as not to forget one's own existence and presence. In Poisonwood Bible, Leah whispers, "Anatole, Anatole," and then narrates, "I repeated his name because it took the place of prayer. Anatole's name anchored me to the earth" (Kingsolver 210).

Every religion has chants, mantras, prayers, verses that are memorized and recited. I'm beginning to understand that these repetitions of recitings are not only to manifest wishes but to manifest rootedness, a merging of the mind and body back to one's center, an integration of mind/body/spirit through fractal performativity. Perhaps, under this logic, the 'crazy' homeless person muttering nonstop is using these words to stay functioning and present. Perhaps, too, this is why people memorize poems, recite stories, and sing songs. They are other forms of prayers that preserve our sanity by bringing us back into a present moment of clarity, to help us to feel 'home.'

Maintaining Hands Embodying Sustenance

The following performative collection of journal entries details my journey of establishing a sense of homeplace across the different soils, seasons, and terrains I've

participated in. Across the southwestern, northeastern, and midwestern United States, I sustain homeplace through my connection to these places and maintain that connection by storying the experiences in my journal. These stories are heuristic for me, in my writing of them and then in my re-reading of them because they function as maintenance of my spirit and my voice, maintenance of my evolving expression through my interrelationship with the living world. I display this prose and poetry as artifacts that mark for me, and exemplify, a shift in my voice. That is, the style and tone of my writing in these journal entries signifies my embodied shift toward vulnerable resistance and my ability to make homeplace across different geographical contexts. This was an important shift for me, as I came to recognize embodiment of vulnerable resistance as a way of being. Where I once found myself at my most articulate in moments of anger, these writings reveal movement toward cultivating an articulate voice in vulnerable resistance. Utilizing fractal performativity, I write in embodied language as I write from the place I embody, and I weave multiple meanings into each line. From a place of vulnerable resistance, I attempt to write the viscosity of happiness, love, homeplace, family, nature, and goodness—themes that risk being dismissed as cliché. But, I write them, and I display them here, in the face of that risk, in an embodiment of vulnerable resistance.

I display three “sets” of journal entries. In the first set, “geoskinscriptions,” the fractal relationship between the earth body (soil/terrain), my body (skin), and the page (paper) captures the intersection of sustenance (connection to place) and maintenance (writing voice), embodied as vulnerable resistance in an engaged display of fractal performativity. The second set, “Acadia, Maine” describes my embodied experience of homeplace in the harsh and rugged beauty of the coastal North Atlantic. I detail my

embodiment of this landscape at the same time I reveal the landscape's simultaneous extremes of fierce resilience and inviting beauty, qualities of vulnerable resistance. Phrases such as "everything is calm, nothing is idle" echo the simultaneity of vulnerable resistance. The third set, "Ice Storm/Birthday Tomatoes," captures my experience of homeplace in southern Illinois sustained through the juxtaposition of seasons, gardens, family, and food. In all three sets, I (re)embody place through words. In this way, writing fractal performativity allows me to maintain a sustaining connection to place, experienced as home and embodied as vulnerable resistance.

geoskriptions in skin kins inks

Flying over the southwest for the first time, I am riveted by the patterns etched into the skin of the earth, erupting into plateaus of stone, repeating themselves in fractals across acres. With my forehead pressed against the airplane window, I watch the landscape move beneath me unfolding slowly its patterned varieties of weathered bedrock, ancient lakebeds, volcanic fields and alluvial fans. Having been reading about fractal landscapes, seeing these fractals from the plane is an unexpected, glorious treat. The flat-topped stratified sedimented earth-sculptures patterned in clusters prompt my glee, "Those must be mesas!" my first-time seeing these iconic geo-cultural images and the conical structures I determine as buttes, ancient places of ritual, wide cones narrowing into slender clefts and yawning grooves.

Witnessing these immense landscapes from this grand scale is disorienting (Beardslee), as size is simultaneously tiny and massive, and I feel myself falling

through my plane of glass, falling into my field of view like Alice through the looking glass, my heart pounding behind my eyes scaling canyons narrowing into fossilized river beds veining like a calligraphy of fern leaves; sand windblown into scalloped shallow waves fluid as muddy water; desert-painted fractal swirls of dusty fuschia, terra cotta, sandstone green: a picture of melting rainbow sherbert gone macabre.

So much like a body's skin, this gravel loam, sand, soil, stone stretched tight and thin, loose and gathered, leathered and layered, scarred, smoothed, pitted, blemished, even hairy with the coarse foliage of desert trees, while the Mojave River runs *beneath* the sand, like veins coursing beneath the surface of our skin.

In abstract ways I've thought about similarities of the skin of earth and skin of bodies, but seeing the particularities from this grand scale revealing itself to me like a literal motion picture, I am stunned by the tangible visibility of my kinship with this earth body beneath me, whose stories are written in stratified layers I read with my cellular memory, my heart-memory, requiring me to see differently in order to comprehend the geometric narrative of this fractal performativity. Stories are written into the valleys of the landscape as they are etched into the wrinkled lifelines of my hands as they are scratched onto the surface of the page. I name them geoskriptions, these stories inscribed into the terrains of earth, body, and page; inscribed into the skins of our geokins: the soils, mountains, valleys, trees; skriptions with the inks of our waters, our bloods, and our pens.

These geoskriptions emphasize for me the relationship between human bodies and earth bodies, embodied knowing, and performative writing. They reveal to me the fractal nature of bodies: Earth as a planetary body, a large scale version of a human body,

a large scale version of life embodied on a page. At each particular scale of kins, skin, and inks, a universal story of relational dynamics unfolds, is told through geoskinscriptions, inscriptions etched and inked into the skins of bodies: earth, human, and page.

*

Acadia, Maine

July 28, 2006

I walked through enchanted red spruce forest
and emerged upon acres of granite coastline.

I could see no other human soul.

I slipped into the icy silk of sea, and my chakras burst open, singing.

The chill of the north atlantic settled at the base of my neck and
radiated through my body like fire, fierce fire-ice.

My happiness was pure as mist-hovered hemlocks,
clear as cliffs against sky and solid as granite.

I back-stroked the waves, breast-stroked the tide,
dove underwater and felt gloriously enveloped.

The happiness in my heart was new, and I knew
it must be joy and centeredness and clarity... yes clarity:

I knew I was alive,

dolphin spirited and porpoisely playful,

united with my child-self. I was *me*.

I played until my lips and finger-tips went stiff with cold,

then crawled from the icy water and
sprawled like a lizard to thaw my body on the sun-warmed granite flats.

August 2, 2006

There's a lonely mysticism here. A rugged mystique.

Piercing extremes jolt my skin my heart my muscles my bones —
forcing me to stay completely in my body amidst the magic.

Whether I'm tightroping slick seaweed-covered jagged rocks
or grabbing granite handholds while scaling ocean cliffs,

Whether I'm billygoating down a mountainside, or diving into icy tide,
Acadia helps me to recognize the extremist in me.

Right now, I'm sitting on a boulder damp with sea spray
surrounded by acres of ochre seaweed cascading like glorious hair
over thousands of rounding rock heads.

A gull appears like an apparition through a seamless veil of silver mist.

A sailboat breaks the smooth horizon.

Everything is calm; nothing is idle.

I wish I could capture the energy of place with words.

Embodied experience is its own kind of poetry.

I store the particularities of the moment in my shoulders, my belly, behind my eyes.

I will smell this ocean in my dreams.

This body will remember *this* place for lifetimes.

I kiss the face cliff and the mist

of moist air is the mysticism of my tears, the
tangible mystery of my story, my ecstasy embodied.

August 3, 2006

Today I leave Seawall. I leave Acadia.

Saying goodbye to a coastline is like saying goodbye to a lover, or a dear dear friend.

All my heart wishes and hopes we'll meet again.

Our relationship has created homeplace.

I promise I will return.

As I write 'return,' two bald eagles land in the spruces and cause a ruckus.

They too have promised a return and have made good on it.

*

Ice Storm—February 4, 2008

Ice storms are not norms in Southern Illinois, and

this one came in a flurry of walnut-sized snowpuffs

blanketing together catching the heavy freezing glaze that followed,

knocking down power lines, closing schools, discouraging traffic.

The world turned slate sheen and wet silver.

The fierce weight of the ice felled majestic tree limbs,

yet its intricate delicacy held each single blade of grass in frozen precision,

a snapshot of popsicled repose.

This quality of the ice reminds me of spider silk

in its simultaneous capacity for murderous strength and fragile beauty.

Peering into clarity, into this sublime stillness amidst nature's wreckage, amidst complexity of tragedy and beauty silencing power by collapsing lines,
I was gifted with the epiphany that I was not ready to leave Southern Illinois.

I spent a week gazing through my backyard window at silver ice
sparkling heavier than dew on morning webs in sunlight,
flashing upon the occasional red of a sheltering cardinal
nestled deep into the enchanted frosty green of a cedar
silhouetted against the backdrop sky of slate blue.

Serenity enveloped me, warmth melted tears from my heart
quenching my thirst like immersion into oceans after months of dust.

The scene outside my window nourished my core like comfort food filling my belly.

I was home. I felt home. This was home.

This was where my life made sense and my center was smooth.

The epiphany was profound and mundane, affirming and significant.

Greg planted spinach and lettuce seeds in the greenhouse,
and seeds of tomatoes in flats in the basement,
and I said if we ever want to act on our vision of tending goats,
then now is the time.

Birthday Tomatoes—July 27, 2008

The red-ripe tomatoes from my garden are cooking down to a juicy broth in the cast iron skillet with the garlic. Today is my birthday, and I'm hungry for Lebanese food, my heart and soul food, so I'm cooking myself a birthday treat. I crush up the fresh spearmint I just harvested, toss it into the skillet with black pepper and cinnamon, spin the spatula, and the aroma of my history surrounds me. Every significant kitchen of my childhood—Mom's, Didi's, Tita's, Siddy's— swirls into my presence, a signature of scented memory imprinted with the bustle of chaos and warmth. I'm three decades and three hundred miles from those kitchens of my past, both near and far to a source of the familiar, the familial. Through my tongue, I'm trying to make tangibly present the ephemeral past of food and family. I spoon piping dishes for Greg and Raynah, heap steaming buttery rice topped with a simmering ladle of the tomato brew. I'm excited to share this meal with them. What I really want to know is if they *feel* it, these flavors of my soul, these spices of my childhood, the part of me that cannot be fully known through photos or stories, that cannot be conveyed except through the direct sharing of this food, through this embodied moment when these flavors pass from my skillet to their palate. With these flavors I am conjuring both the ancestral and childhood homeplaces of my past, both honoring and evoking a history through my very specifically personalized present—a present that is radically different from, yet significantly infused with, the Lebanese influences of my childhood. With these tomatoes, grown from seed and harvested by my hands; with this meal, alchemized in my kitchen as ghosts of my ancestors hover in the aroma, I can begin to convey to Greg and Raynah a part of who I am. It is like sharing a poem, but even more intense. And so I watch their expressions

from the corner of my eye, and I see their faces open in the way a face opens when it has tasted more than the savory: when it has sampled the alchemy of my fully embodied history. This is the story not historically recorded, the story that can only be told through taste. This is preservation of the motherline. The sister of the mother tongue of language is the mother tongue of flavor, the food element of sustenance, passed palate to palate, generation to generation; my story of cultural survival recognized in the gestalt of the senses, shared at the homeplace of the table, planted on the soil of tongues.

August 27, 2008

One month past my birthday, and I realize the tomato seeds Greg planted during my ice-storm epiphany of homeplace grew to bear fruit on my birthday, and those were the same tomatoes I harvested and cooked into the Lebanese meal I shared with my family. Past birthdays I've chosen to go to the ocean, its own kind of homeplace for me. But this year for my birthday my journey took root/route in desire to be home with my goats and gardens and Greg and Raynah, took root in recognition of home as southern Illinois heat and scent of moonflower, song of cicadas and seasoned tomatoes harvested and held in the homeplace of my hands.

Maintaining Hands Embodying Maintenance

The following fractal section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as maintenance within the mode of maintenance. In this section I enact vulnerable resistance as maintenance by writing about writing. Specifically, I write about a moment where future and past intersect on my recognition of my desire to write as a

way of life. This moment demonstrates fractal performativity by displaying how I feel empowered when I write; how my writing facilitated empowerment for others; which in turn empowered my perception of myself as a writer, which further facilitates my ability to continue enacting vulnerable resistance a daily practice of writing to maintain homeplace. Homeplace is created and maintained in my own recognition as well as for the people affected by my writing activism.

Sugar Creek

Greg and I unbraided my hair. After three hair dreams, three nights in a row, it was time to release all that was knotted in my tresses. We unbraided my hair and I washed it, brushed it, oiled it with sandalwood and patchouli olive oil. I washed the old spirits out of my hair. This was a transformative moment and I remembered the fullness of my power. I remembered my vision of the rainbow colored web of interconnectedness of all things. I remembered I'm a writer and a lover of life and goodness. Today we unbraided my hair and the ghosts went home to rest. Before bed I said aloud, "I want to make a living as a writer." It was the first time ever I made such a statement with such clarity. It was the first time I said the words "I want to make a living as a writer." I've said before that I want to be a writer but I've never said 'make a living' as a writer. This felt significant to me. I want to make a living as a writer writing the beauty of place.

The very next morning, Greg was reading the local headlines and called from the next room that the Sugar Creek controversy had ended. Marion signed on with the Rend Lake Conservancy District for its water supply, abandoning its nearly 20-year pursuit to dam Sugar Creek, one of Illinois's last free-flowing streams.

Many years ago, I wrote a series of articles about the controversy surrounding Sugar Creek. The primary article I wrote comprehensively detailed the history of the fifteen years of legal battles, as well as the current state of the ongoing, unfolding saga, between the city of Marion and the local environmental groups, including Sierra Club. My articles emphasized homeplaces for humans and wildlife made possible by this free-flowing stream and the unnecessary and irreversible damage and displacement that would result from damming Sugar Creek. My articles also pointed to the many economic and environmental reasons Rend Lake would be a better water source. I listed public officials' contact information for concerned citizens who wanted to write letters, and I announced the time and place of the upcoming public hearing. My articles were published in Nightlife, a small local newspaper and circulated. I remember at the time not really knowing whether or not the articles would make a difference—or if anybody besides the environmentalists actually read them. Either way, hundreds of people turned out for the public hearing hosted by the Army Corps of Engineers, and the majority who spoke were against the lake. The Corps delayed issuance of the permit to build the lake and the case went back to the courts.

Hearing this latest update that the long saga had finally concluded, I exhaled fully on behalf of all the families and critters whose homes were saved. The news was unexpected, exciting, and surreal. I allowed myself permission to think my articles might have contributed in some small way.

Later that same day, I received an email from the editor of the newspaper that had published my Sugar Creek pieces. Having just heard the news himself, he wrote: "...you played a role through that terrific article you did for us all those years ago!"

The unexpected news of the end of this twenty year saga came synchronistically just a few short hours after I had stated aloud my wish to make a living writing. I wonder if the unlikely odds of such convergent timing increases the odds that I'll eventually manifest that desire.

Maintaining Hands Embodying Alliance

The following fractal section is a performance poem of my experience conceiving, laboring, and homebirthing Raynah. My homebirth experience was an act of vulnerable resistance as alliance within the mode of maintenance. In a moment of fractal performativity, I observed and embodied a synchronistic and magical integration of fractal life: a human body witnessing the body of the universe shift and open to make room for a new body in a dance of trust, breath, blood, rhythm, bodies, water and flesh. Surrounded by my partner, midwife and friends, I was able to maintain the intensity of labor through breath and words, and I attempt to re-embody the moment with breath and words, by reflecting the rhythm of breath through line breaks, extensions, and rhythms of this birthing story. This is a story about intuitive alliances between humans, especially the alliance shared between Greg and I, through the fractal rhythm of maintaining our breath and bodies in partnership. Together, we created a homeplace to welcome Raynah into this world.

Intuitive Bodies

Forty-three weeks pregnant I called to the sky
 "I'm ready to have this baby now!"

full-moon meadow whispered response

as Greg read from a paper scrap he found in the grasses:

“love

happy

heart

family

good feeling

best in world

ovaries”

“Did you write that?” I asked him.

“No, I found it. I thought it was yours and you dropped it.”

“It’s not mine... you really just found that?”

“Yes”

The poem was another bit of magic always present

from that moment forty-three weeks before:

single moment mid love-making

single profound sensation felt once, never since

that had compelled me to say,

“We’ve just conceived. I felt it.”

And then the name a few days later

“Raynah Genevieve” spiraled into my third eye.

“Raynah Genevieve!” I called to the sky
and the most beautiful female cardinal I’ve ever seen
flew before my face, inches away, hovered there,
landed on the tree limb next to me.

“Well hello sweet child.”

“Yes it’s me. Your spirit child.” She flew off,
I walked on, repeated her name.
Instantly, the same bird landed in the tree I was approaching
and as I passed, she flew in one strong swoop
to the next tree and waited for me.
From that moment on we were together.

Now, forty-three weeks later,
full belly ripe body fluids full moon february field and water sky this poem
about family and ovaries emerges from the grasses
manifesting magic on a paper scrap in cattails,
and I knew in a flash, announced to the sky,
“Our baby’s going to make an appearance tonite.”

I completed the very last page of my journal
while eyeing my new journal awaiting birth of its first entry.

fire warming february air, big belly bare mirroring full moon we sat facing.

Suddenly, honking geese, howling coyotes, wafting guitar, gushing surge

rushed through my body in a single breath

lifelong moment of silent eye connection...

then we laughed laughed and laughed

my body surged waves of charged calm amidst chorus of

napping cats, honey locust, lemon balm.

we sauntered indoors eventually...

sacred-altared, sandalwood-incensed, homemade-candlelit.

I swayed showered breathed,

sipped raspberry-leaf and nettles tea.

Friends and midwife gathered singing

“Every breath taken in

by the man who loves

and by the woman who loves

goes to fill the water tank

where the spirit horses drink” (Peg Millett lyrics)

Greg and I surfed on waves and dived in breath and crashed on crests of foaming swirls

I spun floated hurled whirled shat shivered smiled curled spooned arched stretched dug

dove rose breathed glowed shuddered sighed moaned surged tingled

We circled sang grooved
on the rhythms of my hips:

“Where do we walk,
we walk in the fire.
where do we dance,
we dance on the moon.

Just like that grandmother
living inside her

We have the power of life
in the in the in the womb” (Peg Millett lyrics)

We circled sang grooved on the rhythms of my hips my body

free to move as I wanted to move and I

swayed and

swayed and

swayed and

swayed

into a squat I

heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeaved earth cleft ancestral force fire lava silken water

birthed my baby

into soft hands and pink light

centered in the circle of new life

suddenly just like that

“we have a baby now”

my first words

“Hello Raynah Genevieve.

I’ve waited so long to meet you”

I brought Raynah to my breast

umbilical cord still attached I walked to the bed,

savoring forever those first ever moments

connection with old soul born through my very new body

Maintaining Hands Embodying Nurturance

The following fractal section demonstrates vulnerable resistance as nurturance within the mode of maintenance. This section is about living and dying, about building and breathing. Nurturance and maintenance intersect here through family and writing and integrate as fractal performativity of the spirit, a repetition of dying into life, the laboring process of breathing open the door that births us into the next world in a spiraling exiting entry of exhales. In this section I am present during my Uncle’s last breaths. Because I had no script, I relied heavily on listening to my heart and being present with my Uncle. His last words to me were one of the greatest gifts he ever gave me.

Brick by Breath by Word

A gray tube snaked from the hole doctors drilled into his frontal lobe to drain fluid from his brain and relieve pressure created from an inoperable brain tumor. His skin

stretched thin across a gray face that, until this moment, I had known only as hearty. Now everything about him had gray tones: his aura, his flesh and his strength matched the color of the liminal space into which he was suddenly slowly sinking.

