AFRO-FILIPINO ARCHIVES AND ARCHITECTURES: JESSICA HAGEDORN AND NTOZAKE SHANGE’S FEMINIST AND POETIC (RE)VISIONS

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ABSTRACT

During the 1970s Third World Liberation and Black Arts movements, Black and Asian American writers created transnational and artistic alliances. In particular, Filipino artist Jessica Hagedorn and Black feminist writer Ntozake Shange traveled and performed at readings together in San Francisco and New York. With poet Thulani Davis, they formed a trio called “The Satin Sisters” and co-authored plays and poems together. Hagedorn and Shange embodied the Third Worldist visions for Afro-Asian racial and feminist unity. However, current Afro-Asian scholarship seldom analyzes Filipino and African American feminist solidarities and privileges masculinist Afro-(East)Asian nationalisms. I recover these gaps by mining through the silenced archives—both print and expressive cultures—that reveal "Afro-Filipino” women’s exchanges.

I argue that Hagedorn and Shange’s unique collaborations created felt architectures, sensorial spaces that center female intimacies and resistance through sound, touch, sight, and dance. Mapping these felt spaces, that resist patriarchal and colonial domination, this thesis first examines 1970s Third World anthologies, Hagedorn’s Dangerous Music (1975), and Shange’s Nappy Edges (1978). The second part focuses on the plays for colored girls who have considered suicide (1975) and where the mississippi meets the amazon (1978). Focusing on how their works construct female-oriented artistic spaces, my multi-disciplinary project concludes that Hagedorn and Shange’s subversive and avant-garde aesthetics represent Black and Filipino feminist political formations and solidarities as constitutively integral to the foundations of Third World feminist coalition-building and poetic place-making.
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INTRODUCTION

My thesis examines 1970s Afro-Filipino archives and the nuanced intimacies between Jessica Hagedorn and Ntozake Shange. Analyzing their works through various disciplines and literary genres—print and performance cultures—my thesis analyzes how these two female collaborators initiated their early writing careers through co-authored performances. During this time, interracial coalition-building and artistic innovation boomed as post-Civil Rights racial formations galvanized the Third World Liberation and Black Arts literary movements in New York and San Francisco. In tracing their lineage and poetic relationship, I explore multiethnic anthologies and Hagedorn and Shange’s poetry collections and collaborative plays. Shange and Hagedorn grappled with the complexities of Filipino and Black women’s lived experiences on page and in performance spaces.

Throughout my thesis, I implement Christine Balance’s theories of “disobedient listening” as ways that Hagedorn and Shange transform literary aesthetics as part of their project for a feminist-focused interracial solidarity. Balance defines “disobedient listening” as ways of defying cultural caricatures that flatten and mystify racial depictions of Filipinos in America:

These containment discourses, mobilized by both ruling and oppositional forces, produce a set of cultural givens that take the form of tropes… the native and/or the authentic Other; the alien; the machine; the primitive/child; the hybrid/multicultural; the derivative. Disobedient practices listen against such discourse. They draw our attention to listeners’ and critics’ attitudes and manners towards a performer and performance—not just in the moments of audition/listening but, also, in their subsequent acts of retelling (4). By studying subversive acts of “retelling” throughout their co-performances, I employ
“disobedient listening” to demonstrate how Hagedorn and Shange’s stylistic variances and performances subvert white, masculinist, and nationalist gazes of Filipina and Black women.