From depths of morphine sleep, he raised open his eyes and gathered me into his focus. Amidst this grayness he had deep awareness of his need for economic dialogue. Distilling to the essence what he wanted to convey to me in his final words, he persuaded his dry mouth and fading voice to issue forth the question, “Are you still writing?”

These were Uncle Don’s first words to me in his last days. I cannot recall a time that we’ve ever shared a conversation about my writing. Yet, now, in this suspended moment bridging life and death, at our first seeing of one another in over a year, he greeted me not with ‘hello’ but with the subject of my core.

“Yes,” I replied.

With great effort he whispered, “Good” and closed his eyes.

Here, in his final moments, he was gifting me with the reminder of life’s impermanency to reaffirm for me the importance of following one’s passion.

An artist and a carpenter, Uncle Don spent his life following his own passion, creating homeplaces with his hands. It was his job, his life, his core. He built physical homes for people to live in, and he painted homes on canvas, all of them brick by brick. When I was a young child Uncle Don taught me how to lay bricks. I laid each brick carefully and pressed it into the densely moist cement. He showed me how to press just enough so the mortar oozed over but didn’t fall away. The ooze was meant to stay there and dry that way. This was the particular aesthetic for some houses, including the one I was learning on. That was how I learned about multiple aesthetics. For some brick

houses, the aesthetic is to swipe clean and smooth the pressed out mortar, like the extra dough that remains around cookie cutters. I remember appreciating the brick aesthetic that kept the ooze.

When I was eight years old, he taught me how to mix sand into paint to create texture. This was before the days when you could go to a home improvement store and buy pre-manufactured paint textures. I watched him adding sand into the five-gallon bucket and stirring, adding sand and stirring, repeatedly until he reached the desired texture. I was fascinated by how much sand the bucket could hold, and by how much sand the paint could absorb. When I was twenty-eight years old, he taught me, over the phone, how to select the lumber to build support beams, how to install them, and how to jack up the roof of my house that was caving in. Greg and I together implemented his instructions, and to this day, especially after every heavy snow or icestorm, I'm grateful for my uncle's guidance, as I can be confident the infrastructure of my house is strong and that my roof isn't going to collapse.

"I love you, Uncle Don."

And in a barely audible whisper with his eyes closed, he said, "Thank you."

Those were his final words to me. Having just gifted me with affirmation as a writer in his eyes, he offered me a gift of thanks. Here at the end of his life, as in its duration, he gave offerings and gritudes; he was passing through and from life in a giving mode, in an embodiment of vulnerable resistance.

I never again saw him with open eyes. I never again saw him with working hands. The painting he was working on was not yet finished, and so it remains eternally in process. It is a painting of his childhood home, the house he and my dad grew up in,

my Sitdy's and Grandpa's house on Arago Street, the house with the steep wooden stairs leading to the dim sloping basement Grandpa dug with his hands, the basement I followed Sitdy into to watch her roll the dough for Lebanese bread, where I would roll the jar of wood-carved faded red and black checkers, colors swishing the black and grey checkered floor, cold beneath me, beside the ancient oven, hotter than modern, yielding loaves of unleavened bread.

Uncle Don had been painting this house on canvas, building it brick by brick, in an ongoing process of tinting paints to create the bricks' exact colors. The frame of the house was fully sketched, with my grandparents sitting on the front steps, looking eerily just as they had always looked when they were living. The poetic fact of life's incompleteness, and simultaneous perpetuation, exists as the ghost of this unpainted house living unfinished on the canvas, a house whose physical existence lives only, and eternally, in the memories of my eight aunts and uncles who lived there, all heaped together into two bedrooms. The house lives on as a homeplace in my memories, and likely in the memories of my dozens and dozens of cousins, and the dozens of friends and strangers who sat at Sitdy's kitchen table over those many years. Home is a process of creation and cocreation, in our minds and psyches, in the physical everyday maintenance, in the ongoing making and remaking. Homeplace is an event in as much as it is a place or a space, an event that creates moments of stability amidst its dynamics of perpetual motion. Uncle Don's painting of incompleteness captures the ephemerality of homeplace, of memory, of life's passage day by day, captures this ephemerality ironically through the stability and finality of these unpainted bricks he'd been painting day by day, sketched like ghostings of the physical brick by brick, etched onto this canvas and built by his

steady, working, maintaining hands.

The week after he and I shared our last words, he slipped into a coma. I exited directly from the interstate to the hospital and found my uncle's room. He was taking his last breaths. I had heard the phrase 'last breaths' before, but I never knew until this moment that 'last breaths' was a specific phenomenon, not merely a euphemism for somebody nearing death. I've experienced a lot of death in my life, but this was the first time I was at the bedside of a person in transition. I was stunned at the amount of *laboring* he was doing. I came face to face with the similarity between birthing and dying. These breaths were loud and hollow. They sounded like clear gusts of wind, tunneling gusts with concise stops. Each breath had a beginning and an end, but they were the deepest breaths I've ever heard, and there was cleansing strength behind each and every inhale and exhale. The breaths did not sound human. They sounded as though they were coming *through* his body but not *from* his body. It was as though he was breathing every breath from the center of the earth to the outer reaches of the cosmos and back again. It sounded as though he was laboring to birth himself into his next life, to launch himself, to propel himself with the force of each breath. It occurred to me that birth and death are more than cycles, and death is not death but birth into birth, like a fractal--a repetition with a whole new field of particulars that might not have been seen in the previous pattern of living. There is so much life in death, so much living in dying. Maybe dying is just that—a process of dye-ing our life's pattern with a whole new set of colors and seeing it differently the next time around.

I sat silently with my cousin Angie and Aunt Sue at the bedside of Uncle Don, listening to his breaths create the soundscape of the room. His body was turning cold.

His face had transformed itself and his skin was perfectly smooth. He had not one wrinkle. I've never seen such serenity on an adult face. His appearance of peace was as otherworldly as his continual laboring and belied the efforts of his chest heaving up and down in steady, repetitive rhythm, keeping time with the fierce pulsing of the soundscape, breath by breath by breath.

Listening deep into my heart amidst the soundscape of his breathing, I began to feel very strongly that he would make it through the night and pass early in the morning. I knew I should not be there when he passed. This was too private a moment. Too sacred. The people or person meant to be there in that moment would be there, and for right now it was time for me to go. I helped Aunt Sue arrange her reclining chair so she could semi-sleep while being as close to her partner as she could possibly be. Aunt Sue and Uncle Don were the embodiment of homeplace manifested through relationship. They spent their life together literally building houses, building life with their hands, side by side in the bricks and the mud. Their partnership was their livelihood and their craft.

I turned to my cousin and we hugged and hugged and hugged, as though we could squeeze away the sadness, like blinking hard to hold back tears; but the sadness oozed from our pores like leaking eyes. I said my last words to my uncle. I drove in silence, with Uncle Don's laboring soundscape whooshing through my ears.

Uncle Don died that next morning around eight a.m. Angie and Aunt Sue had stayed with him through the night, and in the morning, with nothing seemingly changed, Angie decided to go home briefly to freshen up. In that small window of time, when only Aunt Sue was there alone with Uncle Don, he died. Aunt Sue told me he released one soft, beautifully long, final exhale.

CHAPTER 5

VULNERABLE RESISTANCE AS PERFORMANCE

Homeplace of Performance

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of performance creates homeplace through everyday and heightened rituals/performances designed to heal splits within oneself and address disconnections that occur under colonization. Holding a torch for justice like a seed between thumb and forefinger, the performing hand ignites social activism from a place of personal power. As Marilou Awiakta maintains, “I offer you something so small my thumb and forefinger almost cover it... I lay a deep red corn seed in your palm. Seven thousand years of concentrated energy emanate from the seed... Communications transpire.....create a spark. And we make a quantum leap out of linear time...” (Selu 18-19). That seed in the center of my palm represents my spirit centered in my body. When I’m feeling centered within myself I am able to access my homeplace of personal power, which is often realized through ritualized, stylized performative acts. When I’m not in my “center,” I’m not in my body; and when I’m not in my body I can’t be embodied, and embodiment is central to any good performance whether it’s on the stage, in the classroom, on the page, in my backyard, or in a coffeehouse.

Through performance methodology I am able to access my homeplace of center. Performance methodology requires me to call upon and integrate a cognitive logic, an intuitive logic, and an embodied logic to make specific choices in each context I engage, whether everyday or heightened. For example, to stage a performance I make choices based on fact, epiphany, and kinesthetic awareness. Through the integration of these

choices I am centered in the performance ritual and able to enact change. The integration is a vulnerable resistance that creates homeplace as I heal splits within myself and access my center. My perspective of performance methodology calls upon scholars who also work from this integrative place to heal splits through performance. In my rituals of performance, I am influenced by Pelias's aesthetic communication, rooted in a writing dialogic; Conquergood's performance ethnography that brings together fractured communities; Pineau's "corporeal prosody" of embodied metered rhythm, breath, and movements; Gingrich-Philbrook's stand-up theory, which calls attention to how socio-political issues mark the intimate body; Spry's bricolage to re-member her body through juxtaposed and woven fragments. While each of their performance strategies are distinctly diverse, I find their common thread in that they work from the place of heightened integration I call fractal performativity. That is to say, they draw power from the integration which enacts healing within themselves, which enhances their own personal power, which is then conveyed powerfully through the performance act, which influences the audiencing individuals and ripples outward to enact healing on a larger scale. The power repeats from individual to performance to audience like the repetition of a fractal, like a fractal ripple. In this way, the integration of mind, body, and spirit through the healing ritual of performance is fractal performativity. These rituals are also performances of vulnerable resistance. Performers are enacting vulnerable resistance in that they are open enough to access their homeplace of power and strong enough to allow the power to flow through them to others.

The discipline of Performance Studies, with its emphasis on the soil of the body, empathy, and the dialogic, is a paradigm that values interconnection, egalitarian

relationship, generative dialogue, and embodied ways of knowing. Performance Studies emphasizes a “way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and intimate connection...a view from ground level...anchored in practice... but...ephemeral” (Conquergood, “Interventions” 146). Embodied performances don’t stay still like words on a page, ephemeral they are momentarily present, then gone—but not absent. The energy of performance ripples outward in repetition like a fractal, embodied by performers and audiences alike, swirling into future conversations and performances, with new meanings made in each fractal repetition.

Performance Studies’ emphasis on the body is important to me, especially given my worldview of the interconnectedness of all things. To value the body as a tool for knowing is to begin healing the mind/body/spirit splits and asymmetrical power dynamics that cause damaging oppressions in all aspects of life. Foregrounding the body as a tool for knowing and for empathically relating across differences invites material acknowledgment and tangible evidence that multiple epistemologies and critical methodologies are necessary for social justice.

Through Performance Studies, I have learned to recognize the evolution of my own way of relating dialogically and empathically in my everyday performances and in heightened performance on the stage. In addition to the performance scholars I have cited throughout this document, Starhawk emphasizes shared power and healing through heightened and everyday rituals; and from within my disciplinary community of communication, feminist rhetoricians align with my worldview of shared power. Foss and Griffith propose “Invitational Rhetoric” as an alternative to patriarchal methods of persuasion, and Foss, Foss, and Griffith’s Feminist Rhetorical Criticism, highlights radical

feminists' rhetorical strategies. Mark Levy discusses performance through a shamanic lens, believing that performers are able to channel a visionary and healing energy that infuses and informs their performance and the people gathered in the performance space (Technicians of Ecstasy). The ritual of performance empowers me and I am able to channel a power that is both mine and bigger than mine. It is a power I share with the audience members. They feed me and I feed them. In the doing, a third thing is created, and I am at home on the stage. I perform vulnerable resistance as a means of healing splits and accessing my personal power.

Homeplace can be experienced as this grounded centeredness within the self. I characterize grounded centeredness as a healing of splits within the self that simultaneously enables one to access inner strength. This inner strength is always important, and it is especially necessary to know how to access centeredness when one is unsafe or in an uncertain situation with nobody to rely upon except one's self. When people can heal splits within the self, they can access a feeling of homeplace and safety. Finding homeplace within the self enables one to experience rootedness and flow, a fluid stability, a vulnerable resistance. bell hooks emphasizes healing from within as a means of creating homeplace, quoting Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hahn on restoring 'wholeness':

Resistance at root must mean more than resistance against war. It is a resistance against all kinds of things that are like war....The purpose of resistance, here, is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly...I think that communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves

more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness. (qtd. in Yearning 42)

Naming homeplace as a means of resisting erasure becomes all the more urgent in the context of colonization, in all its forms.

“Performance is a form of agency” (Denzin, Performance Ethnography 9) that heals the splits within ourselves to create homeplace. By ‘splits’ I’m referring primarily to the varieties of separations that occur under any form of colonization or power-over abuses. The hierarchical nature of binaries represents power-over relationships, which survive through domination and disconnection. The Cartesian split influences the hierarchical, patriarchal structures that govern our everyday realities, be they institutions of war, language, education, medicine, government, marriage, corporation, gender, sex, sexuality, or any other hierarchically binaried constructions. These splits and oppositions (mind/body, male/female) separate humans from one another in terms of status and create hierarchies and power struggles inherent in the institutions that structure society, and they also become internalized. Performance artist-scholars heal splits through the act of performing on stage and some feminist scholars address embodied everyday performance rituals for healing splits. In The Eros of Everyday Life, Susan Griffin explicates the violence of the binary paradigm that favors war and disconnection to show how it infuses our current social structures and has “fashioned” “categories of otherness”: “The same dualism which imagines matter and energy to be separate also divides human nature...[but] the mind cannot be separated from the body... (225-227). Nor can spirit and matter be separated, much like physicists agree that matter is energy and energy is matter.

In the same vein, the spiritual/political split is a construction. Audre Lorde claims that “the erotic” is “the bridge” that heals the spiritual and political split and enables us to heal the splits within ourselves (56). Lorde says “We must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change” (122). The erotic is a fully embodied vulnerable resistance, a sense of one’s self that creates a feeling of homeplace within one’s own body. To enact change, we must heal these splits and these asymmetrical power dynamics through performances of integration that access the power of vulnerable resistance.

When we heal these splits within ourselves we are self-empowered; we experience “power-from-within” our center of homeplace and can perform agency in our heightened and everyday lives. When we are self-empowered, we are better at understanding how “energy makes patterns and patterns direct energy” or, said another way, how “consciousness shapes reality; reality shapes consciousness” (Starhawk, Dreaming13) and this understanding can help us be an agent for positive social change. In Selu, for example, Marilou Awiakta writes of the difficulties she encountered leaving her “homeground” and entering into Western education, where she “had to adapt from the web to the boxes” (189). Her process of healing is captured in her poem “An Indian Walks in Me.” Awiakta reflects, “One quiet line marked the beginning of my healing: ‘No more will I follow any rule that splits my soul’....Unraveling the diverse strands, I gradually perceived a pattern of unity among them...” (190). Awiakta learns how to reconcile her native heritage with Western civilization by weaving a pattern of “new harmony,” a performance ritual that allows the two traditions to inform one another in mutual reciprocity. In Silko’s Ceremony Tayo finds healing in recognizing the

permeability of boundaries and their patterns. “He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together.... no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time” (246).

These examples of fractal performativity reveal healing splits of mind/body/spirit embodying both/and perspectives, transitioning from squares or boundaries into multiplicities of webbed patterns, demonstrating that a homeplace of grounded centeredness provides sustaining strength as well as a mode of transition and flow necessary for survival. As Starhawk illustrates, “Rooted in place, an economy of peace extends its branches out to nurture the globe.” (Truth or Dare 329).

Performing Hands Embodying Performance

The following section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance involved in staging a solo show, Depleting Patriarchy, to address the impacts of depleted uranium. In this section I refer to performance as a conspicuous, staged aesthetic act. Depleting Patriarchy is a performance I wrote, directed, performed, and staged for a public audience. Vulnerable resistance is evidenced in a variety of ways. Vulnerable resistance exists as performance in that I had to conjure my power in order to channel the healing I intended for this show. I had to be open to channeling these narratives but resistant to drowning in the grief of the destruction and disease. The moment I stepped onto the stage in heightened performance, all splits, doubts, or uncertainties within me were healed for the suspended duration of that performance act; and at the same time, in the *doing* of the performance ritual, I was manifesting my intentions of healing splits between mind/body, between earth bodies/human bodies, and patriarchy’s damaging

hierarchies, not to mention Bush's either/or—you're either with us or you're a terrorist" mentality. I was calling for a recognition that this war is destroying the homeplace for all life. I was trying to recreate homeplace through healing the devastation I felt within my own body over these injustices, and to enact healing of the destruction wrought by the increasing disconnections between world powers and living beings. The staging of this show was fractal performativity realized on stage as a fractal star. Fractal performativity as a staging process allowed me to integrate the splits between human bodies and earth bodies, and also to integrate the interdisciplinary bodies of literature, narratives, and mythologies I was putting into play.

Depleting Patriarchy

I lay on the cool of the black stage, my body splayed like a star. "This is my *religion!*" I cry. "*This!*" and my palms press flat into the stage, the ground, the earth, the energy of matter. The theatre is empty and I am sobbing fully, in an unrehearsed rehearsal moment of raw release and synthesis.

Then, I'm in full motion, tracing a pattern of a star with my body in ecstatic, elemental movements: airy, watery, fiery, grounded, spiraling. "We are various and multiplicitous! We are an ecology of each other! A complex collage of rhythms and emotions! And we cannot be reduced to a simple binary! Why have we not moved beyond this!! Societally beyond this institutional, hierarchical, asymmetrical power-structure of the binary that is killing us! Wrenching our minds from our bodies, stealing ourselves from each other, splitting apart energy and matter! I want dialogic communion! an intersubjective ecology! an elemental collage! an erotic ecollage!"

And my own human body burst into a star and spirit and matter reconnected. “This is my *religion!*” I cry. “*This!*”

The scene above illustrates an embodied epiphany I experienced during my rehearsal process of Depleting Patriarchy, a solo-show I wrote, directed, and performed about depleted uranium warfare. In that moment, I’d felt as though everything I had been processing during my entire lifetime came together in one spiralling flash. Here is where I understood how my body as a fractal, in the shape of the star, embodying the movements of the elements earth, air, fire, water and connecting to the body of the stage, represented the interconnection of human bodies and earth bodies; represented the fabric of energy and matter that is severed in the nuclear fission process and manifests as the mind/body split that becomes a metaphor for the existence of every hierarchical binary (white over black, man over woman, straight over queer, rich over poor, etc.) that has real physical consequences as it materializes on real bodies as racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism. It was in that moment that I conceptualized the intentioned ritualistic staging for my show to represent the interconnectedness of all things: a pentagram, a spiral, and the marking of the four directions. I recognize the staging as fractal performativity in the structure of a fractal star. Through performance methodology I came to understand the different energies of the texts, narratives, statistics, and poetry I was putting into play by the way my body responded to the stories I was performing in the rehearsal process.

The staging of fractal performativity was a physical representation of my intention to heal splits caused by problematic fear-based, power-over binaries that inform patriarchy, war, and most organized religion. I drew a large pentagram in white chalkdust on the black surface of the stage, and I drew a spiral in the center of the star. The star

represents the human body. The spiral represents spirit, the place of intersections. The act of drawing the star on the ‘body’ of the stage—in-script-ed on the page floor of the stage—was both a ritual to ‘call the circle’ and to signify the fractal interconnection between human body, earth body, and astral bodies. I write on the earth body, and during the show, my body becomes ‘written on’ in turn, literally, by the chalk, as I embody interconnectedness and do embodied theory on the floor of the stage. This ‘written body’ also enacts the visual metaphor of governmental injustices to both earth bodies and human bodies.