Throughout my analysis, I also incorporate a theoretical model of “felt architectures,” a term that Shange pens in her 2011 book of essays *Lost in Language & Sound: Or How I Found My Way to the Arts*. I contend that “felt architectures” represent sensorial built environments that house intimate women of color relationships. These embodied and complex spaces are constructed through sound, touch, sight, and dance. They also challenge race, gender, and sexuality throughout Hagedorn and Shange’s political performances, where poetry, music, and dance converge to critique dominant power structures, i.e. white, patriarchal, and settler colonial properties. In the “Social Space of Sound,” Daphne Brooks and Roshanak Kheshti theorize these sites as soundscapes, places where “sound and corporeal gestures and aesthetics travel and transmogrify across time and haunt our present-day lives” (Brooks and Kheshti 330). Exploring Hagedorn and Shange’s call and response exchanges with one another, I draw from Brooks’s analysis of soundscapes as a form of palimpsestic resistance to my theorization of felt architectures. Hagedorn and Shange’s felt architectures, as Afro-Filipino women’s spaces, are central to radical African and Asian American print cultural production and organizing throughout the 1970s.

Both writers created felt architectures to challenge traditional women’s scripts in private and public urban places. For example, they challenged popularized representations of Filipino and Black women as domestic caretakers and custodians. Instead, Hagedorn and Shange acted as “cultural workers” (Murguía 62) who re-shaped myopic representations of Filipino and Black women and re-envisioned their characters as rebellious personas in the public sphere, such as lead singers of jazz bands and aspiring creative writers. Disobediently listening against the male-
centric nationalist movements of their time, Hagedorn and Shange’s subversive and avant-garde aesthetics represent Black and Filipino feminist political formations and solidarities as constitutively integral to the foundations of Third World feminist coalition-building and poetic place-making.

The first chapter of my thesis examines how they map female-centered spaces in the 1970s multi-ethnic anthologies *Time to Greeze! Incantations from the Third World* (1975), *Yardbird Reader IV* (1975), and *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers in the United States* (1980). The second part of my thesis examines their poetry collections: Hagedorn’s *Dangerous Music* (1975) and Shange’s *Nappy Edges* (1978). I argue that these print cultures illuminate how Filipino and Black feminist artists grappled with presenting their lived experiences on the page and in masculinist literary spaces. The third part of my thesis analyzes their collaborative theater performances in *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (1974), which first debuted in Berkeley, California. Alongside *for colored girls*, I also analyze their co-authored and understudied musical cabaret *where the mississippi meets the amazon* (1978).

Addressing these questions, I use the identity marker “Afro-Filipino,” first coined by Latin jazz and soul musician Joe Bataan. In 1975, the same year Hagedorn and Shange were collaborating and working on their poetry collections, mixed-raced African American and Filipino singer Bataan released his album “Afro-Filipino.” This was the first time this identity marker was introduced to popular culture. In this context, I place “Afro-Filipino” together as a simplified way to address African American and Filipino relations. Moreover, I contend that “Afro-Filipino” studies are political and aesthetic projects that bridge the fields of Filipino and African American studies. This cross-pollination further expands our ideas of interracial
conflicts, alliances, and women’s intimacies.

Articulating Afro-Asia: Origins and New Directions

Scholarship on Afro-Asian relationships and cultural productions initiated at the turn of the 21st century. Claire Jean Kim’s 1999 seminal piece “The Racial Triangulation” examines asymmetrical power relations that are structurally organized in the racial triad of Black, White, and Asian relations. She problematizes these interracial relationships by offering a nuanced critique of histories embedded in the conflicts and histories of labor-organizing and racial-based solidarities among African and Asian Americans. After Kim’s article, Vijay Prashad’s *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (2002) and Bill Mullen’s *Afro-Orientalism* (2004) historicized Afro-Asian relations. As a result, much of the criticism that exists focuses primarily on critiques between African American and Chinese intellectuals. Surveying the literature, scholars have predominantly analyzed W.E.B. DuBois and Mao Zedong’s political relations, Ralph Ellison’s Black Internationalist rhetoric after the 1955 Badung Conference in Indonesia, and Fred Ho’s Afro-Asia Music Ensemble.

Afro-Asian studies, as multidisciplinary, theoretical, and political terrains, prompts discussion on the multi-layered intimacies between Blacks and Asians in America. In *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe defines intimacy "as a particular fiction that depends on … the circuits, connections, associations, and mixings of differentially laboring peoples, eclipsed by the operations that universalize the Anglo-American liberal individual" (Lowe 21). Decentering “universal” Anglo-American narratives, we see the contradictions and coalitions between African and Asian Americans in wake of anti-racism and anti-imperial sentiments in post-Civil Rights America. As scholarship on Afro-Asian relations privileges political and organizing activists and scholars, many of the insights that thread the intellectuals
together are built by “laboring peoples” (Lowe 21), working-class and immigrants who face common class struggle and racial-based violences.¹ Scholars have expanded the Black-Chinese dichotomy critique Black-Japanese relations, such as Yuichiro Onishi’s book *Transpacific Anti-Racism* (2013) and Crystal Anderson’s *Beyond the Chinese: Contemporary Afro-Asian Cultural Production* (2015).

Beyond East Asia, new directions in Afro-Asian critiques are indexing underexplored communities in the Global South, namely in South and Southeast Asian Studies. For example, Vijay Prasad’s *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* navigates the term “Third World” by employing post-colonial Afro-Asian organizing efforts and contacts in Egypt, Bali, New Delhi, and Singapore. In addition, Tamara Robert’s *Resounding Afro Asia: Interracial Music and the Politics of Collaboration* captures the New York-based Red Baraat ensemble, a musical group that incorporates an “Indian wedding (baraat) band format, *bhangra* rhythms [with] New Orleans jazz, funk, and hip hop” (Roberts 1) and female-led Funkadesi, a “Bollyfunk” fusion band of “Indian folk/classical, reggae, and funk” (3). Recovering the margins of Afro-Asia, we see the factions present in Afro-Asian nationalistic movements. We can begin to re-orient Afro-Asian studies to subaltern “Third World” subjects, who are central to conversations on race, power, and representation.

Repositioning Afro-Asia to include peripheral Asian peoples, scholars are also problematizing the masculinist and heteronormative Afro-Asian nationalist movements. Cheryl

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¹The working-class relations between multiple ethnic groups in San Francisco and New York formulated many of these grass-roots organizing and protests. Interethnic coalitions practiced what Gaye Theresa Johnson theorizes as “spatial entitlement” (Gaye ii). In *Spaces of Conflict and Sounds of Solidarity*, Johnson states working-class Black and Brown communities in Los Angeles “used the physical places they inhabited discursive places they imagined to assert their common humanity and forge shared struggles grounded in mutuality and solidarity” (ii). These were not limited to “urban renewal” gentrification projects, policing and racial profiling, and segregation of Whites and people of color in neighborhoods. As part of my thesis, I also echo Johnson’s ideas of “spatial entitlement,” as a way to theorize how silenced working-class women of color artists adopted and created these spatially-focused alliances.
Higashida and Chong Chon-Smith confront how these homosocial networks emerge in Afro-Asian print cultures, such as Ishmael Reed and Al Young’s *Yardbird Reader Volume Three*, the Asian American edition, edited by Frank Chin and Shawn Wong. As the *Yardbird* series primarily published male authors and catered to male audiences, both Higashida and Chon-Smith contend these early anthologies secure the Black and Asian nationalist projects of misogyny and homophobia. In Chapter 3, this thesis interrogates how Hagedorn and Shange resist those masculinist spaces and provide complex female characters. Additional studies critiquing masculinity post-Badung include: Vaughn Rasberry’s *Race in the Totalitarian Century* and Daniel Kim’s *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow*. In particular Kim’s book articulates how manhood is rendered through literature, especially from the writings of Ralph Ellison and Frank Chin.

In response to these criticisms, scholars are now exploring Afro-Asian feminist and queer critiques to the conversation by centering such coalitions between women. In *Darker Nations*, Prasad maps out the 1961 Afro-Asian Women’s Conference in Cairo, Egypt which was organized by the Afro-Asian Federation for Women. At the conference, the women “detailed the efforts of women within national liberation movements, from Vietnam to India, from Algeria to South Africa” (Prashad 57). Moreover, Jordache Ellapen’s “*When the Moon Waxes Red: Afro-Asian Feminist Intimacies and the Aesthetics of Indenture*” and Venita Reddy’s “*Afro-Asian Intimacies and the Politics of Aesthetics*” articulate a new Afro-Indian framework by comparing histories of African slavery with Indian indenture through feminist praxis.