The fractal process of staging Depleting Patriarchy through conscious choices based on intuition, cognition, and kinesthetic attunement enabled me to negotiate the psychic weight of the depleted uranium situation I was researching while enabling me to structure—here in the shape of a five-pointed star—the collage of elements and texts I was performing. The star enabled me to question the paradigm of war and disconnection by reconfiguring binaries through the visual staging of interconnectedness, spiritual ecofeminism, and shared power. I wanted to extend an invitation (Foss and Griffith) to people across ideologies to witness and consider possibilities for critically evaluating the government’s use of depleted uranium. I wanted to expand the public conversation beyond the binaried ideological rifts of pro-war/anti-war sentiments to show that an either/or reduction is not complex enough to support life's diversities of elements and emotions. My strategies for demonstrating this multiplicity was to stage fractal performativity through poetry, movement, narrative, and goddess mythology grounded in the emotions and elements of air, fire, water, and earth, and harmonizing in the dialogic, the place of spirit embodied. These elements map onto the modes of vulnerable resistance: maintenance,

performance, nurturance, sustenance, and alliance. For example, narratives that evoked the dialogic or the erotic, I associated with alliance which, in the fractal star, mapped onto the spiral center, or “spirit.” Alliance maps onto spirit in that both enact an embracing copresence. I staged texts and goddess mythologies according to the elements, the modes of vulnerable resistance. A particular intention of my show, especially in my performances of narratives, was to embody a genuine conversation or “dialogical performance” (Conquergood) about the impacts of depleted uranium.

Depleted uranium is the radioactive waste product from uranium enrichment plants and nuclear reactors that the Department of Energy gives away free to munitions manufacturers to be fashioned into weapons. It’s a recycling of radioactive waste, the stuff of Yucca Mountain. The problem is that “depleted” uranium toxicity is not “depleted” from depleted uranium weapons. These are radioactive weapons. When the missiles explode, the explosions blanket bombed areas with a uranium oxide dust that becomes inhaled and ingested. The radioactive dust is impossible to clean up and never goes away: depleted uranium has a half-life of four and half billion years, taking the remaining lifetime of our planet for just half of it to disappear. It poisons the places the U.S. has bombed since 1991, has resulted in extreme illnesses of returning soldiers, and severe birth defects and disease in returning soldiers’ children and Iraqi children. Meanwhile, the Department of Defense refuses to acknowledge the extent of depleted uranium’s toxicity and the VA is not providing returning soldiers with adequate health care (Discounted Casualties).

As I was grappling with this information and the invisibility of this information in the mainstream presses, the Iraq war was (and is still) raging chronically, and

deployment of soldiers was increasing in numbers. Almost half the troops in the first gulf war were Black and Latino and enrollment has increased in the current gulf war. Young people facing racism and living in depressed rural areas are disproportionately pushed into the military by lack of economic opportunity in United States. Additionally, the largest number of women in military history have served in the Gulf Wars. Meanwhile, Native Americans and South Pacific islanders have nuclear blast sites and radioactive waste buried in their communities (Metal of Dishonor). This war, fueled by greed, profit, racism, and religion is ravaging the people of the Middle East, American soldiers, and life of the planet everywhere.

The depleted uranium issue encapsulates and epitomizes multiple injustices; it embodies patriarchy's disregard for human bodies and earth bodies. My own coming to awareness of the ways depleted uranium lives at the intersections of anti-war activism, feminism, and environmentalism, created a specific, epistemic resonance inside my body that compelled me into motion and dialogue. I could feel the interconnectedness of our fractal bodies. Depleted uranium kills all life no matter where the war, and I physically *felt* the heaviness of depleted uranium in my body, empathically relating to other bodies, as "our interconnectedness stops at no borders" (Starhawk) and is an embodiment of fractal performativity. I felt it urgent that people come to know about depleted uranium, that this is an issue that cuts across ideological lines, that at the very least, regardless of one's position on the war, most people would agree that every soldier has the right to be informed of the dangers of breathing uranium oxide dust and the right to be equipped with appropriate protective gear and provided with accurate health measures.

Though an increasing amount of literature on depleted uranium was beginning

to appear in books, newspaper articles, video documentaries, a myriad of internet sources, guest lecturers on university campuses and radio interviews, the topic seemed not to be widely known. I decided to develop a show that would raise awareness and at the same time put on display a performance method for activism.

Utilizing fractal performativity as an embodied method of activism and inquiry, I was able to ground the context of Depleting Patriarchy in the depleted uranium issue and to further contextualize the impacts of depleted uranium and the issues it raises by performing narratives of people whose lives and health have been directly affected by depleted uranium toxicity. Depleting Patriarchy engages the literary, the poetic, the ethnographic, the feminist, the environmental, the socio-political, the journalistic, the legal, the international, the intercultural, and the mythologic in a display of fractal performativity as a performance method that stages aesthetic activism through embodied theory, elemental movement, poetic language, narrative and statistical evidence, and creates counter-narratives to the Master narratives, sets a dialogue into motion, and brings attention to the particular and the universal as inseparable from the fabric of actions of individuals and warring nations.

McGrath's Loving Big Brother helped me to see that by staging the issue of depleted uranium I was actually turning the government's hyper-surveillance lens back onto itself. Further, Kershaw's Radical in Performance prompted me to begin thinking about postmodern performances of memory, reminiscence, and history as I developed the character goddess Andromeda, who became the first of four goddesses offering a polyphonic interplay of counternarratives, influenced in part by Bakhtin's dialogism. The staging as fractal performativity signifies the dialogic, creates a dynamic, sensual interplay

between the goddesses, the four elemental energies, the body of the star, and my body onstage. Further, the star, spiral, and elements represent possibilities for egalitarian interconnections, webs of intersubjective relations, multiple ways of seeing, knowing and being, by illustrating power as a force that can be shared intimately and harmoniously.

On stage I embody fractal performativity as an integrative performance methodology as I trace, turn, and straddle the lines, points, and spaces of the star to juxtapose and create meaning. In a moment of embodied theory staged in the spiral center of the star, the place of the dialogic at the heart of the four elements, my body is laying on stage splayed in the star shape I found in my rehearsal epiphany. My body is in full tension, resisting but being tugged and torn away from my own ground of connection as I'm speaking "*my body doing theory as resistance/to the binary paradigm that favors war and disconnection,/ my body resisting that paradigm so insistent on splits and divisiveness that/even after Einsteinian physics revealed that matter is energy and energy is matter,/ embodied as one in the fabric of the atom and/ not separate as Newtonian physics believed,/the power elite split the atom, ripped apart matter and energy—/and in the aggression of that binary fission,/the most destructive kind of war was born*" (Depleting Patriarchy 4).

This above embodied moment is juxtaposed with the Second Day of Patriarchy's command, "Don't let me hear your voice" which leads directly into an excerpt of Margaret Atwood's poem "marshlanguages" which is staged between earth and water and opens with the following words spoken from beneath a black veil "*The dark soft languages are being silenced*" ("marshlanguages" qtd. in Depleting Patriarchy). Atwood's following words further capture the patriarchal linguistic split that I punctuate by drumming a box:

“Translation was never possible./Instead there was always only/conquest, the influx/of the language of hard nouns,/the language of metal,/the language of either-or,/the one language that has eaten all the others” (“marshlanguages” qtd. in Depleting Patriarchy). Fractal performativity is demonstrated through Atwood’s words, which deconstruct how patriarchy perpetuates through dichotomous, exclusionary language, and by my body on stage performing her words and embodying their disruption by intersecting them with intrusive drumbeats to display the discordance of patriarchy’s normalized oppressions.

My body further performs theory as a strategy to heal the mind/body split and restore wholeness by adapting and embodying narratives of people affected by depleted uranium poisoning. My embodiment and performance of these narratives put into play qualities of intimacy, immediacy, resonance, and empathy. Conquergood makes the theoretical argument “about the epistemological potential of performance as a way of deeply sensing the other” (“Performing as a Moral Act” 3). As fractal performativity, I empathically witnessed their illness; my healthy body viscerally carried their physical pain, and the audience witnessed my witnessing of them. As Conquergood said, “the performance of a story can pull an audience into a sense of the other in a rhetorically compelling way” (3), and I experienced this in my own witnessing of audience members’ spectrum of emotions as they witnessed my own visceral embodiment of these narratives. By embodying others’ stories, their pain, their cadence, their struggle, I empathically came to understand the manifestations of the plights and injustices carried in the organs and neurosystems of these individuals. Through fractal performativity, their bodies became my body and together our bodies became the body of the planet. My performance of narratives of depleted uranium survivors was an act of active listening, an act of co-witnessing

injustices without turning the other way. Through fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance, we begin healing splits caused by war on human bodies and earth bodies, and co-creating possibilities for social justice in the face of globalized military corruption.

A person cannot see the Andromeda galaxy by looking directly at it; you have to look just to the side in order for it to come into view. My show was my way of looking ‘just to the side’ to open space for new alternatives, new ways of seeing possibilities for a peaceful world to emerge. The fractal logic of my show was to utilize and display an eco-spiritual feminist methodology of embodied, epistemological performance activism that utilizes juxtaposition of movements, elements, and texts to disrupt master narratives, to create new meanings, and to raise awareness of the devastations of depleted uranium warfare and offer possibilities for actions calling for the ban of depleted uranium. Depleting Patriarchy was my way of compos(t)ing the Pentagon’s biggest brag utilizing fractal performativity as an integrative performance methodology.

Performing Hands Embodying Alliance

The following demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as alliance within the mode of performance. This section takes a pedagogical turn to demonstrate this nuance of alliance in performance. Specifically, this section suggests that through the performance of teaching from an embodied feminist perspective that utilizes the concept of the erotic, we as teachers can begin to break down power differentials and prejudices that often exist between teachers and students, and between students themselves. By integrating these power differentials, we create an egalitarian classroom space through fractal performativity that facilitates critical alliances and equips

students with self-empowerment skills and a social justice orientation that extends beyond the confines of school walls to create healing. Teaching vulnerable resistance as a means to create safety and homeplace can begin in the classroom.

Embodied Feminist Pedagogy of the Erotic

Many feminists have reconceptualized the erotic as an intuitive force that can enact social change through an ethical emphasis on critically intimate relationships between people. In addition to these feminists, many performance scholars and critical pedagogy scholars address the erotic as they foreground social justice issues and challenge traditional epistemologies. In this section, I bring these three areas together to suggest an embodied feminist critical pedagogy of the erotic enacted through performances of vulnerable resistance in order to create alliances across differences between students in the classroom, as well as to eliminate classroom hierarchies that privilege mind over body and teacher over students. This strategy of vulnerable resistance creates an egalitarian safe space, a homeplace within the institution. Audre Lorde writes in her essay, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex":

My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living.

(120-121)

Like Audre Lorde, I too find that when I'm able to 'integrate all the parts of who I am' I

find my energy flowing most dynamically; I feel powerful enough to be safely vulnerable. And it is in those moments of vulnerability that I'm able to embody a pedagogy that facilitates movement towards empathic awareness in the classroom and enables an intimate engagement between students as they access the power of *their* multiple selves. It is in these everyday interactions that I see myself in others and create recognition. It is in the recognition that I am able to share resonance, and existing in that resonance is the erotic, which lives at the heart of the classroom.

bell hooks, in her essay "Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process" proposes that erotic pedagogy is an epistemological force that concretizes personal and social transformations, and unites theory and practice. She invites professors to restore passion and wholeness to the classroom by honoring "the place of eros within ourselves and together allow the mind and body to feel and know desire" (198). hooks writes:

Understanding that eros is a force that enhances our overall effort to be self-actualizing, that it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know, enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination. (195)

I believe in the transformative, erotic quality of vulnerable resistance. Themes of passion, power and creativity are threaded and grounded in the body.

Judith Hamera says teachers bodies are foregrounded in the classroom and that foregrounding should be embraced/reclaimed (122). McWilliam finds the erotic in the intersubjectivity between teacher and student and proposes "(s)education," seductive education, as a metaphor for nurturing that desire ("(S)education" 15). bell hooks calls

the erotic a “motivating force,” that can bring a “quality of care” to the classroom and enhance “our overall effort to be self-actualizing” (“Eros” 194-195). Audre Lorde believes that when we are in touch with our deepest feelings, we take responsibility for ourselves and refuse society’s alternatives of numbness. “Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated and empowered from within” (58). And it is this “sincerity” of “presentation of the self that both reflects and refracts otherness” (Alexander 328). Starhawk views teaching and learning as “erotic endeavors... journeys together” (Dreaming the Dark 145). Starhawk states, “When we teach... we create the bond, arouse the power so that each student knows it in her or his own body, in an individual way. Our purpose as teachers ... is to create a context that evokes power-from-within each person” (145). Maxine Greene’s notion of imagination alludes to the erotic, “It may be the recovery of imagination that lessens the social paralysis we see around us and restores the sense that something can be done in the name of what is decent and humane” (Releasing the Imagination 35). Both the erotic and imagination are grounded in that place of possibility within our deep selves. McClaren points to these possibilities of the erotic when defining “embodied knowledges that can help us refigure the lineaments of our desires and chart the path...” towards transforming capitalist patriarchy (152).

The politics of the erotic through performances of vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance threaten patriarchal society because they “threaten the roots of hierarchical power relationships” (Starhawk 141). Theories of the erotic embrace a self-empowering, critical consciousness, capable of disrupting existing dominant ideologies that favor disembodied existence. The creative mind and creative body, the imaginative,

the sensual, and the tangible come together in the place of the erotic, in the vulnerable, empathic, attentive, and attuned classroom moments.

It is important to me that my pedagogical praxis is in alignment with my vision for social justice because I feel I have an ethical responsibility to daily plant seeds for a world where all life is valued. Like Audre Lorde writes in her essay “Uses of Anger,” “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own” (132-133). My body and my students’ bodies each have individual ways of moving through the world. The way our bodies are marked creates meaning, and the meaning created in the action is the praxis of our embodied epistemologies. I move through the world in my body and I share what I know *because* of the way I move through the world. To teach from an embodied politics of location is a liberatory praxis inspired by pioneers of critical pedagogy such as Paulo Freire and his Pedagogy of the Oppressed. I recognize Freire’s work as performance of vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance. His pedagogy is grounded in his own experience of teaching adults and finding that people succeed when they are allowed to utilize their tools and strengths from their place of location, through a pedagogy that is “forged *with*” individuals through dialogue and mutual trust, from a place of genuine intention, love and humility. bell hooks writes, “I am grateful to the many women and men who dare to create theory from the location of pain and struggle, who courageously expose wounds to give us their experience to teach and guide, as a means to chart new theoretical journeys. Their work is liberatory” (“Theory as Liberatory Practice” 41).

Bodies matter. Our bodies are sites of social inscriptions. Through our bodily experiences and kinesthetic attunements we make and communicate knowledge claims,

present embodied research, and create new spaces for learning in the educational exchange. The foregrounding of the body as a tool for knowing is what I have come to know through my own body as performance methodology—embodying language and experience and attending to the feelings that arise, taking on the speech and movement of another in order to step inside another’s perspective intimately and respectfully. The body itself becomes a site of knowing through embodied critical self-reflexivity, a site of praxis that disrupts binary structures and power-over paradigms by uniting the mind and body and braiding the theory and practice of language, idea, and action. Performance methodology resonates with feminist methodology in that it disrupts the traditional mind/body hierarchy. bell hooks, speaking from the perspective of feminist pedagogy, states, “Those of us who have been intimately engaged as students or teachers with feminist thinking have always recognized the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the mind/body split and allow us to be whole in the classroom, and as a consequence wholehearted” (“Eros” 193). Performance scholar Elyse Pineau, in her article “Teaching is Performance” writes that “performance studies classrooms are often exemplars of critical pedagogy” in that students “engage nontraditional texts, and...explore crossgender and crosscultural experiences through performance” (21). Pineau explains:

Indeed, the disciplinary dictum that performance enables a ‘sense of the other’ is ground in the commitment to engage multiple—often contradictory modes of experience in an intimate, nonjudgmental, and dialogic manner. Certainly the performance method itself, with its commitment to participatory, kinesthetic learning, dismantles the rational bias of traditional instruction. (21)

Performance methodology enables, as Pineau states, “an imaginative leap into other kinds of bodies, other ways of being in the world, and in doing so, it opens up concrete and embodied possibilities for resistance, reform, and renewal” (“Critical Performative Pedagogy” 51). At the same time, critical pedagogy holds visions of possibilities for a more egalitarian society through dedicated critical educators who “view education as a form of cultural politics and so commit themselves to teaching and learning in the service of social justice” (“Critical Performative Pedagogy” 43). bell hooks writes, “Given that critical pedagogy seeks to transform consciousness, to provide students with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves better and live in the world more fully, to some extent it must rely on the presence of the erotic in the classroom to aid the learning process” (“Eros” 194).

Recognizing the significance of the cross-disciplinary relationship between performance methodology and critical pedagogy, Pineau identified and named the emerging trend that lives at the intersection of performance methodology and critical pedagogy, calling it *critical performative pedagogy* in her 2002 article by the same name. Pineau’s essay links performance praxis and critical pedagogy by identifying three interconnected means of thematizing the body: the ideological body, the ethnographic body, and the performing body, in order to offer a liberatory agenda for critical performative pedagogy which includes (1) acknowledging the embodied impacts of power inequities (2) researching the multiple, particular presentations of bodies in the classroom, and providing rich accounts and (3) integrating performance methodology across disciplines. “An important test of critical performative pedagogy,” Pineau writes,

“will be to apply it as fruitfully to courses in the hard sciences as to those in the performing arts” (“Critical Performative Pedagogy” 53).

In the same way that fractals travel across disciplines and provide a glue between them, critical performative pedagogy is a methodology that travels outward and brings together. Critical performative pedagogy allows me, as a teacher, performer, and life-long student, to bridge activism and theory as they entwine in my body in an erotic praxis. In the classroom and in my everyday interpersonal interactions, I try to embody integrity and shared power. I teach from my body, from my own lived experience, from my experience in the doing. I do not know how to teach any other way. I move through the world as a performance methodologist, critically, self-reflexively attuning to what I come to know through my body, from my interdisciplinary, intersectional, bicultural experiences— and so it is that I teach from my way of living, from my embodied epistemology, as a way of integrating theory and practice, mind and body, academia and activism. This praxis of critical performative pedagogy creates space in classrooms for students to confront issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality by embodying differences and being self-reflexive about these experiences. Pineau states, “When students engage their physical bodies they ‘come to know’ things in a uniquely personal and heuristic manner” (“Critical Performative Pedagogy” 50).

It is important to remember that even in the non-performance classroom, bodies are performing, even if the performing is role of “good student” or “tired student.” Our bodies don’t disappear even though the traditional classrooms born out of the Western mind/body dualism have been sites that encourage us to forget about our bodies, as though we think without bodies. Pineau writes, “Schooling systematically domesticates

our bodies; it incarcerates them in rows of wooden desks, robs them of spontaneity through rigid demarcations of time and space, and in fact devotes a great deal of energy to hiding the fact that we have bodies at all” (“Critical Performative Pedagogy” 45).

bell hooks writes about when she first became a teacher and had to use the restroom in the middle of class, “I had no clue as to what my elders did in such situations. No one talked about the body in relation to teaching. What did one do with the body in the classroom?” (“Eros” 191). Similarly, Pineau recounts a personal experience of her own “body that refuses to disappear” while lecturing about embodiment. The “fleeting thought of [her] infant son triggered lactation” and she found herself trying to hide this fact from her students, finding it a “discomforting irony” to be talking about embodiment while simultaneously enacting “the mind/body separation I had been taught was both necessary and possible” (“Critical Performative Pedagogy” 46). She reflects upon the “uniquely instructive” quality of that moment, realizing that to ignore her own or her students’ bodies:

undermines my ability to engage myself and my students in meaningful ways, to provide immediate examples of the performative principles that I teach, and to genuinely confront issues of prejudice and exclusion that have become such an important dimension of my course content. (46)

Echoing hooks and Pineau, Alison Bartlett writes of her “fears...of beginning to menstruate before a lecture” (“A Passionate Subject” 86) because her bleeding is accompanied by severe cramps and nausea. She asks, “What else might (teaching) women’s bodies entail, and how does this affect their pedagogical positions” (86). She draws conclusions similar to Pineau and hooks, stating, “As women...we must remind

ourselves of our bodies, and incorporate our leaky and inquisitive breasts and active wombs into our stories of pedagogy for others to read and write about” (90).