In addition, Venita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar’s 2018 Special Issue “*Afro-Asian Feminist and Queer Formation,*” recently published in *Scholar and Feminist Online*, further contributes to the archive by examining Afro-Asia through feminist and queer lenses. In that
issue, Apryl Berney’s “In the Basement: Afro-Asian Teenage Female Alliances in Post-War America” focuses on Etta James and Afro-Filipino Blues singer Sugar Pie DeSanto’s songwriting duo. Drawing from Gaye Theresa Johnson’s ideas of “spatial entitlement,” Berney’s article argues how girls in interracial music groups in in the 1950s “used technology, creativity, and sonic spaces to construct new collectivities across racial and ethnic lines” (Berney 1) in the Bay Area. It is here that I turn to specifically address the possibilities of experimental collaboration that Afro-Filipino girlhood and youth culture fostered. In the following section, I trace how Filipino and African American histories and literatures have been previously studied. Through these comparative lenses, my thesis adds to the project of Afro-Asian Feminisms by including Ntozake Shange and Jessica Hagedorn as a pivotal part of Afro-Asian genealogies.

**Black and Filipino Literary Legacies**

Studies on the solidarities and conflicts between African Americans and Filipinos typically analyze military histories between men. In particular, scholars have critiqued the history of David Fagen, an African American soldier who defected from the American military during the Philippine-American War (1900-1903). Gary Okihiro writes that Black soldiers like David Fagen “deserted for the purpose of joining in insurgents, whose cause they saw as the struggle of all colored people against white domination” (Okihiro 57). Moreover, Scot Ngozi-Brown examines the social relations between African American soldiers and Filipino citizens as “function[ing] within the broader context of racial imperialism and an imported Jim Crowism” (Ngozi-Brown 42). Ngozi-Brown further writes that they inhabited a “common disenfranchisement. Neither was regarded to be capable of full political participation and self-determination. Nor did either possess a sufficient coercive apparatus to challenge the hegemony of powers that made decisions about their political destiny” (44). Thus, the African American
soldiers and Filipinos at this time experienced acts of Jim Crow violence that compelled some African American regiments to join the Philippine insurgent efforts.\(^2\)

In accordance with the racial histories between Filipinos and African Americans, a prime example of intimacy between Filipino and Black men appears in Filipino writer Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart: A Personal History*. First published in 1946, the semi-autobiographical novel humanizes the experiences of Filipino migrants who experience similar feelings of alienation, subjugation, and mistreatment in the United States. One of the earliest hallmarks of Filipino American literatures, *America is in the Heart* calls attention to pan-ethnic effort towards building a national American identity through multi-racial solidarity. In one scene, Bulosan conveys a romanticized and shared American identity between immigrants and people of color, America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling on a tree. America is the illiterate immigrant who is ashamed that the world of books and intellectual opportunities is closed to him. We are all that nameless foreigner, that homeless refugee, that hungry boy, that illiterate immigrant and that lynched black body. All of us, from the first Adams to the last Filipino, native born or alien, educated or illiterate - *We are America!* (189)

Bulosan is one of the first Asian American writers to assert a pan-ethnic identity and consciousness. An additional poignant scene occurs when, at the end the novel, Allos meets an African American soldier named Larkin. The two share a drink at the end they both extend their hands. In this intimate exchange, through touch, Allos remarks that “His hand, too, was like my

\(^2\) In “Fagen and Other Ghosts: African-Americans and the Philippine-American War,” Rene Ontal provides a history on African American defectors from the Colored Regiments in the late-19th century. After the war, he notes of intimacies between the Black male soldiers and Filipino women. He also states that Black American experiences were excluded from Filipino education and the “social engineering of U.S. colonialism…altered the racial psyche of Filipinos by the time Black soldiers’ daughters and sons were born. The hierarchy of color, introduced during the Spaniards’ reign, was institutionalized under the Americans” (Ontal 130).
brother’s—tough, large, toil-scarred” (Bulosan 324). In this moment, Bulosan subtly displays acts of brotherhood between Filipino and Black men. The hands, in unison, symbolize the scars of “toil” shared between both men: African American forced slavery and Filipino farm workers in California. Bulosan illuminates these subtle intimacies between Filipino and Black men.

At the same time that *America is in the Heart* was published, burgeoning masculinist sentiments arose in early internationalist racial formations in the 1950s. The prime example of this includes early Afro-Asian peace and coalition building in the 1955 Badung Conference in Indonesia. Badung was the first international meeting between thirty-three African and Asian states. Their goals were to “promote the Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and to oppose colonialism and neocolonialism by the United States and the Soviet Union” (Lye 1735). After Badung, Black writers appropriated pan-ethnic coalitions that prioritized economic and Black racial unions with men. As Harryette Mullen states, “Often envisioning the movement for black self-determination as a struggle between oppressed black men and oppressive white men, militant revolutionaries of the 1960s tended to conflate their affirmation of blackness with a celebration of black masculinity” (Mullen 213). Similarly, scholar Vaughn Rasberry critiques Black decolonial militancy, particularly with Richard Wright’s Black Internationalist aims, “[Wright’s] apparent endorsement of military discipline and the use of dictatorial means to implement [Third World modernity] aims suggested his willingness to promote modernization at an intolerable and somewhat perverse cost” (Rasberry 205). These masculinist perceptions resonate throughout Black Arts aesthetics and Third World solidarities in the 1970s.

The left-wing political collisions between the Black Power, Third World, and Feminist politics amongst artists escalated in major U.S. metropoles, namely San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, where radical artists began experimenting with new avant-garde forms
blurring the boundaries between poetry, theater, dance, and music. Pacifists and anti-war protesters expressed strife and distrust with the U.S. government. These sentiments affected writers, particularly as writers of color gathered to form transcultural projects that demonstrate their solidarity. Experimenting with mixed-medias, they promoted the sharing of their lived experiences and fellowship with Brown and Black colonies both in the United States and abroad. Speaking about these injustices abroad, their underground contacts formed Third World decolonial conscious-raising groups and reading circuits. Women were included at the forefront of these efforts.

During the Third World Liberation Front Movements, as we see with Shange and Hagedorn, Filipino and Black women exchanged artistic work. Filipino poets like Cyn Zarco begin to emerge in multiracial anthologies, such as Ishmael Reed and Al Young’s *Yardbird Reader Volume 3*. However, in contemporary literary and cultural studies, comparative Filipino and Black feminisms are sparse in Afro-Asian and larger Ethnic Studies. This limited scholarship negates the possibility that Filipino and Black women’s works influenced one another. It also prompts scholars to think about how Filipino and Black communities have been racially and ethnically studied separately and to further delve into what “solidarity” between Filipino and Black women proposes and says about Third World history.

**Beginnings of Friendship**

Jessica Hagedorn and Ntozake Shange met during a decade of political and cultural transition in American history. In the late 1960s, Black Feminist voices called for a change in the Black Arts, Third World, and Feminist movements. They demanded that these movements address differences in Black women’s systemic oppression due to race, class, sexuality, and ability. At this time, Third World revolutionaries also espoused “anti-imperialist politics and
consciousness that united people of color globally in their struggles against U.S. economic imperialism” (Asai 91). For example, in one gathered reading at San Francisco’s Intersection for the Arts, they protested U.S. militarization in El Salvador. In 1968, Third World Liberation Front students of color also protested at San Francisco State University and U.C. Berkeley. They demanded that Humanities and Social Science departments develop curricula that reflected their cultural backgrounds. These protests not only led to new faculty of color hires and tenure-track professorships, but they also established the first Black and Ethnic Studies programs.