Bartlett also speaks to the multiplicities of bodies and cultures held in a single classroom and the importance of the erotic in the critical feminist classroom: “Our classes are comprised of many student bodies variously responding with their desires and knowledges... all are part of the condition of eros in the classroom, and part of the power of teaching and learning and whatever dances between” (“A Passionate Subject” 90).

bell hooks writes of her early days in Women’s Studies classrooms:

I learned by the example of daring courageous women professors... that there was a place for passion in the classroom, that eros and the erotic did not need to be denied for learning to take place. One of the central tenets of feminist critical pedagogy has been the insistence on not engaging the mind/body split. This is one of the underlying beliefs that has made Women’s Studies a subversive location in the academy. (Eros 193)

Together, feminist critical pedagogy and critical performative pedagogy are a critical embodied feminist pedagogy that gives me permission—and incites me—to engage the erotic, to foreground the intuitive, sensual, passionate, critical and creative at a heightened place of awareness in order to excite, connect, transform; to be aware of my own body and to convey an awareness in the classroom that bodies matter. The best I can do is to be a critical facilitator in a classroom of performing bodies. In the classroom performance space, all of our bodies come to know the ways in which we write bodies, we write on bodies, and we read bodies everyday, everywhere.

As Audre Lorde says, “Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation” (“Age, Race, Class, Sex” 339). The classroom is a living text of real bodies who have come to know each other through the bodies and boundaries of the classroom, in a space that foregrounds multiplicities and differences and re-examines structures of power by naming them in order to begin disrupting, reifying, or reconceptualizing. I have to believe that the smallest ripples are the greatest movements to begin change: from self-awareness to empowerment and appreciation for difference; to recognition of the invisible power structures perpetuated everyday by our unconscious performances and the coming to realize how our daily performances can disrupt those same power structures.

I admit I find some days particularly difficult. The traditional structures are sedimented in cynicism and apathy. My own differences, held in my body, my worldviews, my passion, and the very teaching paradigm I embrace, is often met with negativity or hostility by bodies who have been academically trained to forget about their bodies. In the academic institution alone, I live on the margins as a person who embraces feminist and performance methodologies. It’s not until I leave the comfort of the company of performance studies scholars and women’s studies classrooms that I forget how relatively few of us there are and am reminded of the hostility towards differences.

Like the fool, I find myself somewhere between leaping and landing. And while I may be a fool, somehow, in the face of growing apathy and fundamentalism, I still

believe—I especially believe—in possibilities of critical feminist performance pedagogy and embodied knowing. Perhaps this is where the fool and the wise crone meet. Perhaps this is where the erotic exists. In that rich place where anything might happen, where possibility tantalizes. Where I am the fool who jumps and the wise one who believes. Yet this isn't about leaping off a cliff and falling into air. It's about grounding possibility in the real, in the tangible, in the fabric of our bodies continually weaving and being woven. In the mundane of everyday experience, and in the heightened conspicuous moments of the critical classroom, we create what is not yet by leaping into the place of the erotic, into the engaged, attentive, intimate, and sensual. We live in that third space of performing vulnerable resistance to create alliances across differences. The erotic energizes us to recognize that which is needing revitalized personally, politically, socially, globally, and it gives us the spark and integrity to face and transform oppressive systems.

I draw upon that source of power as I stand in place to enact vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance and greet each day, open for possibilities of erotic engagement, passionate connection, conscious embodiment, dynamite of melting into dialogue and movement. In opening to each other, in sharing encouragement of sharing power, in finding power within ourselves, disruption happens. From Cixous's disruption of traditional economies in the interpersonal exchange to the erotic disruption of traditional power binaries of the student/teacher exchange in the classroom, these disruptions of institutionalized hierarchies create possibilities for social change. "The classroom becomes a borderland," says Joni Jones, "a liminal space capable of disrupting the social order" (175). The erotic engenders an excess of possibilities through a pedagogy of the

sensual, grounded in the body. Every time somebody acknowledges her or his own personal power enough to say ‘yes’ to what intuitively feels right and ‘no’ to something s/he sees as oppressive to self or other, then that is movement, however small, toward transformation. That is a performance of vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance.

In the classroom, I am both teacher and student, teacher with students, student among teachers; and together, in that critical embodied feminist pedagogical space, we attempt, like my many performance scholar mentors do, to “put heart into the academy” (Pelias) and “conjure the text of [our] bod[ies]” (Pineau), as we begin “thinking of each other as improv partners on whom we depend and share the struggles and joys of an ensemble” (Park-Fuller 214). That space of praxis is the erotic, and it is that intimate space I try to create with my students--space for being present with one another, sharing with each other’s marked, various, multiplicitous, unique bodies, attuning to one another in ways we can each feel most empowered as individuals and in communion with one another. It is in that space our bodies manifest fractal awareness, share in the many textured fabrics of the weave, and contribute to new patterns for transformation.

Performing Hands Embodying Maintenance

This next fractal section is a performance of integration enacted through writing in order to maintain a sense of who I am. Regarding aspects of my gendered, ethnic, spiritual identity, I’ve had difficulty finding homeplace across contexts of family, friends, and even in literature. In order to make sense of my sometimes competing identities in the contexts of my family, my ancestors, and the religious conflicts of the Middle East, I work toward integrating myself as Lebanese-American/Feminist/

Ecospiritual/Writer /Performer by drawing upon ethnic feminist writers, family stories, and personal experience. Utilizing fractal performativity, I write myself into existence, as a feminist Lebanese-American female writer, in a performance of integration that maintains my sense of self. I represent an ethnic spiritual voice that is not often heard. By writing of my struggles to find voices similar to me, I am adding my voice to the literature and am filling a gap for people looking to find homeplace in ethnic, spiritual resonance. While not every reader will feel this resonance, my hope is that most readers will find identification at some levels, and that those readers who haven't always felt included in the literatures will especially find the resonance they crave—that I too have craved. This writing demonstrates fractal performativity of my self-identity and is an act of vulnerable resistance as I disclose my personal journey of finding homeplace with who I am.

Integrating My Identities by Writing Myself into Existence

My way of being doesn't fit easily into Western mainstream culture or my Lebanese family's mainstream ideology. I've made choices that have differentiated me both from my family and mainstream reality, for example naming myself, having one child, etc. I made these choices not to "be different," but because they felt true to my path. I often find myself standing between worlds, which can be hard. Often I feel that "I am other within the company of cultural familiars" (Alexander 328). As Said recalls, "The overriding sensation I had was of always being out of place" (3). When I am with women who share my ideology, I find that we *recognize* each other in our personal power. Yet, at the same time, something feels missing, the feeling of shared ethnic

experience, loyalty and cohesion that exists among my family. The network of support in the Lebanese community, especially in times of celebration and grief, is incomparable to any other group I've experienced. There is a deep loyalty in my extended family and Lebanese community that is dependable and present. At the same time, in this community, something feels slightly missing for me in the interpersonal exchanges. While our respect and loyalty exists, we don't necessarily *recognize* each other.

In the everyday sense, sometimes I feel I haven't found 'my people.' I want the egalitarianism of feminist culture and I want the deep loyalty of Lebanese culture. But I want them together, in a sort of ethnic pagan feminism.

Sometimes, I am able to experience feelings of identification through the characters and voices I read in ethnic feminist women's writing. But even as I find recognition in writings by ethnic feminists, I still haven't found many writers who are writing specifically from a Lebanese-American perspective. Not much is written from the point of view of a feminist Lebanese-American woman. I belabor the significance of this point because not only has this lack influenced the development of my fragmented ways of seeing/being, it also underscores the necessity of having multiple voices, points of view and integrated identities represented in literature, in scholarship, and in bookstores. I have found it lonely throughout most of my life recognizing myself only in fragments. I don't mean to imply that I believe everybody else finds full recognition reflected back to them at every turn, but I'm saying that for me, the majority of works I've encountered across my lifetime have been written by, and/or featured characters and experiences of, people with whom I could only minimally identify.

It may be true that today, there are more feminist ethnic voices being heard (and published) than ever before, but the harsh reality also exists that these voices are still severely marginalized. Recently, I experienced one of the most devastating blows I've felt in a long time, relating to myself as a feminist writer, more specifically a Lebanese-American woman writer. I had excitedly ordered Elaine Showalter's groundbreaking new book *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (2009)—the first and only comprehensive literary history of American women writers *ever* written, a 586 page tome—only to frustratingly discover that Showalter nearly completely omits women writers with hyphenated ethnic identities. More specifically, while she does include many African-American writers and Chinese-American writer Amy Tan, she devotes an embarrassing one and a half pages (total) to a section on “hybridity” and unabashedly tokenizes four writers, literally *listing* them: “Julia Alvarez... Jhumpa Lahiri...and Min Jin Lee...were among the novelists...Gish Jen...is representative of this new hybrid generation” (501). Meanwhile, she omits from literary history Native American writers Paula Gunn Allen, Joy Harjo, and Leslie Marmon Silko (though she does include Louise Erdrich). She also omits Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, Chilean American writer Isabel Allende, Palestinian-American writer Naomi Shihab Nye, queer writers Dorothy Allison and Mary Oliver (and, confusingly, straight white Barbara Kingsolver). Trying to determine Showalter's criteria for inclusion in this collection, I read in her introduction that in compiling this book, she was especially “interested in women writers' efforts to move beyond female experience, *to create male characters, and to write outside of their own race and place...*” (xv-xvi, my emphasis). Ironically, in compiling a “comprehensive” women's

literary history, Showalter has failed to value women writing exactly from their place of being, ethnicity and all. I find it severely unfortunate that in the year 2009, in a book touted as “comprehensive” and rapidly becoming the ‘bible’ of women’s literary history, Showalter has reified the perpetuation of omission from the literary canon the very writers *with* whom I identify—and as a woman writer with a hyphenated identity, whom I identify *as*. I suppose my act of vulnerable resistance, more importantly than ever, is to just keep writing.

Because when I *do* discover writers like Paula Gunn Allen and stories such as Sitt Marie Rose by Etel Adnan, or essays by Laila Farah, I devour these writings. Devour them, trying to find myself in them. When I read Gunn Allen’s essay “My Lebanon” I am swollen with identification: “In my mouth sometimes I carry the taste of food, on a tongue that stumbles in saying the names” (207). In fact, Paula Gunn Allen is only one of a very few people with whom I’m able to identify in multiple ways. She’s part Laguna Pueblo, part Lebanese. We share an ecospiritual feminist sensibility, we share an ethnicity, and we both love words. Her Lebanese ancestors were Catholic, as are mine, but we each developed our own personal spiritualities which share an egalitarian approach. Paula Gunn Allen draws upon Native American woman-centered spirituality based “on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused worldviews” (Sacred Hoop 2), and says that “a woman-centered social system include[s] free and easy sexuality and wide latitude in personal style...mean[ing] that a diversity of people, including gay males and lesbians, are not denied and are in fact likely to be accorded honor” (2).

And similar to me, Allen has compassion for her relatives’ desire for religious freedom, “They were Maronites, under the nominal protection of the Roman Church

throughout the agency of France, but they were a conquered people, and like the conquered everywhere, they were never free from fear of brutality, of terrorization” (215). I find comfort in Gunn Allen’s words, if merely for the plain fact of recognition. Even though I no longer practice Catholic Christianity, I am able to identify with my ancestors’ attempts to carve out their space in the mountains as the minority Christians among the larger surrounding Muslim communities and live their own way. I can appreciate desires for separatism even while at the same time I understand its problematics. However, I’m also aware of the deep entanglement of privilege, conservatism, elitism mixed in with religion, geography, and genetics. It’s a snarl. It’s a deep point of conflict for me that I wish I could reconcile. I want to be critically reflexive regarding the historical layers of patriarchy built into the patterns of my family and relatives, *and* I do not want to dishonor the women in my family, whom I love and admire, and who have, as much as safely possible, ignored the larger political warring factions and simply continued the daily work of making bread and hummus, of keeping the families together, of making the preserves. It is their stories I really want to hear. As Kingsolver’s Orleanna says, “We whistle while Rome burns, or we scrub the floor, depending” (Poisonwood Bible 383).

As I try to integrate the aspects of my feminist ethnic identity and at the same try to see how my identity relates to the pattern of competing narratives of Middle Eastern conflict, I draw upon personal experience, family narratives, and scholarship by ethnic feminists. This performance of integration is maintained through the function of bringing together voices, mine and others’ with whom I identify, through the act of writing this section, fractal performativity as vulnerable resistance in the mode of maintenance.

My family has narrated Lebanese identity and how this narration serves as a microcosm to the larger 'homeplace' disputes of the Middle East. Growing up, I was told by my relatives that I was Phoenician. The ancient Phoenicians lived along the coastal strip that is now Lebanon and established trade routes along the Mediterranean. Historically speaking, it has always been anecdotally suspected that the Phoenicians are the ancestors of the Lebanese. Personally speaking, in my family our Phoenician ancestry was an undisputed given. Now this anecdotal and family knowledge has been scientifically proven: In 2004 geneticists of the National Geographic Genographic Project identified the genetic marker of the ancient Phoenicians. Modern day Lebanese have been shown to share a genetic link to the ancient Phoenicians.

People of the Middle East make distinctions between Mediterranean identity and Arab identity, Christian identity and Muslim identity. Many of the Middle East's territorial disputes about homeland are grounded in whether or not a person's ancestry is Phoenician, because that ancestry can get folded into distinctions between Mediterranean and Arab identities, which can translate into Christian and Muslim identities. Of course, these are not easy dichotomies and distinctions. Geographically, coastal people have moved inland and vice versa, have crossed borders, been displaced through wars and famine, have interracially married, etc. The groups and sects of the Middle East are not easily essentialized or categorized, yet the wars rage on as if these clear distinctions can be made. Paula Gunn Allen writes of the feeling of being objectified, persecuted based on her perceived identity. "I find myself obscurely humiliated, frightened, grieved, to be one who is identified as the enemy of righteousness and good....And so I can only watch, horrified, as the mobs, the shells, the bullets, erupt" (213). Nawal El Saadawi echoes the

problematic of desires for easy binaristic categories, “People asked me where I stood, did I identify with the angels, makers of the peace, or with the devils, the makers of war, the aggressors, the terrorists. I am not a terrorist, nor will I ever be. But I believe that without justice there is no peace” (“Identity” 118). Adnan’s Sitt Marie Rose unflinchingly speaks back to her assassin’s praise of the relationship between war and religion, “...They kill and mutilate with a rosary in their hands, believing that they serve the Virgin. And you want me to bow before such a fantasy?” (96).

Susan Starr Sered writes of the patriarchal constructions of the ‘Good Woman’ and the ‘Bad Woman’ in her essay “‘Woman’ as Symbol and Women as Agents.” Applying Sered’s frame to Sitt Marie Rose, a Christian Lebanese woman who joined the Palestinian Resistance, we see that from the perspective of her militant Christian captors, Marie Rose is not in compliance with the religious cultural symbol of the ‘Good Woman.’ Rather, through her resilience, Marie Rose has earned the ‘fallback position’ of religious ideology: that of “Bad Woman,” the demoness who refuses, in the words of Sitt Marie Rose, to “bow before such a fantasy” of patriarchy’s belief “they serve the Virgin.” Marie Rose has exercised agency which makes her the perfect Bad Woman, as Susan Starr Sered states, “From the point of view of the patriarchal institution, women are problematic symbols because they always ‘threaten’ to turn into agents” (195).

The following two examples speak to ways patriarchy has ‘buried the female’ in order to maintain its power, and how in both instances the burial intersects with organized monotheistic religion which, in turn, influenced conventional Biblical and Middle Eastern patrilineal naming traditions that have continued into today. First, Nawal El Saadawi eloquently expresses why she does not base her agency and identity and

resistance upon religion; she speaks to the multiplicity problematizing her Mediterranean roots; she blurs the lines of geography, genealogy, and war, especially war based on essentializing identities, and finally how it relates to the erasure of our female ancestors: “My history goes back in Egypt for seven thousand years, to Isis and Ma’at and Noon... How can I, Nawal El Saadawi, have an identity... if my female ancestors are forgotten, buried in oblivion?” (126-128).

Next, Etel Adnan’s Marie Rose speaks against religious war and its accompanying violent sexism. Her captors are afraid of her prehistorical embodiment of love-fueled power. “Feminine symbols tear at them with their claws. For seven thousand years the goddess Isis has given birth without there being a father. Isis in Egypt, Ishtar in Baghdad, Anat in Marrakesh, the Virgin in Beirut” (68). And so they watch all women “more closely, and perhaps with even greater hostility. Every feminine act... regarded as a rebellion” (101). But after her arrest, she became, in their eyes, more a human with agency and less an object as symbol. This disturbed them, and they had to dehumanize her in order to kill her; they needed to turn her once more into an object, an object seen as prey through the detached gaze, removed through the distance of the barrel of a gun (103). This objectification, dehumanization required for murder pervades all war. War is perpetuated and enemies are sustained through words like “Christian” “Muslim” “Jew” “Witch,” etc.

How do we begin to *see* each other differently, as human? I can see the seduction and the problematics, simultaneously. Do I enjoy that I can construct a self-identity based on a genetic, cultural, and geographic association to the ancient moon goddesses of Phoenicia? Truthfully, yes, I really do. It helps me to feel powerful. It feels affirming of

my ecofeminist spirituality, especially since my spirituality existed before my Phoenician goddess knowledge. But, would I go to war over it? No. My goddess identity is pre and post patriarchal, pre and post biblical, pre and post Yahweh, pre and post Muhammed. My personal cosmology is a different paradigm from monotheistic generated conflicts. My way of being is vulnerable resistance. I channel my anger, my rage, my righteous fury into creation *and* destruction, it's true; birthing *and* dying, yes; but in a paradigm of sustainability, metaphorically and literally, through an incorporation of the weeds, a planting of the seeds, a building of the soil with goat shit and debris. Not human blood. I will not rip the fabric of humanity.

I acknowledge that I am speaking from a place of geographical privilege. I do not live in the Middle East, my physical homeplace is not directly under threat, and war is not raging outside my door. But, no matter how geographically distant, I am psychically, familiarly, and genetically linked to the Middle East. I must use my privilege, at the very least, to begin to envision other ways of being, and to enact my agency to begin making differences in incremental ways. I will create homeplace with the tools at hand, making connection with the soil, the place I stand, the people I know, through the sensual dynamics of love and trust, respect and presence. As far as the warring factions go, I cannot engage. Nawal El Saadawi speaks the fibers of my being and I quote her at length:

I am an Arab woman fighting for a peace that will last. Not a surrender to the US and Israeli nuclear arsenal, nor the peace that fundamentalism wishes to impose by bullets and terror in the United States and also in Egypt. Not the peace of fanatic religious movements, whether Muslim, or Christian, or Jewish.

I am against the identities built on religion because the history of religion was written in the endless rivers of blood flowing in the name of God, in the name of a land chosen by Him for His people...I am against a nationalism, a patriotism, that does not see the rest of the world... (126-128)

I'm starting to understand that ecospiritual feminist culture and Lebanese-American culture intersect in their unique ways on my particular body, and it is in that uniquely third space that I embody vulnerable resistance by writing myself into existence in a performance of integration in order to maintain a sense of who I am.

In writing this section I have come to realize that I do not know one single person in this world who is Lebanese-American and an ecospiritual feminist. Realizing this helps me to better understand why, throughout my lifetime, my presence, my work, my way of being/seeing has been so often misunderstood. By that fact alone I move through the world in vulnerable resistance, trying to stay open at the risk of being hurt; trying to find homeplace in the center of myself by integrating my identities. I have often internalized the repetitive pattern of being misunderstood as self-doubt, a systemic issue within a patriarchal power-over paradigm (Saadawi, Starhawk, Noble, Lorde). This is compounded by the fact that I've always had difficulty translating how I feel/see so that others can understand. This dissertation is an example of that difficulty: translating my pattern of seeing/being to this linear page so that others can understand it has been a struggle. But all of these struggles and misunderstandings have strengthened me, have taught me the value of living in vulnerable resistance, have taught me the necessity for compassion and empathy so that I can "see the rest of the world" (Saadawi), so that I can "translate my feelings so they can be shared" (Lorde), and so that I can cultivate active

patience in moments others are translating their ways of seeing to me. I have come to realize that instead of hating myself, I need to heal the wounds of my identity splits by performing maintenance of my way of being. By healing my own identity splits, I can then begin to enact healing on a global level. This integration is fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance.