After TWLF, underground mobilizing in literary scenes in San Francisco reshaped masculinist and mono-ethnic unions by including women in arts-based and grass-roots activism. For example, the literary collective Third World Communications (TWC), founded by Japanese American poet Janice Mirikitani, nurtured young writers of color in San Francisco. The group brought together the literary collectives Aion (Asian American), Pocho Ché (Chican@), San Francisco Black Writers Workshop, and American Indians (Mirikitani v). In addition to organizing readings, TWC published Third World Women in 1973, the first anthology to feature collective works by women of color. Jessica Hagedorn and Ntozake Shange’s earliest poems were printed in Third World Women (1972).

Hagedorn met Shange met through TWC. During this time, Hagedorn was the lead singer and lyricist in the West Coast Gangster choir, a hybrid rock n’ roll and jazz band featuring lead musician Julian Priester, a former member of Herbie Hancock’s Jazz Ensemble. As she toured with her band, she also wrote poems for her debut collection Dangerous Music (1975). While Hagedorn crafted her poetic and musical career on the West Coast, Shange lived in New York City and studied at Barnard College. She graduated in 1970 and moved to Los Angeles to pursue her M.A. in American Studies at the University of Southern California (USC). After completing
her graduate studies in 1973, Shange traveled to Oakland, California to teach Women’s Studies
courses in colleges around the Bay Area (Als 1). As writers with similar interests in theater,
music, dance, and poetry, Hagedorn and Shange became artistic partners.

Hagedorn and Shange also befriended Black feminist poet Thulani Davis, and the trio
called themselves “The Satin Sisters.” Together they arranged public poetry readings and co-
performed in San Francisco and New York. These events took place at underground cafés, bars,
and cabarets, housing alternative sites where Black and Brown women could meet and perform
“without being hassled or having someone try to pick them up” (Buckley C4). In these intimate
spaces, women experimented with literary forms and voice. They crafted “choreopoems,”
intermixed expressions of poetry, plays, dance, and music. In 1974, Shange debuted her
acclaimed choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*
“outside of Berkeley, California at Bacchanal, a woman’s bar” (Shange ix). Jessica Hagedorn,
Thulani Davis, Laurie Carlos, and Cyn Zarco acted in the production’s first cast. After *for
colored girls* premiered in Berkeley, the production moved to Broadway in New York City in
1976 at Joseph Papp’s Public Theater in New York City. The “Satin Sisters” also co-authored
*where the mississippi meets the amazon* (1977) and *Shadow & Veil* (1982).

In addition to performing plays and poetry together, Shange and Hagedorn established
close ties with writers Ishmael Reed and Victor Hernandez Cruz. In San Francisco, Reed and
Cruz founded The Before Columbus Foundation, a literary award and non-profit that aimed “to
promote the recognition of multicultural literary achievement” (Harris 75). Shange and Hagedorn
dedicate many of their poems to Cruz, who was one of the pioneers of the Nuyorican poetry
scenes in New York City. In San Francisco, the three poets organized readings together at San
Francisco Art Institute’s Intersection for the Arts Poetry & Prose Series, one of the most popular
reading venues for writers of color. Along with their public readings, Hagedorn and Shange’s early poems were anthologized and distributed in their literary circles.