Performing Hands Embodying Sustenance

The following fractal section displays how sustaining my spirituality became an act of vulnerable resistance as I create homeplace by making connection with the spirit world around me and performing self-empowerment in a new town. When my spirituality came under attack after I performed a house blessing ritual that entailed clearing the space through singing and noisemaking, I found that I needed to keep my center from splitting apart from the force of fear and hate. I consciously chose to integrate my mind, body, and spirit in a fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance by standing in place and offering love.

House Blessing

We moved to Marion, a town in southern Illinois, and rented a small house. The house had an oppressive vibe. At first I thought it was the nasty carpeting that reeked of dog. But even after I steam-cleaned it multiple times, the vibe lingered. I felt as though I was being watched. Within about three weeks of moving in, I decided we needed to do a house blessing to release any old energy that didn't need to be there anymore.

We were new to the area, but we had a few close friends in Carbondale and invited them over for the house blessing. We opened all the windows and lit all the candles. We revitalized the energy inside the house, going from room to room. Next, we went outside to create a protective circle around our home by walking the perimeter of the yard. Our friend joked that if anybody asks us what we're doing, we should say that we're rehearsing for a play. We all laughed and proceeded inside to share a meal.

As we were cleaning up after dinner, somebody knocked on the door, which was unexpected because we didn't know anybody in Marion. Here was our very first visitor.

"Uhh. Hi," said a woman about my age, shifting uncomfortably. Over her shoulder across the street I could see a gang of about a dozen kids crowded in her front yard, looking over. Another neighbor sat on her porch and stared at us. "Um, everybody in the neighborhood was wonderin' what you was doing over here. They're saying it's witchcraft. Do witches live here?"

Well, so much for neighborhood welcoming committees with the fresh baked pies, I thought to myself. I had a small urge to cackle loudly with wild eyes, croon with lunacy, and swirl my hands, *As a matter of fact, yes, witches do live here.* But instead I smiled and said, "Actually, we were rehearsing for a play."

"Oh," she said.

That night as I was getting ready for bed, I noticed how much lighter the vibe in the house felt. Even Greg, who generally looks at the world from a scientific perspective, said, "You know, the house actually *feels* better now." Months later we would learn that the house had been home to a string of successive tenants with violent tendencies,

including the couple who lived there before us--they rammed their truck into the house during a fight and caught it on fire. I was glad we were able to transform the energy.

The next afternoon, somebody knocked on my door. Standing in my doorway was a girl, about nine years old, whom I had never seen before. She blurted out, "My friends dared me to come knock on your door and ask you if you're a witch."

I said, "I'm a person who believes in love and tries to do good things in the world."

"Oh," she said, looking into my living room. "Well, even if you're not a witch, your house is totally witchy cool." She giggled and rejoined a small gang of girls waiting for her outside on the sidewalk.

About a half hour later, I was sitting on the front porch nursing my six-month old baby, when another neighbor, a middle-aged woman I'd seen around but hadn't met, came striding over. She walked right up my porch steps and stood before me. She took a drag of her cigarette and blew the smoke directly into my face and onto my nursing baby. Then she drawled, "We's wondering what you was all doin' over here yesterday. Making noise and burning candles." She looked over my head through my open living room door and saw the candles. "Everybody knows candles are a witch's tool. People are saying that you're Satanists." She glared at me. "We sure don't want no Satanists for neighbors." She stole a glance at my plump, milk-fed baby, and continued, "The older kids was walking around your house last night and said they saw smoke coming from your chimney. They said you was burning babies."

I felt violated. These were violent accusations—and ridiculous. We didn't even have a chimney. I could have reacted from the place of angry incredulity that was rising inside

me. But mostly I was disappointed that I was so misunderstood. The house blessing was simply my form of prayer. I wanted to meet this woman in kindness. I began to speak, but she interrupted me.

“I was scared to come over here, but I prayed to Jesus. I prayed to Jesus to give me the strength I needed to come over here and talk to you. And I went to my preacher this morning and we prayed to Jesus together, and then my preacher told me the good Lord would protect me. And so here I am.” She took another drag off her cigarette and blew it, again, in my face. She said with intensity, “We don’t want no Satan-worshipers living on our street. We’ll run you out of the neighborhood. We’ll burn a cross in your yard if we have to.”

I’d never met anybody like this before in my life. I wanted to enter into dialogue with her but didn’t know how. I wanted to tell her we were simply blessing our house. I believed this woman was probably well-meaning, despite that she was extremely misguided. Apparently she associated non-Christian prayer with propaganda still circulating from the witch-hunts. I recognized that she was operating from a place of fear and knew that my best response would be to meet this woman in compassion. I stayed centered in vulnerable resistance, continued sitting in place on my porch nursing my baby—in both a practical and a symbolic act of love—while this woman called me a Satan worshiper. As I continued to sit in love, she began to back away and take in the scene of my homeplace.

The neighbor was looking at my porch, which was lush with hanging plants, potted plants, a table full of plants, plants lining the steps, all of them thriving. She said, “Well, your plants are healthy. I thought a witch’s plants would all be dead.”

Just then my cat, Moonglow, came sauntering by. Moonglow's fur is completely white. The neighbor said, "I'm surprised to see that your cat is white and not black!" I didn't bother telling her that my black cat, Obsidian, was inside napping.

Clearly, the lush health of my plants, baby, and cat was in contrast to the narratives she had been taught about "Others" who did not share her religion. It was my steadfast vulnerable resistance that gave her the space she needed to *see* that my way of being was not threatening, thereby challenging her assumptions about "otherness". While vulnerable resistance is simple, it is not easy. While perhaps I had alleviated her fears, I still felt threatened.

That night I shut all the windows and blinds. The house blessing cleared my house of negativity on the inside, but now I felt that the world outside my house was condemning me. I felt trapped and dismal. I was angry at the failure of dialogue, her refusal to see me as human, her ignorant absolutism that her way of praying is the only way to pray, her misinformed assumptions about my way of being.

I felt *marked*--not as a spiritual ecofeminist activist but a "witch," a "communist," a "terrorist," under surveillance, with no opportunity for voice and a fear of disappearing without a trace, like the witches before me: the healers, midwives, activists, feminists, people of color, Quakers, queer folk, all of us on the fringe, burned if we say we're a witch, burned if we won't.

In three years the boy who lived at this woman's house and prayed with her at her church, would, at age fifteen, be sentenced for life without parole for murdering a teenaged girl. Meanwhile, our church-going neighbor down the street would continue to beat his wife

and daughters and we'd hear yelling and screaming past midnight, doors slamming, siren lights swirling in through our bedroom window.

During this time, we continued to live there. I enacted vulnerable resistance by standing in place and opening my door. These same daughters, and many other neighborhood kids, would come to my house everyday directly after school to tell me about their days, before going to their own homes. Nearly every day, I would have at least half a dozen neighbor kids just hanging out at my house. I provided a homeplace for them: food, safety, kindness, a listening ear. The kids would trust me, but the adults on the street would rarely make eye contact, and even then, only reluctantly.

But I no longer felt their hostility. I realized that my spirituality, my everyday performances of making a home, a safe place—not just for me, but for my child and for the children in the neighborhood, was a transformative kind of love that would always protect me. I realized that it was with that intention of love I had drawn the protective circle around my home to create a symbolic safe space. What I understand now is that I *was* rehearsing for a play. I could name it “The ongoing performance of living in vulnerable resistance.” In this performance of vulnerable resistance I was able to remain open to loving in the face of hostility and resist against splitting apart from the force of fear. I integrated my power in fractal performativity of sustaining homeplace.

Performing Hands Embodying Nurturance

The following fractal section displays vulnerable resistance through nurturance and performance, as Lebanon and depleted uranium make a direct intersection on my body, “hitting home” through my ancestry and activist work. In this performance I was

attempting to heal the splits I felt in my own body, which were a fractal embodiment of the fractured bodies living in these warring countries. I wanted to enact healing by reminding all of us of our shared humanity, that ultimately we all breathe the same air. We are all fractals of each other. We share in a fractal performativity of humanity. I delivered the following words at a local coffeehouse as part of a performance with the Bombs Away Collective, an activist performance troupe. The other performances that I reference during this presentation also took place at the coffeehouse with the Bombs Away Collective. The following is the transcript of the presentation I delivered to the coffeehouse audience in an enactment of fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance.

Israel and Lebanon

A year ago I stood right here in this room and spoke about the United States's use of depleted uranium weapons in Iraq. I explained how depleted uranium weapons are illegal and radioactive, that their explosions blanket bombed areas with a uranium oxide dust that settles into soil and water, is inhaled and ingested by humans and animals, and causes nerve damage, cancer, organ mutations, and birth defects. I told you that it binds to RNA and DNA and changes the genetic code forever. I told you there has been a significant increase in severe birth defects documented among Iraqi children and children born to returning American soldiers. I stood right here and I performed narratives of individuals poisoned by depleted uranium. That semester I began having horrible nightmares of dismembered bodies of women, men, and babies.

Last spring, I stood here again. This time I chose to perform something of beauty and gave tribute to my Tita, my mother's mother who was born in Lebanon. I shared with

you that when Tita left Lebanon, she didn't know she'd never see her mother again, but her mother died before Tita was able to return. Tita never saw her mother or her motherland again.

Now, I'm standing to here to tell you that my mom and I made a plan to visit Lebanon, and two days later, Israel bombed the Beirut airport. Unblinking, the United States shipped weapons to Israel, and the weapons they shipped were cluster bombs and depleted uranium weapons. For the next several weeks, Israel pummeled Lebanon with depleted uranium weapons, wiping out, in one month, fifteen years of Lebanon's economic and social recovery from civil war. The United Nations reports the Israeli attack on Lebanon caused fifteen billion dollars in damage, devastated the water infrastructure, destroyed 35,000 homes, 80 bridges, 94 roads, killed over 1000 civilians, and displaced one-third of the population. The United Nations also reported that Israel violated international law by dropping cluster bombs on at least 170 Lebanese villages. Many of these cluster bombs failed to initially explode and still pose a danger to families returning home to rebuild. Also, within the first week of fighting, Israel bombed a power station in Beirut, spilling three million gallons of oil into the Mediterranean Sea, coating the Lebanon coastline black for eighty miles, and stretching into the coast of Syria. The Israeli military's aerial and naval blockade on Lebanon has prevented access to clean up the oil spill. Now, six weeks after the spill, the oil has seeped into the seabed, indicating that oil contamination has spread beyond the shore and beyond the water coastline and into the underwaters of the Mediterranean, threatening waters as far as Cypress and Turkey. Oil on the seabed is so thick it can be physically picked up by divers. Marine life has died as has the livelihood of many Lebanese who make their living by the sea.

Meanwhile, the United States, the largest military industry in the world, continues to offer undisputed military support to Israel, who continues to break the cease-fire agreement with Lebanon; yet Iran's military support of Hezbollah is deemed a terrorist action. Further, under pressure from the United States, the U.N. is threatening sanctions on the people of Iran, even though Iran's nuclear facilities passed inspections-- more than 2000 days of inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency. But nobody is inspecting Israel, who has eight nuclear centers capable of fabricating plutonium and uranium, at least 300 nuclear bombs, and has just purchased two nuclear submarines from a German company this past July.

Last year when I spoke about depleted uranium, the Iraq war was still considered justified by many. Today, according to a CNN poll, two-thirds of American's disapprove of the Iraq war, and over half disapprove of the United States support of Israel against Lebanon. I don't know if Israel knows the extent of the dangers of the depleted uranium weapons they deploy in Lebanon. I want Israel to know that the weapons they are using are deadly not only to Lebanese water and soil and bodies, but to their own water and soil and bodies. Israel and Lebanon share the same water and the same borders. To destroy Lebanon destroys themselves. And I want everyone to know the United States government is complicit in all of this and should be held accountable to international law. The evidence supports the claim that George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld are war criminals.

I will never know the Lebanon that my Tita knew. But I will still go to her homeplace. I will hold Lebanese soil in my hands, and I will plant a seed for rebirth.

CHAPTER 6

VULNERABLE RESISTANCE AS ALLIANCE

Homeplace of Alliance

Vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance creates homeplace through relationships. The hand creates alliance. Holding hand in hand, the allying hand reaches across diversities to touch in solidarity. The allying hand forms communities and support networks. We create homeplace through relationships with each other. In doing so, we enact vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance. The stories in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which humans form mutual alliances to create homeplace while working towards social justice.

The following quotations are about the mutuality between weeds and soil, but I appropriate them here as metaphors for alliances between humans. Rachel Carson writes, “Soil and the living things in and upon it exist in a relation of interdependence and mutual benefit. Presumably the weed is taking something from the soil; perhaps it is also contributing something to it” (*Silent Spring* 78). Linda Shepherd describes mutuality through companion planting: “Weeds... *cooperate* with crops and form community” (“My Life with Weed” 200). Susana Valadez explains that the women of the Huichol culture build “relationships of reciprocity” with “their plant, animal, and spirit helpers.” These relationships “provide [the women] all the knowledge and training they need in order to ‘nourish their *iyari*’ [heart memory] and to fulfill themselves as women, wives, mothers, ceremonialists, and providers” (“Patterns of ‘Completion’” 159) in their creations of homeplace.

Human companionship is just as community-forming and beneficial. By performing vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance we create homeplace with one another. In the same way that communion between people and soil is an expression of sustaining mutuality, so is homeplace experienced as a mutual alliance between people expressed through friendship. In Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship, Mary E. Hunt defines friendship as “those voluntary human relationships that are entered into by people who intend one another’s well-being and who intend that their love relationship is part of a justice-seeking community” (29). In her book Communion, bell hooks writes, “The happiest, most fulfilling committed partnerships...are those in which mutuality is the core value, in which the spiritual growth and development of each individual matters” (224).

When we share creative energy with another we create a sense of homeplace with that person. That creative energy is also known as the erotic, a life-force that enables us to feel spiritually alive and energetically fulfilled. In her essay “Uses of the Erotic,” Audre Lorde defines the erotic as “the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers...and lessens the threat of their difference” (56). Lorde suggests that the erotic speaks in multiple ways and facilitates recognition across multiple differences to create ground for deep connections and social transformations. In The Eros of Everyday Life, Susan Griffin echoes Lorde, speaking to the transformative power of the erotic at the levels of ecological and social justice. “To exist in a state of communion is to be aware of the nature of existence. This is where ecology and social justice come together, with the knowledge that life is held in common.

Whether we know it or not, we exist because we exchange, because we move the gift” (150-151). Both Lorde and Griffin conceptualize the erotic as a gift of joy and nurturance that we are able to share with one another. It is a space to which we can return for healing and a place we can create for justice. In this way, the erotic is a space in which a feeling of homeplace can be shared. It is a space of vulnerable resistance expressed through the mode of alliance.

The erotic significantly informs my conceptualization of vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance, and is a central theme in this chapter. I wish to spend a few pages discussing the erotic. The word “erotic” is often charged, equated with “sexual” or construed in the context of “erotica.” However, a more holistic conceptualization of the erotic exists that informs vulnerable resistance. Like bell hooks, I believe that limiting the erotic to the sexual is a problematic reduction. The erotic holds energetic complexity, and to understand it, hooks says “we must move beyond thinking of those forces solely in terms of the sexual...” (“Eros” 194). The erotic is much more complex than sexual energy primarily because the erotic is that exchange of energetic intimacy that is so hard to name. For as long as I can remember I have been fully aware of that energetic intimacy, but in recent years, it is my discovery of the sensual articulations by Audre Lorde, Starhawk, bell hooks, Susan Griffin, and Patricia Hill Collins that have helped me to more fully identify that energetic intimacy as resonant with my own conceptualizations of vulnerable resistance. Like them, I believe that the erotic is a source of power, an intuitive, self-actualizing force, an energy capable of facilitating social change and global justice through our everyday alliances. The erotic is sensory, of the senses, sensual. Through our daily actions of taste, touch, smell, vision, hearing; through our daily actions

of vulnerable resistance in the modes of alliance, performance, nurturance, sustenance, and maintenance, we embody the erotic. The erotic can be experienced through the touch of a hand, a moving poem, the silk of corn, burst of blueberries, sun-warmed sand, fragrant oils, passionate dialogue. It is the force that enables people to form mutually beneficial alliances and create homeplace. The erotic infuses, informs, and motivates actions of vulnerable resistance.

French feminist Helene Cixous calls it *jouissance*, a powerful force of excess, desire, pleasure, connection, intimacy. There is no English word for *jouissance*; its been rendered untranslatable. It's often equated with pleasure, although it is agreed that "pleasure" is too simple of a translation. *Jouissance* is excessive and irreducible in the same way the erotic exceeds the sexual. "*Jouissance* has a power, the power to unsettle foundations and classifications, to shake up ideology," writes Jane Gallop. "It is this power to unsettle ideological founding assumptions that is celebrated in the French feminine concept of *jouissance*" (Thinking Through the Body 121).

Helene Cixous conceptualizes *jouissance* as an economy of female pleasure based not on traditional economies of exchange but on giving freely. In "At Helene Cixous' Pleasure," Cixous describes the work of Clarice Lispector to exemplify this, "Lispector's writing derives from 'an economy of the passions, an economy of exchanges with the other that are not governed by appropriation, by ego capitalization.'" In Lispector's texts, states Cixous, "One is no longer in the economy of opposition, one is in the economy of the gift. And of love. Of how to give" (qtd. in Sellers xxx). In "Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous extends her notion of *jouissance*, "This is what nourishes life—a love that rejoices in the exchange that multiplies...She gives that there may be life, thought,

transformation. This is an “economy” that can no longer be put in economic terms” (262). In the Eros of Everyday Life, Susan Griffin echoes this economy of the gift, the erotic exchange that we share in communion with one another. Griffin writes “there is an eros present at every meeting” that is “sacred” (150), and she etymologically links sacred with communion: “In Sanskrit the word satsang, which translates into English as ‘meeting,’ means ‘godly gathering.’ In the English language the word ‘common’ is linked through the word ‘communicate’ to ‘communion’” (150). It is through the word ‘common’ and its relationship to the erotic that “ecology and social justice come together, with the knowledge that life is held in common” (151).

That we create homeplace by enacting vulnerable resistance through this erotic communion, or alliance, is echoed by Rebecca Martusewicz in her article “Eros in the Commons: Educating for Eco-ethical Consciousness in a Poetics of Place.” Martusewicz looks to “the relation among eros, language and the creation of the commons as a critical educational endeavor” and refers to eros as a “life sustaining force” that “plays on our bodies and connects us to the larger community of life, an embodied form of love that charges the will towards well-being” (331).

Many writers have alluded to creations of homeplace that occur through that erotic force manifest as alliances between and across family members, friendships, and activist coalitions. Across all the forms of alliances, the authors write about shared intimacy, that erotic glue of alliance, the recognition of solidarity across differences and similarities, across bloodlines and geographies.

Alice Walker’s novel The Color Purple demonstrates the importance and success of intimate friendship for survival and the transformative power of sharing strength.

While there are many important relationships in this novel, I find the two most powerful relationships those between Celie and Nettie, and Celie and Shug. When Celie and Nettie are younger they enact vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance to protect each other from their stepfather and Celie's husband. Throughout their decades of separation, they share a psychic homespace kept alive through a correspondence that meets no replies, and a persistent belief in their possibility for reunion despite the odds. Likewise, the relationship between Celie and Shug is a mutually nurturing and fulfilling friendship. Through Shug, Celie experiences a sexual and a spiritual awakening. Through Celie, Shug experiences a replenishment of health and unconditional love. Together they create both a physical and an emotional homeplace. Nettie and Shug provide a ground, a homeplace for Celie, and she can return to them again and again for nourishment and safety, and they to her. Through their relationships, their alliances with each other, they enact vulnerable resistance in order to create homeplace, a place of safety and belonging carved out of a hostile environment.

In Memoirs from the Women's Prison, Nawal el Saadawi writes about the alliances that were formed between the prisoners. Their acts of vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance enabled them to create a sense of homeplace between themselves amidst the terrible prison conditions they were living. Their alliance formed a practical function: their collective and successful demand for toilet repair, shower installation, cockroach fumigation, and worm-free bread (43). Their alliance also functioned at the level of the erotic, the shared survival through collective embodied engagement. For example, every morning at 9:00 a.m., Nawal would exercise. She was confined to her cell, but the other prisoners were allowed in the courtyard. The prisoners gathered in the

courtyard to stand outside Nawal's cell every morning and joined Nawal in her exercise routine by imitating her exact movements. As Nawal "moved [her] legs and arms in that regular rhythmic movement that resembles dancing" she saw "a long line of arms and legs, moving through the air, striking the ground with the same, regular rhythm" (97). "As if my body and theirs are one," she writes. "As if there are no bars or steel partitions between us" (97). As she exercises, she recalls the guard yelling at her that this was a "provocation to revolt inside the prison" to which Nawal had replied "the prison statutes...do not prohibit physical exercise" (96). Now she realizes "a truth as if I were comprehending it for the first time. Any organized group movement, even if it be merely bodily exercise or dancing, establishes a rhythm in the mind and body which resembles the pattern of revolution or revolt" (97). This everyday and routine physical group activity—the collective, embodied sharing of visceral sensuality through rhythm and sweat and heartbeat, is an example of how the prisoners created homeplace by enacting vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance.

Another form of alliance and homeplace created in another kind of prison is demonstrated in Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. The characters Offred and Nick develop a relationship at the risk of death and share trust despite the hostile environment. Their relationship speaks not only to the human need for alliance, but the strength of the erotic in fueling one's ability to enact vulnerable resistance in life and death situations.

Alice Walker, in her essay, "Home" writes of her experiences of different feelings of homeplace and belonging across different contexts of relationships. She writes that while living in Northern California she's been happier with the people she has met there than in other places she's lived and so has assumed this area as her "definitive" home.

But then she has an experience that prompts her to restate, “it is, and it isn’t” (71). She explains that when her brother was dying from leukemia, the family gathered. These were family members she hadn’t seen for decades and she experienced “a feeling of belonging” that she realized she never experiences in California. She felt that she “had come home” (73). Walker experienced a kind of return to homeplace with family she hadn’t known was possible. She recognizes the multiple ways shared passions resonate differently across her relationships with the many people with whom she shares and manifests “home.”

Another kind of literature, scientific literature, supports my theory that we perform vulnerable resistance through the mode of alliance to create homeplace. A UCLA study by Taylor et al (2000) shows that when a woman is stressed, her body releases oxytocin which, rather than triggering the “fight or flight” response, encourages her to care for children or gather with friends, a response named “tend and befriend” (2000). This scientific study supports what women’s literature has been storying for years. In times of stress, women (and men who practice what could be called “testosterone awareness”) gather together to talk, to cook a meal, to share a pot of coffee, to tidy their surroundings and “make a nest” or homeplace by bringing together the sensual and erotic elements at hand. The “tend and befriend” model is further interesting at that level of vulnerable resistance existing as an alternative response to “fight or flight”: if “fight” is akin to resistance and “flight” is akin to vulnerability, then I suggest that to befriend—to gather and form dialogue and relationship—is that third thing I’ve been calling vulnerable resistance. In this case, it’s vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance.

Another kind of homeplace we create through alliances functions to stave off the loneliness we can experience when we haven't found "our people." In The Women's Room by Marilyn French, the protagonist Mira recognizes:

loneliness is not a longing for company, it is a longing for kind. And kind means people who can see you who you are, and that means they have enough intelligence and sensitivity and patience to do that. It also means they can accept you, because we don't see what we can't accept, we blot it out, we jam it hastily in one stereotypic box or another. (208)

As Barbara Kingsolver writes, "Homelessness is the loss first of community and finally of the self" ("Household Words" 197-198). Humans need a person or a people with whom we can share the deep core of ourselves with in love and safety in order to feel that we are home.

Annie Proulx's Brokeback Mountain reveals the enactment of vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance through Ennis and Jack, two men who struggle to create homeplace through the power of their love for each other, despite challenges brought by a homophobic community and family, as well as internalized homophobia.

Allying Hands Embodying Alliance

How can we all feel safely vulnerable enough to love fully? The following section demonstrates fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance as alliance within the mode of alliance. This story displays the complexities that accompany, impede and deepen the forming of alliances, and the nuanced ways we perform vulnerable resistance as alliance. The story I tell addresses homophobia and heterosexism and the challenges of forming

alliances even between well-intentioned people. At the same time, this story displays vulnerable resistance and the creation of homeplace through genuine love and respect between two people.

Loving Each Other

The framing of same sex marriage makes me feel uncomfortable: “Do you support or oppose same sex marriage?” Perhaps rather than dividing relationships into categories of “same sex” or “heterosex,” we would be smarter to reframe the conversation as one that supports harmonious relationships, regardless of the sex, sexuality, or gender of the people involved. As Mary Oliver writes, “Yes, it is a din of voices that I hear, and they do not all say the same thing. But the fit of thoughtfulness unites them” (Winter Hours 20). Relationships create homeplace through the mode of alliance and contribute to our well-being.

Consensual relationships taking form on mutual grounds of love, respect, and shared power—and these relationships do exist, not only as pairs, but also in the shapes of V’s, triangles, and other polyamorous forms agreed upon by the individuals within each relationship—should be legally honored and recognized if the loving party so desires it. Love is the seed of harmony. Love does not support hierarchy and abuse, nor does it support power-over binaries, oppression, and colonization. Love supports egalitarian interaction, dialogue, deep listening, respect and compassion. With love, peace and happiness flourish in good health. My daily hope is for a collective understanding that an infinite supply of love exists, and that we therefore don’t need to ration it or categorize it or discriminate against it or kill for it. We simply need to love

abundantly. I have a story that points to a conundrum brought on by pervasive homophobia and hate, and highlights the complexities of vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance.

Amber and I have walked many miles together, discussing that thing that is so hard to name, that slippery, ephemeral, intangible yet palpable thing shared between two people who care deeply and intensely for one another and the dialogue or endeavors in which they are together engaged. I have come to call this exchange of energetic intimacy “erotic communion.” I believe in erotic communion as a way of coming to know by being deeply present with one another in our everyday lives. In Audre Lorde’s resonating words, “Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world....For not only do we touch our most profoundly creative source, but we do that which is...self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society” (“Uses of the Erotic” 59). Audre Lorde’s erotic is shared power, “a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens” experience (57). Patricia Hill Collins writes in Black Sexual Politics of the influence of Lorde’s redefining and reclaiming of the erotic as an energetic source that resists gender oppression. Collins applies Lorde’s conceptualization of the erotic as a means to resist intersecting oppressions and encourages us to “rescue and redefine sexuality as a source of power rooted in spirituality, expressiveness, and love” (51).

A few years ago, Amber and I were asked to participate in a bed-in for peace and consciousness-raising modeled on the bed-in performed by John Lennon and Yoko Ono. From their bed, John and Yoko publicly demonstrated erotic alliance and vulnerability as a way of protest. The bed-in that Amber and I were asked to do would have been a three-

day endurance performance art installation in the lobby outside of a theater production about activism. Informed by conceptualizations of the erotic, I saw the bed-in as a site where energetic intimacy and the materiality of self-empowered bodies could converge with intentions for peace and social justice. I viewed the bed-in as a way to create an erotic communion that invites possibility through vulnerability and energetic exchange while enacting resistance against dominant ideologies. I believed in the possibilities for this bed-in to begin a ripple of healing exuding from two bodies demonstrating an exchange of energetic intimacy in a period of seventy-two hours of heightened awareness, peaceful intention, and sensual interconnection—elements of alliance.

Amber and I met the opportunity from our similar performance approaches and our shared, particular paradigms of love and justice. As we both draw inspiration from performance artist Marina Abramovic, we saw the bed-in as an endurance art piece of energetic transmission. Like Abramovic, who references her performance with Ulay in “Nightsea Crossing” as a performance of “trust, and will, made visible,” “We believe in the art of the twenty-first century. No object between the artist and observer. Just direct transmission of the energy. When you develop yourself strongly inside, you can transmit your idea directly” (Carr 27). Similarly, like Adrian Piper, I am interested in the “particular, personal, immediate transaction between ethnic or cultural others,” and the relationship of that transaction to the “indexical present,” the immediate here and now of the actual performance context. States Piper, “Through the work I try to construct a concrete, immediate, and personal relationship between me and the viewer that locates us in an indexical present that is itself embedded in the network of political cause and effect” (Piper 290). Borrowing Abramovic’s and Piper’s terminologies, our performance

choices would have embodied intentions of offering a direct transmission of compassionate energy in the indexical present as a way to generate healing across sites of hatred and intolerance of cultural others.

Because Amber and I shared these performance intentions, and because we assumed the colleagues who invited us to do the bed-in likely had similar intentions, we felt safe, and excited, to do the bed-in. However, as the performance grew near and we had yet to have a conversation with the directors about their intentions and their ideas for framing, we became wary. Amber and I spoke to each other about our individual concerns. The framing of this performance was crucial not only for creating optimal audiencing possibilities (Barba), but also for our own basic safety needs. We were beginning to feel that our paradigms and intentions might not be matching that of the directors. We decided to pull from the bed-in. However, before we formally did so, news coinciding with our decision came from the department. The department had voted to prohibit the bed-in, citing concerns of safety and departmental integrity.

While my *ideal* self still believes in the value of a (carefully-framed) bed-in, I had come to understand the impossibility of this particular bed-in given the layers of the larger social, academic, and (poorly-framed) performance context. I was painfully aware of Lorde's observation that the sexualization of the erotic under a homophobic "european-american tradition" creates conditions in which "these occasions are almost always characterized by a simultaneous looking away, a pretense of calling them something else....And this misnaming...give[s] rise to that distortion which results in...the abuse of feeling" (59). I had become concerned that many of the spectators would "look away from the importance of the erotic" (59) "rather than...participate in the

experience with us” (58) and “rather than make connection with our similarities and differences” (59) across the continuum of loving. I did not want our deep connection to be co-opted as spectacle by the male gaze of apathetic students between classes and homophobic faculty members across departments. It would have been unbearable to have our intentions, a display of vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance, misread.

No matter how carefully this bed-in might have been framed, Amber and I would have still been two women in a bed, two objectified bodies: one marked ethnic and heteronormative, one marked white and queer. Despite how or whom I love, the visible and material fact of my heterosexual privilege is ever present. Ultimately, at the conclusion of the bed-in, I would have gone home to my male partner—my *husband* who I had the heterosexual privilege to marry in any state I chose, and my child, who I had the heterosexual privilege to conceive or adopt or “parent” by any means I chose. I would have gone home and continued to participate in my heterosexual privileges, while Amber would have gone home to a home she did not share with her female partner and continued their conversation about the conflicts brought by institutionalized heterosexism and internalized homophobia. It was tremendously painful for me to watch Amber negotiate daily obstacles and uncertainty regarding the shape of her future, while I continued to be socially, culturally, constitutionally enabled and *rewarded* for my lifestyle choices.

The entire ordeal of the bed-in left me overwhelmingly sad. Without doubt, it was one of my saddest moments during my doctoral program. I felt grave disappointment from the aching reality of the prevalence of discrimination of all kinds, and that so many people are afraid of love and loving. Further, the internal conflicts created by this scenario for all the individuals involved—the directors, the faculty members and Amber

and I, echoed the challenges of creating alliances, even for people sharing common ground in socially-minded ways with good intentions for a better world. Forming alliances is often a difficulty of details.

I believed in the power of the erotic generated through shared energy of alliance, a tool of vulnerable resistance in dismantling intersecting oppressions. And I still believe in the potential of shared power. Had the bed-in been performed from my place of intention, with proper framing, it could have been a successful performance of vulnerable resistance. But because the number of factors complicating the bed-in were preventing it from being an act of vulnerable resistance, Amber and I chose not to do the bed-in. Performing vulnerable resistance includes making responsible choices in particular contexts in keeping with the tenet of a vulnerable resistance that self-preserved. There is a distinctive difference between safe, fierce vulnerability and ignorant or reckless vulnerability. In this way our refusal to do the bed-in was vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance.

The relationship Amber and I share in and of itself is vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance. The connection we share creates a homeplace that has no geographical boundaries. We currently live in two different countries, but that does not change the fact of our connection. Our homeplace exists as a psychic space at the same time it lives within our physical sharing of relationship and dialogue. The homeplace we share *is* vulnerable resistance. Our relationship is vulnerably open to all categories and descriptions of love as it simultaneously resists categories. Our relationship exists in a third space that is uniquely our own and simultaneously universal—love is love is love.

In the past year, Amber has met a woman with whom she shares an erotic alliance based on mutuality and trust. The two of them create homeplace through their relationship. Together they came from Canada to my house, to visit Greg, Raynah, and me. We spent a week together, sharing food, dialogue, music, hiking, goat-tending and simple presence. We celebrated the turning of the New Year. The five of us together created homeplace through our shared vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance. We are family in the deepest sense. My experience that week was one of pure joy, for it was a uniting of family that I'd been waiting my entire life. My heart family was finally home in an integrative alliance of vulnerable resistance.

Allying Hands Embodying Nurturance

The following fractal section captures a moment from my childhood and demonstrates how food, family, ethnicity, grief, and women all come together in a shared moment of vulnerable resistance as nurturance within the mode of alliance. Through fractal performativity, I display the nurturing power of alliances created around the kitchen table in a cross-cultural embodiment of homeplace.

Feminine Eth(n)ics in Sitdy's Kitchen

No matter what time of day we dropped by, Sitdy would take everything out of the refrigerator, whatever she had, and put it on the table, and say "Eat!" A saucer of calamata olives, a last piece of rhubarb pie, a bowl of pickled turnips, a plate of *kibbee*, warm Lebanese bread, spinach pies. Her kitchen had a distinct blend of scents: cinnamon, chewing tobacco, coffee, and *arak*- Lebanese anise whiskey.

I'd sit at the table in Sitdy's kitchen and let the adult gossip murmur into the background while I attended to the windows. In dark evenings, if the lights were off in the house next door, the windows bounced reflections at us like mirrors, like magic, and I'd watch my grandpa, doubled in the window pane's reflection, scoop his customary three heaping sugar spoonfuls into his cup of black coffee and stir. If the neighbor's lights were on, I could see directly into their kitchen. The two kitchens were so near to each other that if I tried, I could reach through Sitdy's window and touch their window. I was fascinated with the casual, effortless ability of all the dwellers of both kitchens to never look at each other through the windows, to never wave and say hi, to never steal glances. I, on the other hand, quietly spied. I secretly wanted them to see me so I could wave. But they never looked over. It was as though they all shared an unspoken promise of privacy, an honorable, "You may eat in our kitchen any time, but when we're each in our own, let us be in our own."

I loved it when the neighbor's lights were on, for it meant warmth, it meant sharing. When I was in Sitdy's kitchen, I ate Lebanese food as I watched the neighbors pass deep Vietnamese bowls of noodles and foods I couldn't identify but wanted to taste. I used the flatbread as my utensil to scoop rice from stuffed tripe and catch the juices of cinnamon, pepper, garlic, mint and lemon. I watched the neighbor's chopsticks click soundlessly behind the silence of the windows. I imagined my body laying across the sills to bridge the short space between the houses, my body's short length bridging our two families, our two homes, our two meals, our two Asia's. My body spanning the wide continent, connecting my family's Southwest Asia to their family's Southeast Asia in that short reach between our two sills.

After dinner in the summertime when the days were long and light, I'd go outside and linger on the front steps with Grandpa and Dad. I'd skip on the sidewalk, I'd jump on the cracks, until finally, Chung would come running out her front door, followed by her sisters Ha and Ling, Tree and Huong. Sometimes their parents would stand on the steps, and by then, my Mom and Siddy were outside too and everybody would wave, "Hello!" "Hi!" "Hello!" free now to acknowledge one another, no windows between us, and move toward each other to stand coalesced in that small yard space that bridged the two homes. Chung and her sisters and I would play clapping games until dark, and skip and hop and race up and down the sidewalk. Sometimes my cousins were there too and we all made up games to play on the sidewalk spanning the two homes. Reflecting back I think, what a beautiful sight we must have been in our pure innocence and joy. Standing together in a circle on the sidewalk, our hands articulated the intricate conversation of clapping games, and each of us relied evenly upon each other to sustain the clapping dialogue and chanting rhymes. Our hands were the hands of our mothers and their mothers and theirs. In the branching storylines of our young palms, we were holding our mothers' cross-cultural and cross-generational stories. There we stood in our clapping circle, our dancing hands pairing unpaired palms in a synchronized frenzy: my cousin Angie and I laughing with our Lebanese eyes framed by our dark brown and very thick, nappy, curly, rough, unruly hair; Chung and her sisters laughing with their Vietnamese eyes framed by their shiny black, sleek, straight, smooth, long, fine hair. We never marveled at the differences because we recognized each other in our laughter and in the touch of our hands.

One time, after dark, we all went inside and piled around Siddy's kitchen table where the adult women were talking. My two aunts and my mother were all sisters-in-

law, each having married three Unes brothers. My mom's parents were Lebanese. Aunt Sue's were Mexican. Aunt Carol's were Italian. Chung's mother was telling her story. She was looking deep into her mind and mixing her mother tongue with English, speaking fast, and sometimes faster, sometimes haltingly with tears. I heard her story as fragments of two languages. I heard "Cambodia," I heard "boat," I heard "pain" and "hungry." I heard "refugee," I heard "flee." And I saw her eyes. When she wasn't looking far away, her eyes were present, her eyes were wet. The brown mole on the eyelash line of her right eye punctuated her solemn intensity. Her large round cheekbones were wide-set and high, with skin stretched thin and tight, mapping the terrain of her journey. She came to America alone, separate from her husband, clutching her five daughters and a fierce fistful of hope that they would all survive to reunite, to form alliance and make homeplace.

Mom's and my aunts' eyes were locked on her eyes and their brows were creased. Their heads' wagged slow and nodded deep. Their tongues ticked behind their teeth, and they leaned in from their hearts and murmured, "How hard," affirmed "How strong," whispered exhales of identifying fatigue, grief, triumph, fear, hope, desire, desperation, faith. And their hands reached for her hands, and she unclenched her fists. A network of reaching arms, extended fingers, open palms bridged skin tones. Geographies of searching hands clasped, embraced, entwined their ancestries. A web of touch circled and centered on the kitchen table in a visual display of alliance, where multiple stories, embodied and transmitted through the palms and fingertips of these many hands, found interconnection in a cross-cultural display of solidarity recognized as empathic love, "bridging the home and the world" (Bhabha 148).

Allying Hands Embodying Performance

The following narrative reveals my engagement of vulnerable resistance as performance, within the mode of alliance. Competing on the college track team but reluctant to submit to traditional performances of “competition,” this is the story of how I competed against my own times each race to better myself, and along the way, developed an alliance with my “competitor.” Through fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance, I integrate mind/body/spirit in a heightened performance venue—a 5K race performed on an outdoor track at an intercollegiate track event with an audience of runners, coaches, and spectators—while resisting the traditional paradigm of competition (which also houses the “male gaze”) at the risk of being perceived “a loser.” I created a homeplace within myself and with my competitor by feeling powerful within myself enough to create a relationship with the other runner.

A Running Relationship

When I was an undergraduate, I ran on the college track team. I was a “walk-on,” which is code for “not a very good runner.” Or, the more positive spin: “she loves to run, so she runs for free.” I loved the sweat. I loved the community I shared with my teammates. I loved the discipline my body required in order to survive the workouts. I loved running until I couldn’t run another step but not stopping until I had run five more miles.

I loved the payoffs of those workouts, the self-satisfaction of discipline. I watched my body sculpt itself. I would glimpse the contours of my quadriceps rippling in reflections of windows as I’d walk by. In the training room, I sat across myself in the

mirror lifting weights and watched my shoulder veins surface beneath my skin like pale blue worms as my biceps tightened.

It is true, however, that regardless how hard I worked there were certain things about my body I couldn't attain—or eliminate. I joked that I ran my ass off, but it was still there. Or, as Ann Cooper Albright better states it, “The body never reaches a stable location, no matter how disciplined the training. The daily practice required to keep that body “in shape” exposes the body’s instability, its annoying tendency to spill over its appropriate boundaries” (*Choreographing Difference* 5).

Routinely, Coach would line up my teammates and me and pinch our triceps with his fat pinchers, and every time he told me I was too fat. He wanted me under 100 lbs., and at my lightest I was 107.

Coach had a bean pole metabolism, a lanky musculature that earned him a 7th place Olympic finish in the triple jump, and he couldn't understand our difficulties with losing weight. We struggled to meet his ideals. Virginia was bulimic. Lori was anorexic and bulimic. Aislyn was exercise bulimic and anorexic, doing triathlon training in addition to college competition and only allowing herself a square inch of lettuce per day. Eventually she was hospitalized.

I lived in the layers of an anorexic/bulimic culture, running, in Tami Spry's words, in “the terrain of consumption, desire, and denial” (Spry 716). I escaped it as a way of life, but I don't think any of us can escape it as cultural oppression, as collective culturally mediated performance that forces the body politic to confront what Albright describes as “that [“ideal”] body in conjunction with the history of [our] own bodies” (Albright 1997 qtd. in Spry). I often wonder if Aislyn is still alive and how Virginia and

Lori are doing. I find myself hoping the acid from their gut hasn't eaten away their esophagus.

Despite Coach's verbal and psychic abuse, I stayed on the team for three years. It actually never occurred to me to stop running. I enjoyed the camaraderie I shared, and the alliances I developed, with the other runners, and I was on the team for the pleasure of personal improvement. I ran against my own times, disciplining myself to beat the time of my previous race.

I remember the day I ran my personal record in the 5K. I remember my body's focus, the lift in my knees, capacity for infinite air. But the best part was racing stride for stride with the runner beside me. For three miles, our bodies competed in cooperative challenge, sharing a fabric of breath and sweat, creating the "felt-text" (Spry) of our race. Even though we never exchanged one word, our bodies never stopped speaking--and twelve and a half laps around a football field is a lot of time to get to know another person's body. Conquergood might have named those shared moments "embodied dialogical performance." In committed sharing of breath and rhythm and movement in that timed and metered race, our bodies created what Dwight Conquergood and Elyse Pineau together might call *dialogical corporeal prosody* (Pineau, "Nursing Mother" 3). Conquergood's "dialogical" refers to the genuine conversation that occurs between people with competing ideologies ("Performing as a Moral Act"). Pineau's "corporeal prosody" refers to the "conspicuous choreography" of the rhythms and patterns of living and dying and passage of time embodied as "rhetorical tropes" in heightened performance ("Nursing Mother" 3). I apply Conquergood's and Pineau's concepts to the context of two competing, running bodies performing in a heightened, conspicuous,

timed and metered race, within the ideology of the competition paradigm, in a choreographed display of lifted knees, pumping arms, patterns of cadence, and rhythms of exhaling, inhaling breaths, fractals of dying and birthing. It is that genuinely conversational, choreographed, embodied prosody that I refer to as *dialogical corporeal prosody*. Despite the competing ideologies of our bodies, we were attuned to each other rhythmically and in this way shared a genuine conversation of embodied prosody. It is what I have come to know as vulnerable resistance in the mode of alliance. During those laps, our openly shared rhythm resisted the dictates of competition and instead created homeplace in the space of our alliance to act upon and against the competition paradigm and create a better race for both of us. During those laps, sometimes I was the stronger runner and some laps she was the stronger, but we were both committed to keeping pace with each other.

Nearing the finish line, I realized I didn't want to leave this runner behind, not after all those laps of shared energy. She felt like a running partner, not a competitor. In Conquergood's words, I was struggling to keep the dialogue of our bodies "open and ongoing" in a "kind of performance that resists conclusions" ("Performing as a Moral Act" 9).

I found myself thinking, "Well maybe I'll just run in right beside her." So there we were, sprinting stride for stride to the finish line, our dialogical stance situated in the space between the competing ideologies of our bodies, bringing my self and the other runner together even while it held us apart (Conquergood, "Performing" 9), and at that last moment I told myself, "This is where you *have* to pull ahead so you can beat her,"

but in that same moment I thought, “But that would be mean,” and my body just sort of slowed down, just slightly, and we crossed the finish line with her one stride ahead of me.

As I caught my breath, I learned I had run a personal record! My best time ever! I was elated! But Coach came striding over, furious, yelling, “You let that girl win! You’re not a *real* competitor!”

For awhile I wondered if maybe I really was a loser. In most of my races I was so far behind everybody else that I never had to worry about their feelings. This was the first time I felt a relationship with my competitor, a “sensitivity to the other” (Conquergood 11). As I think back on this race now, I find myself wondering why it never occurred to me to finish in a tie. I do wish I had thanked the runner for her partnership in the race. I’ll always remember the joy I felt running at my best in harmony with another woman. We created an alliance in our race together that taught me the value of competition when it is utilized from paradigms of mutuality. I learned that the traditional competition paradigm of winners and losers is not the only paradigm; competition can be utilized as a mutually beneficial tool for learning how to enact vulnerable resistance through alliance as a way to create a sense of homeplace through relationships.

During my final year of track, I was at my strongest and most confident, consistently improving my times with each race, excited and focused on running my best 10K ever in the culminating Conference meet.

But a week before Conference, my name was absent from the roster.

Coach said, “You’re not going to Conference. You’re really just not good enough,” and left me feeling outside of my body.

After three years of working my hardest, it was made clear to me that at my very best, I wasn't good enough.

Reading Albright, I recognize my running body as subject in training, in the “process of making and remaking the self through movement” (20). I also recognize that, to Coach, my body was object as commodity for the male gaze, a display failing in both type and speed and so abjected as “a product—of training, of narrative, of consumption” (19).

Recently, I found my old running log from those years and found my very last journal entry. Ironically, my very last race happened at SIUC. The final words of my running journal read: “10k at SIU. P[ersonal] R[ecord]. Afterwards took long time to recover.”

In many ways I'm still recovering from that whole ego crisis. Yet now I find myself at SIU, disciplining my body once again, through other forms of rigor, creating other genres of personal bests, having found a new venue for my commitment to healthier discipline, to personal growth and engagement, through performing vulnerable resistance in alliance with other bodies.

And yes, I find myself confronting my fears of failure all over again; I find myself in perpetual doubt, perpetual motion, the perpetual motions of doubt. “And doubt is the most certain of tortures. It is doubt that kills the intellect and the body” (Saadawi, Memoirs 136). But I also learn that when I doubt I question more, and the more I question, the more I come to know that I can name less that is outside my lived experience, and trust more what I have learned inside my lived experience: I can never know Aislyn's tormented lettuce lunches, I can only know the cold metal of the pinchers

on my own triceps and imagine. I can only and best meet others in dialogic performances of alliance as vulnerable resistance.

These days, my discipline is in listening to my body, running according to my own body's needs, my own knowledges, dynamically engaging texts and authors, dialogically disciplining my academic body, my theoretical spirit, my physical mind while writing from the pulse of my heart (Pelias, Heart Methodology) and calling upon the visceral to "illuminate" the scholarly (Stoller, "Scholar's Body" xi). By re-embodying muscle memories as a past performance athlete in my present day context as a performance artist-scholar, I come to know again (Madison) through the performance methodology of fractal performativity, an integrated, kinesthetic repetition of embodied (re)knowing.

So now, instead of running on the track field, I find myself in motion on the stage, my present self interacting with my past self, my self interacting with others (Spry 712), traveling between the academy's heart and the scholar's belly, spiraling in the soft spot of the performer's core, the solar plexus of the stage, the place of personal power, trying to become, as D. Soyini Madison says, "a un/learning body in the process of feeling" (109), always becoming to know again, in an ongoing performance of vulnerable resistance through the mode of my allying, performing body, creating homeplace in dialogic erotic communion with others.

Allying Hands Embodying Sustenance

The following poetry performance tells the story of creating and sustaining connection to our then-new, physical homeplace through an alliance with somebody I

hadn't expected to meet: the previous owner of our home. His visit taught me how to distinguish between dreams and dream visits and reminded me that possibilities for communication and alliance are not limited to the physical world—that we can sustain connections across the spirit world, dream world, animal and totem worlds through vulnerable resistance. This story details the affirmation that comes from relationships to a place and to another being and the importance of staying open to multiple realms of communication. Through fractal performativity I integrate the patterns of knowing that came to me through my conversation with Louie Hill. I tell the story by using a blend of line breaks, dialogue, and prose in an attempt to capture the way I *see* the story and to reflect the rhythm of the way I embody the story when telling it aloud, a combination of tones that are crafted, conversational, self-mocking, ironic, sincere, reflective and intimate. The story of Louie Hill exemplifies vulnerable resistance as sustenance within the mode of alliance, reminding me how we can create homeplace through our sustaining relationships and alliances with the living beings that surround us in our immediate worlds.

Louie Hill

We bought a dead man's house,
and the house was full of stuff
left behind, stuff nobody wanted,
stuff we had to clear away
to make his home our own.

It was hard emotional work
sifting through the remnants
of this old man's life: closets
full of bed pans, underpads, transfer belts,
books on pain management.

It seemed he had suffered greatly,
this poor man, Louie Hill,
and it made me feel sad.

After about two months of daily heavy clearings,
I fell into a deep sleep, exhausted.
Suddenly my dream was interrupted
by the appearance of a man standing at the foot of my bed.
He was tall and robust,
about fifty years old,
and he was wearing this
hat (gesture my hands to frame my head)

We looked at each other for a moment
and then I said, "Oh, you're Louie Hill!"
and he said something that made me laugh.
Then after a pause I said, "You're a Virgo!"

The next morning I awoke,

overwhelmed by the palpability of this “dream visit.”

The energy lingered all around me and I couldn’t shake it.

I felt his presence everywhere throughout the day.

Was that *really* the man who used to live in this house?

Or was this just a dream? And if it was simply a dream,
then why was he fifty and healthy

when I’d been picturing him as a fading eighty-five--

--the age the realtor had told us he was when he’d died?

And where did that certainty about him being a Virgo come from?

I’d never seen any papers that may have revealed his date of birth,
nor had I seen any photos of him, for that matter.

Weeks passed, and his image had still not faded from my mind.

I was filled with this insistent desire to find his birthdate

to confirm whether or not he’s a Virgo,

to “prove” to myself the “truth” of my dream.

I called the courthouse.

But they would not reveal his personal information to me because I’m not a relative. So,

I asked them if they could give me the name of the cemetery he’s buried in, and they did.

Impulsively, I grabbed my keys, gathered up Raynah, and drove straight to the cemetery.

The place was huge.

Acres and acres and acres of headstones, and I realized:

I have no idea where this man is buried.

So I drove around looking for a grave marker with the name “Hill”

and within minutes I saw it! Marveling at my good luck,

I jumped out of the car and ran over, but to my surprise, it didn’t say *Louie* Hill,

it was a different Hill. And that’s when it occurred to me:

“Hill” is a very common name.

I returned to my car and drove around the cemetery, Raynah riding in the backseat.

Every time I saw a marker labeled Hill, I’d jump out of my car and run over,

but none of them said “Louie.”

I repeated several times this process of jumping out and back into my car,

when suddenly

I was struck

by my absurdity

and wondered

if maybe

I was slightly

losing

my mind

Here I was

driving among acres of headstones

looking for the grave of a dead man I'd never met to see if he's a Virgo

I stopped the car

and from behind my steering wheel I spoke out loud,

"Spirit of Louie Hill! If you can hear me, show me where to go!"

And I found myself driving toward an area of the cemetery I'd already been,

and feeling compelled to stop there.

"But this is crazy!" I argued with Louie out loud

"I've already looked here!" as I put my car in park.

Grumbling, I dragged myself out of the car,

unbuckled Raynah, plopped her not-yet-two-year-old body down by some plastic flowers,

and started walking toward no particular destination.

I don't know how much time lapsed, but suddenly I stopped walking.

Raynah was not at my side.

"Raynah!" I turned around.

She was in the same place I'd left her!

I had just walked a hundred yards in a total daze.

Shaking my head in bewilderment, my eyes

fixed directly on the gravestone to my immediate left.

I read the carved inscription,

gasped loudly and fell to my knees:

Louie Hill

September 16, 1911

“You *are* a Virgo...”

I whispered.

“It really *was* you in my dream...”

And then I understood why I was there,

why he called me there.

He had something to tell me,

and I had something to learn.

“What is it you want me to know?” I asked him.

“What are you trying to teach me?”

And in a rush it was clear to me:

he wanted to show me he’s not in pain;

he doesn’t want me to envision him as a bedridden eighty-five year old;

he wants me to remember him as he appeared to me:

at his prime, at his peak where he was happiest and most satisfied with his life;

He wanted to help me affirm for myself that

I *am* powerful psychically and I really need to trust that.

He wanted to teach me how to distinguish between

regular dreams and dream visits

because he must've known I've been struggling with that distinction my whole life.

He wanted to remind me that possibilities for communication and alliance are not limited

to the sphere of living, en fleshed bodies. The spirit world, the dream world, the animal

and totem world—these places hold life and his dream visit reminded me (in an even

more personal way than Harjo, Silko, Gunn Allen, LaDuke and Awiakta remind me)

of the importance to honor the mutuality we share with the beings living in these places.

If we learn to listen, if we learn to trust, if we pay attention to the signs,

we can sustain connections across these worlds through vulnerable resistance.

We can create homeplace through our relationships and alliances with the living beings

that surround us in our immediate worlds.

Greg and I had been clearing the remains of Louie's homeplace and

making it our own when Louie had come to visit me in that dream.

He wanted to thank us

for treating the physical remnants of his existence with respect.

He wanted to let us know that he helped us to find this land by drawing us there.

Through the dream visit I was able to realize that this land

wasn't "his" land, and nor is it now "our" land, but that importantly we are *of this* land.

(We bought the place late fall, when many plants were dormant.)

To my abundant surprise, that next spring— our first spring on this land—
lilies of all kinds burst into bloom.)

I realized Louie told me he was a Virgo because he knew
that was the approach that would resonate with me, *that* was the sign I would read
that would give me a way to validate this dream experience.

Because evidently,

he also knew that despite all my performances of “ommm”

I’m often a total skeptic. I need ways to affirm these mystical experiences.

“Thank you, Louie Hill,” I whispered.

Some time later, I was outside on my driveway, and my neighbor Gina came over.
She lived in the house next door, which had been her grandma’s house; so Gina had
actually played at that house quite often when she was younger. I did the math in my
head and figured out that when she was a kid, Louie would have been about the age he
was in my dream. So, I casually asked her if she had known the man who used to live in
my house.

“Oh Louie? Yeah! I remember Louie. Louie was always outside, working in his
yard... I used to follow him around.”

“Really? Tell me about him. What did he look like?”

“Well, he was tall. He was a really big man--not fat, not thin. But strong. Really
solid.”

I found myself thinking, *robust*, remembering my dream.

“Oh...yeah,” said Gina, lost in memory, “and he always wore this...hat,” and she gestured with her hands toward her head.

Later, Greg came in from working outside, saying,

“Hey, look what I found in the garage.”

He was holding the hat I saw Louie wearing in my dream.

Allying Hands Embodying Maintenance

The following section points to one way I maintain relationships. When I open into vulnerable resistance so fully, I’m excessively attuned to my conversational partner, to a degree that I can “hear” through more than simply my ears, and the “hearing” manifests itself as a “shiver.” It is a kind of empathetic attunement I continue to cultivate and strengthen. It is a fractal performativity that integrates all my five senses to a heightened degree. When I am open to the other this fully, I feel that I am in a kind of homeplace with my own aesthetic, psychic gifts and can, therefore, offer my deepest gifts of empathy, presence, and friendship. I continue to work to be able to sustain this intensity of openness in my relationships and interactions, especially as I build alliances in the service of social justice, but I am not there, not quite yet. Currently, I am able to maintain vulnerable resistance through writing, my strongest aesthetic gift, my pen and tongue, as I work toward deepening my compassion and heightening my attunement in relationships through deep listening as a means to create homeplace.

Vulnerable Listening

The bodhisattva Avalokitesvara has one-thousand arms and one-thousand hands, with an eye in the palm of each hand. Thich Nhat Hanh explains that the hands represent action and the eye in each hand represents understanding. He writes, “When you understand a situation or a person, any action you do will help and will not cause more suffering. When you have an eye in your hand, you will know how to practice true nonviolence” (Love in Action 67).

I seek understanding of myself and of others around me so that my actions come from a place of loving intention. Each one of us stands in a personally distinct context, so when I encounter another, in trying to understand another, I stand under. I wish to see from the ground up, from the ground upon which one’s bare soles have walked the path of their soul wisdom. I need to see this person from the soil first, touch the terrain of their path with my hands so I might finally stand beside them in their place of location.

The eye in my own hand is the ‘I’ of my world, the soil of my soul, my living psalm. I am trying to understand myself by writing the actions of my life. As Thich Nhat Hanh continues, “Imagine if each of our words also had an eye in it...Before we say something, we have to understand what we are saying and the person to whom our words are directed” (68).

The bodhisattva Avalokitesvara’s name means ‘listening to the cries of the world.’ Listening deeply to another can be movement toward alleviating pain. “When we show our capacity of listening and understanding, the other person will also listen to us, and we will have a chance to tell him of our pain. This is the beginning of healing” (68). I open myself up to the other in order to graciously receive the gift of personal stories. Because I hear these stories as a gift, I pass on the gift either by telling a story in turn, or holding and narrating

with respect the stories I hear (“Personal Narratives,” Langellier). Like Tami Spry my intention is to engage an “empathetic epistemology” (343). I listen critically and deeply through my hands, with my heart and gut, beneath my skin, into my shoulders and spine. It’s necessary for me to listen from multiple places, because my ears alone often fail me. With D. Soyini Madison I learn that “the fully embodied struggle to pay attention is a methodological and ethical necessity” (“The Dialogic Performative”). Like Naomi Shihab Nye I realize, “I become the deepest listener/where there is least to hear./.../On the earth, feet receive direct knowledge/...//Could I live like this?.../and I know, somehow, I must...” (“At Otto’s Place”).

When I listen with my entire body, I can hear into the aura of the other. I know that I’ve heard the other through the fact of the shiver, intense enough in its suddenness to also be called a shudder. These shivers come with unmistakable clarity. They occur very simply and last less than a second. They happen unpredictably. If a person says something to me that resonates on some level for some reason as profound or meaningful or cosmically loaded or karmically significant even if uncategorizable or undefinable, before I can even begin to respond verbally, before I’ve even fully comprehended or cognitively processed what the person just told me, an electric feeling surges like a charging shiver up my spine and jolts the back of my neck, the base of my skull, and flies down my arms and through my throat simultaneously and instantly out my mouth and fingertips. The shiver is very unexpected, somewhat intrusive, and always jarring, if not rattling. The fact of the shiver marks the significance of the moment. Even if neither I nor my conversational partner can decode the significance in the moment, the marking of it facilitates any future moments of meaning-making.

I'm reminded of Craig Gingrich-Philbrook's "Bite Your Tongue: Four Songs of Body and Language." Gingrich-Philbrook says that when he cuts off the words others do not want to hear but that he needs to say, he has a seizure: "I can feel them, the sentences, the having to be them, in my spine. In the back of my head...If I try not to say these things, not to be them, I have a seizure" (3). I have never lived Craig Gingrich-Philbrook's seizures, and I feel our two experiences are fundamentally different in intensely significant ways, so I don't want to compare my shivers to his seizures. Yet, I do want to mark one similarity I sense based on his description. For me, when I hear beneath the words that others are speaking, I *feel* their sentences, I become their sentences. Their sentences travel up my spine and jolt the back of my neck. It is as though for me the shiver happens in what not is being said in words but in what is communicated through the electric energy swirling the spaces among their words. Said another way, when Craig Gingrich-Philbrook silences himself, he seizes; when I hear unspoken words in the silences, I shiver. The shiver is made possible through vulnerable resistance and it is vulnerable resistance itself.

I believe in the possibilities of vulnerable resistance for transformation. The thought of the public moment, the interpersonal exchange with multiple strangers and loved ones who might be resistant to meeting me at this place of vulnerability is, for me, the challenge of vulnerability. But at the same time, how better a way to begin a dialogue than by listening, by beginning a dialogue that invites new dialogues. More than the exchange of dialogue—that is, more than the feedback of words, the success of the vulnerable exchange lives in the words and actions that are generated beyond the immediate exchange and begin rippling outward. "We exist because we exchange,

because we move the gift” (Griffin 151). Borrowing from Cixous’s conceptualization of *jouissance* as an economy of pleasure based not on traditional economies of exchange but on giving freely, I envision an economy of vulnerable excess that goes beyond the basic exchange to emphasize a pleasure economy of vulnerable, gracious giving and receiving, and a generous passing on, an extending outward, of the gifts.

When we share our stories with one another we are offering gifts, and when we bear witness to these stories through vulnerable listening we are not only graciously receiving the stories, we are offering the gift of attending. To narrate these stories in turn, with the same grace and integrity with which they were given, we extend the gift of vulnerable excess, creating fractal ripples of healing. To offer the gift of listening, to extend compassion, to move the gift of love until we melt our sharp edges, is a gift towards building a world in which we can feel safely vulnerable.

CHAPTER 7

THE FRACTAL HAND: OPENING INTO POSSIBILITY

Fractal performativity is my strategy for organizing my way of seeing, as I write toward a methodology of vulnerable resistance as a way of being. The organizing structure of the fractal hand has allowed me to integrate my stories into a pattern that feels most organic to my way of being. I have discovered that the fractal hand is dextrous enough to hold the multiple aspects of my nurturing, sustaining, maintaining, performing, and allying identities in fluid, intersecting, foregrounded, minimized, partial, and heightened displays of homeplace.

Writing my homeplace stories has revealed to me, over and over again like a repeating fractal pattern, that living in vulnerable resistance is as simple as standing in place and opening my heart—and that “simple” is not the same as “easy”. The stories in this dissertation reveal moments—fragments—where I’ve enacted vulnerable resistance, and they also reveal moments that show I am still learning. I’m still learning how to enact vulnerable resistance as a daily way of compassionate living. But along the way, I’ve grown, and have come to see that growing in vulnerable resistance is a lifelong journey, a movement along paths toward healing our collective spirits. I’ve discussed the fractal relationship between the cosmic body, earth body, and human body, and I’ve come to see the iteration of the human body more clearly: our human bodies are fractals of each other. We are fractals of each other in that we share interconnection through the fact of our humanity and our common need for homeplace. While “homeplace” might look different to each person, the common thread is that we all need a place where we can feel safe, happy, and loved. Simply put, we want to feel safe so that we can be happy. When more

people are happy, we have a better world. Conversely, while one person is suffering, all of humanity suffers, because when people are unsafe or displaced, we have a tougher world.

Understanding ourselves as fractals helps me to better understand a basic tenet of spirituality—that in order to heal the world we must heal ourselves; that healing ourselves means loving one another by seeing ourselves in each other; and to see ourselves in each other means, in turn, we need to love ourselves. The work of loving ourselves is difficult work, but is facilitated by having a sense of homeplace. Learning how to cultivate homeplace, then, is a first step toward a better world. It is hard work making homeplace, especially when we feel our homeplace is fragmented across geographies, people, and even disciplines--or when one's (inter)disciplinary homeplace is itself on the margins. But the more we create homeplace through the integrative approach of fractal performativity, the more we are able to enact vulnerable resistance; and the more often we continue to enact vulnerable resistance, the more often we continue to create conditions for homeplace, for safety, for possibility. For scholar-artist-activists working on the margins, this integrative strategy offers enough hope to keep them coming back to the keyboard, the stage, the classroom.

I've recognized that across contexts, we cultivate homeplace through modes of nurturance, maintenance, sustenance, performance, and alliance. I organize these modes through fractal performativity, a method of seeing based on recognizing and mapping the pattern of my conscious, specific choices in my daily actions as well as in heightened rituals. While I have not felt completely "at home" in particular areas of my life, I have found that fractal performativity has allowed me to integrate these parts of myself so that

I can feel homeplace in the integration and through the individual modes, enabling me to feel moments of safety and hope, and to live in vulnerable resistance.

In order to begin cultivating homeplace for ourselves, in ways that fit our personal strengths, needs, and contexts in which we live, we can ask ourselves the following questions: What aesthetic action helps me maintain my sense of existence, my sense of homeplace, so that I do not disappear? What performance ritual helps me to heal splits within myself so I'm centered in homeplace? In what ways do I relate with my surrounding environment so that I can create a safe, sustaining connection to homeplace? What relationships with other people do I value most, that enable me to feel I have a community of homeplace? What ways can I nurture forgiveness and compassion so that my homeplace is filled with warmth and goodness? These questions echo the questions I ask at the beginning of this dissertation and that I attempt to answer throughout the document. I offer a brief summary of what I learned.

What aesthetic action helps me maintain my sense of existence, my sense of homeplace, so that I do not disappear? I've learned that when I'm in the act of writing, I'm able to maintain a sense of myself, a sense of homeplace and safety that facilitates the maintaining of vulnerable resistance as a way of *voicing* my power. Writing is my preferred aesthetic activist action for preserving the stories. For some people it may be singing, or painting, or quilting, or pottery, or performing to an audience. In our work as writers, performance artists, creative scholars, feminist activists, activist healers, we can utilize fractal performativity as we teach students how to maintain a sense of identity and homeplace by helping them to recognize their strengths, so that they can feel confident to

speaking their voices in the medium most resonant to them as they learn tools for living in vulnerable resistance.

What performance ritual helps me to heal splits within myself so I'm centered in homeplace? I've learned that I feel strong and centered within the homeplace of myself when I make embodied, conscious performance choices integrating logic, intuition, and physical attunement to perform vulnerable resistance as a way of *doing* heightened and everyday activism. My preferred performance rituals include solo performance, poetry performances, and walking my spiral garden. Some people might heal splits by going for a long walk or run, or doing yoga or dance. Activist scholar artists can help people heal splits by facilitating kinesthetic attunement and mind/body/spirit awareness through embodied methodologies and movement therapies so that people can perform their own healing rituals. Through fractal performativity we heal splits to find our center of homeplace, which enables us to live safely in vulnerable resistance.

In what ways do I relate with my surrounding environment so that I can create a safe, sustaining connection to homeplace? I've learned that when I have flowers, or nightingale, or sandstone, or forest, I can feel spiritually at home, safe enough to open into the metaphysical aspects that sustain vulnerable resistance as a way of *knowing*. Others might sustain a sense of safety by connecting to place through a particular tree, a coffeehouse, the ocean, a city, the song of an owl. Activist-scholar-artists can teach the importance of connecting to place as a way to sustain a sense of homeplace. By learning how to attune to the living world around us, we can sustain that connection and feel anchored in safety enabling us to move through the world in vulnerable resistance.

What ways can I nurture forgiveness and compassion so that my homeplace is filled with warmth and goodness? I've learned that when I form trusting relationships through listening and exchanging meaningful conversation, I experience homeplace in the warm alliances of vulnerable resistance as a way of *sharing*. For some people this may be experienced with a partner, a best friend, with a group of people, in a single conversation, a brief encounter, a long relationship. We all need somebody with whom we can feel safely at home. Activist-artist-scholars can help individuals realize the importance of forming homeplace through alliances as a way to move in vulnerable resistance. Utilizing fractal performativity we can teach empathy, reciprocity, trust, coalition building, and relationship building from a place of love.

What ways can I nurture forgiveness and compassion so that my homeplace is filled with warmth and goodness? I've learned that when I empathically feel into another person with compassion, understanding, and deep love, I'm able to transform grief and heal generational wounds through the nurturance of vulnerable resistance as a way of *giving*. Some ways we do this is by sharing food, coming together, deeply listening, and opening our hearts. Activist-artist-scholars can create awareness for the importance of these qualities and offer workshops to teach skill building for cultivating compassion, generosity, and kindness as a way to begin nurturing vulnerable resistance and creating homeplace.

All of these aspects together: voicing, doing, knowing, sharing, and giving, create vulnerable resistance as a way of *being*, which I organize through fractal performativity, my way of *seeing*. Importantly, these seven aspects: voicing, giving, doing, knowing, sharing, being, and seeing, are all *active* qualities. The most important thing I've learned

is that one of the most ethical ways we can embody these active qualities is through being receptive. It is in being our softest, our most vulnerably *receptive* that these aspects can emerge; and the fact that they do emerge, and emerge *actively*, in the service of a better, more just, global society, is what makes this soft receptive vulnerability, *vulnerable resistance*. Through the *deeply receptive* emerges the *actions of being* that are vulnerable resistance. Vulnerable resistance *is* the mode of being *actively receptive*, like a seed. A seed is actively receptive in that it absorbs warmth, air, moisture, and nutrients from the soil and then it bursts into active growth.

When we enact vulnerable resistance, particularly in challenging situations, we are centered, strong, compassionate, and empathic, but we are also safe and protected. We have grounded ourselves in homeplace by connecting within ourselves (performing), connecting to a place (sustaining), connecting with another person (allying), connecting hand and tongue (maintaining), and transforming grief (nurturing). From this template, we can apply vulnerable resistance to larger contexts of community activism and as a personal strategy in daily life. By walking into a situation intentionally, grounded, critically self-reflexive, and actively receptive, like a seed of vulnerable resistance, we can absorb what we need while blocking out what is harmful, and then grow from the situation.

Vulnerable resistance depends on our ability to integrate the active and receptive through critical self-reflexivity. Being vulnerable without being critically self-reflexive can create an unhealthy pattern of submission, and enacting resistance without being critically self-reflexive can create an unhealthy pattern of aggression. Critically self-

reflexive fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance enables the disruption of unhealthy patterns.

If I wanted to teach the method of fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance in a workshop to help individuals critically reflect upon and access homeplace, I would consider organizing the workshop loosely along the following steps: meditation/journaling/embodiment/storytelling/self-reflection. For example, I would invite workshop participants to meditate upon, and then journal, the ways they create homeplace across each of the five modes, using the above questions as guidelines. I would then invite them to move around the workshop space, feeling free to be integrative, repetitive, interpretive, metaphoric, vocal, etc., as they experiment with embodying the words, emotions, movements, etc. that they wrote about during their meditation and find the ways they feel most at “home” in their bodies across these modes. Next, I would invite them to create pairs and share a story with each other about the way(s) they create homeplace, and any new insights into homeplace arising for them in the workshop. Participants might discover during the workshop that they have one mode that is “stronger” than others, or they might discover an integration of the modes. Through these exercises, they would be creating their own template, or pattern of modes built on a recognition of their own strengths, that they can enact in a variety of situations as they move through the world. Finally, I would invite the participants together in a group dialogue to reflect upon and share aloud their experiences and insights with each other that arose during the workshop regarding homeplace and vulnerable resistance. The workshop should facilitate participants’ awareness of, and ability to access, homeplace for themselves and/or enable them to teach others how to access homeplace. This workshop example is a loose

organizing template of fractal performativity that could be modified and adjusted. The context in which the workshop is held would yield different results, but could be equally meaningful whether the workshop is conducted in an academic environment, such as a classroom or conference, or a men's prison, a women's shelter, an artists' retreat, etc. Context matters, and facilitators can read each group's needs and adapt accordingly. By helping individuals recognize or find the mode or modes that offers the most resonance, scholar/activist/healers would be helping individuals find a way to create homeplace, to maintain/sustain/perform/nurture/ally a sense of safety, by the available means at hand, across a variety of contexts.

For the context of the dissertation, and my own body of experience, I needed to invent the structure of fractal performativity in order to hold my homeplace stories of vulnerable resistance. The fractal hand is a symbol of the practical tool doing the daily work, a metaphor for vulnerable resistance, and a metonym for my body. The structure has enabled me to begin to define myself and my ways of being without writing myself into rigid identity boxes. I've appreciated the infinite possibilities that this structure holds; for if I so desire, the structure would allow me to extend the fractal hand to the next generation (the next iteration) of stories. These stories would necessarily become more specific and nuanced, in the same way we see more detail under magnification. The structure of the fractal hand gives me space to tell the stories still untold, as well as the stories that are yet to unfold in my life. The stories contained in this document are fragments, partial stories— as stories are. The beauty of the fractal structure is that it expands to allow for as much specificity as we'd like. If I extended my fractal hand to the next generation, my fractal section Coffee and Granola, for example, would branch into

five additional sections, giving me space to talk more particularly about, say, my decision to not vaccinate my child and the pharmaceutical issues related to vaccines (performance); or about mothers' rights regarding hospital protocol immediately pre- and post-birth, such as PKU shots and drops in babies eyes, etc. (nurturance); the ways I'm learning how to maintain my garden using organic methods, and the satisfaction of, for example, pulling weeds, harvesting and processing herbs (maintenance); the benefits of creating a community garden (alliance); the impacts of genetically processed food on earth bodies and human bodies (sustenance). Through all of these modes I create homeplace and enact vulnerable resistance. Notice how as these topics become more specific, they point to a broader picture, in this case of the impacts of the agricultural, medical, and pharmaceutical institutions. This phenomenon operationalizes the fractal logic that the more intensely we magnify and look at the small particularities, the field of view changes and the bigger, more global, it becomes.

The fractal structure is also efficient and mobile in that the fractal sections can break apart and stand alone. I can continue the fractal logic of my dissertation as an organizing template for the stories still to come, yet without the burden of having a six-hundred page document. The stories, like cauliflower pieces, can be broken off and carried in bite-size chunks consumable in a lunch hour. At the same time, these fractal sections remain held together by my hand, my embodied homeplace. However seemingly random, they are all my stories, intersecting on my body.

Simultaneously, while my fractal hand begins with me, in the homeplace of my palm, I'm left to recognize that my fractal hand isn't The Beginning. The fractal hand is its own universe—and the closer we get to the moment just before the Big Bang, the

more that time and space elongate. We can't pinpoint the Big Bang moment any better than Derrida can deconstruct to a point of origin. Likewise, generations of hands came before my fractal hand and, however subtly or directly, they have influenced the shape of my life, the homeplace of my hands, my way of being. With Mohanty I've learned "the lesson perhaps...that home, community, and identity all fit somewhere between the histories and experiences we inherit and the political choices we make through alliances, solidarities, and friendships" (136). In this way, my fractal hand holds both a collection of inherited histories and a creation of political choices, and homeplace is enacted in those spaces between what we inherit and what we pass on through a fractal performativity of vulnerable resistance that simultaneously disrupts, alters, transgresses, and repeats. Importantly, the fractal hand reminds me to see the interconnectedness of all things.

Fractal performativity is a useful organizing structure for integrating multiple themes into a unifying sensemaking pattern. The fractal hand holding homeplace and the five modes of vulnerable resistance is one template of fractal performativity. The fractal star of Depleting Patriarchy is another template. Academic writers, artist-scholars, embodied performers, and healing artists across genres can utilize fractal performativity as a method to generate fractal patterns, modes and concepts that hold and reflect their way of seeing. For example, fractal performativity might be a useful method for musicians integrating the multiple genres that have influenced the development of their unique sound, or for activists trying to mobilize specialized groups who share a common vision. For example, if social justice is the common vision, and there are five groups, each with a different focus: civil rights, LGBTQ rights, animal rights, environmental

issues, and women's issues, then by utilizing fractal performativity, these groups could be integrated under one umbrella to mobilize their focus without losing sight of their core causes. In this way, there would be activists who feel core to one issue, and activists who identify across the intersections; for example, a woman who self-identifies as queer, black, and ecofeminist would have affinities across all the groups and wouldn't have to "section" herself off. That is, with the fractal performativity template, people can express their entire identities and not be limited to one area of social justice; and at the same time, people who identify strongly with a single issue can continue to put all their energy into that issue. Another advantage of fractal performativity is that it would enable tasks to be divided across strengths and skills: for example, people with strong maintenance skills could be assigned the task of public relations/communications; people with sustenance skills could take on the tasks of fundraising; people with strong alliance skills could act as a liaison between groups; people with strong nurturance skills could act as listeners and offer counsel; and people with strong performance skills could raise awareness both within and across the groups, as well as in the larger public by emphasizing embodied awareness, agency, empowerment through heightened performances, workshops, and making conscious choices that integrate mind/body/spirit.

Fractal performativity is an integrative performance methodology that embodies intersectional identities and in this way can mobilize theory for change as a useful praxis that at its core advocates vulnerable resistance. Fractal performativity can invigorate identity politics because fractal performativity is an integrative embodied way of knowing, rather than a cognitively-based method. While one can argue that identity politics is inherently embodied because we're talking about bodies, a weakness is that we

often don't move beyond the talking. Fractal performativity offers a way for us to go beyond theorizing. Fractal performativity is creative activism, which is necessarily an embodied, intersectional engagement, a direct strength of performance and its qualities as dialogic, visceral, dynamic, and based on conscious choices. Fractal performativity is especially effective for enacting social change because the empowered performance of empowered voice communicates outward in a fractal ripple. When individuals embrace vulnerable resistance as a way of being, fractal performativity becomes an especially powerful activist pattern, because vulnerable resistance begins from a place of centered compassion, an open heart that facilitates ethical action.

Fractal performativity *is* vulnerable resistance and vulnerable resistance *is* fractal performativity in the sense that form and content are often inseparable when working with integrative strategies. Fractal performativity as a way of holding intersections in multiplicity to infinity, yet within a specifically mapped pattern, is a kind of vulnerable resistance, a way of being; and vulnerable resistance as a way of being that is a third thing of fluid multiplicity is a fractal performativity that relates the personal to the political, the particular to the universal, in a way that both embraces and escapes essentialisms and abstractions. Through the lens of fractal performativity, I am able to integrate my way of being in/as vulnerable resistance, compassionate action rooted in one's self-empowered homeplace. From that homeplace of being, an exchange of respect and empathy resonates within and between selves and others, like the energy in the spaces between fingertips, like the intimacy shared in holding hands. It is movement toward a loving world.

My recognizing the ways in which my method of being/seeing has developed over time has required ongoing self-reflexivity. Translating that method into words so that others might utilize it is an act of agency, an integration of power that ripples out like a fractal for others to then internalize and pass on. They can pass it on by utilizing fractal performativity as vulnerable resistance, or by recognizing their agency in developing and sharing their own methodology for moving through the world with compassion in the best way they know how, in a way that brings them back to that all-encompassing thing: hope (Tan). Indeed, it's a cliché that with hope all things are possible. For me, the variation on that cliché is that knowing possibility exists gives me hope. And with more possibilities, hope multiplies. We create our own possibilities by discovering our own methods for being, developing our own ways of seeing, and then sharing what we're learning and what we've always known in our *iyari*. As Audre Lorde says, "The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all...to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference" (Sister Outsider 123). For me, those seeds of possibility are held in the homeplace of my hands, and I have named them vulnerable resistance. With my fractal hands opening into possibility, I hold the seeds of vulnerable resistance in the homeplace of my palm.

"I look at my hands and see they are still unfinished

I look at the vine and see the leafbud

inching towards life" (Rich, Dream of a Common Language 41)

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