Theorizing Community: Afro-Filipino Women’s Poetic Collaborations

Jessica Hagedorn and Ntozake Shange’s poetic collaborations present literary friendship as a dynamic feminist and multiethnic project, one that inspires an interracial “Afro-Filipino” poetics and sound within coalitional politics. Their co-authored plays and choreopoems, experimental writings in multiethnic anthologies, and their individual poetry collections serve as social sites where they cross-reference gratitude and musings, and where they grapple with the complexities of female space, psychology, and agency. Their poetics also demonstrate how Filipino and Black feminist artists sampled musical traditions, namely from African American and Latin jazz lyrics and dance, to craft new aesthetics akin to their unique gendered, racial, classed, and historical contexts. I attribute their use of jazz aesthetics to the ways that multicultural communities exhibit a Third World “improvisational consciousness” (Ferreira 43), one built on the Third World’s attentiveness to building the foundations of their own literary traditions apart from Eurocentric criterion. This mutable improvisation fuses together multiple consciences. It also challenges how the Brown and Black “Other” are racialized and gendered in post-Civil Rights America. Third World historian Jason Ferreira notes of the improvisational nature of coalition-building between communities of color in San Francisco,

Rather than something which is handed down—vertical—from generation to generation, fixed and unchanging, subject to the dualistic forces of assimilation or cultural preservation, the oppositional Third World consciousness… reveals how working-class, racially oppressed peoples—drawn horizontally—have constructed something entirely new out of the crucible of their lived experiences…[they] coexisted, intersected, and
built upon dynamic identities (43-44).

Resisting a monolithic racial consciousness, multicultural contacts emerged by recognizing differences within their coalitions. Asian, African American, Latino/a, and Native neighborhoods intersected within San Francisco, as they experienced economic, political, and social oppressions that were not similar, but relational due to their proximities in low-income neighbors. Writers of color often experienced adversity and detailed their stories about growing up in neighborhoods that were segregated from whites. Christine Balance states that Jessica Hagedorn’s early writings in San Francisco often “underscore the Third World movement’s trope of ‘internal colonies,’ the barrios and ghettos that connect people of color’s lives, at home and abroad” (Balance 76).

Similarly, Shange writes that her reasons for joining the Third World movement,

The neighborhood where we grew up during segregation… had Haitians, Nigerians, people from Togo, Jamaica, Panama, Costa Rica, East India, the Philippines and Japan. We all had to live with each other because we couldn’t live with the white people: my friend’s parents were from countries that were still colonies… these countries attained so-called independence: we experienced colonial history (86-87).

In addressing their colonial histories and shared “lived experiences” within these interracial neighborhoods, Third World artists constructed new art forms to express their sense of coalition and resistance against racial oppression. In particular, the music and sounds of African and Nuyorican communities inspired Shange and Hagedorn’s transgressive senses and poetics. In their performances, they often incorporate call and response, embedding humor, songs, and giving chorus, which conjures an “Afro-Filipino” feminist contact. Within these women-centered communications, Hagedorn and Shange shared “expression[s] of the human impulse to not only survive, but also to create, commune, celebrate” (Ferriera 43). Provide counsel for one another,
Shange and Hagedorn recognize the differences between interracial Filipino and Black women. While listening, they also provide the grounds for one another to take a solo voice in bringing attention to the overt racial violences affecting women of color. This, I contend, creates powerful feminist felt architectures.

It is important, however, to understand how conflicts surface in Afro-Filipino community building and aesthetic formations. As Anne Dewey and Libbie Rifkin theorize in their anthology *Among Friends*, “In these intimate relations and the poetry that sustains them, we find contesting spaces of contestatory, creative exchange, often more open to the surprises of difference and more revealing of the gendered conditions of poetic production” (Dewey and Rifkin 3). These friendships, generative and conflicting in experiences, produce a gendered “intersubjective becoming” (5) for Shange and Hagedorn’s earliest experimentations with poetry, voice, and theater. These intersubjective exchanges of becoming, what Hortense Spillers theorizes as “intramural relations” (Spillers 1) within Black communities, construct new understandings of the complex female psychologies that emerge between Filipino and Black women within the everyday social exchanges and in practice. Often these intimate exchanges are silenced within the masculinist Asian and Black nationalist movements towards racial and economic justice. Spillers asserts,

> It is one thing to make pronouncements in public spaces about fraternity, brotherhood, liberty, and justice. But it's another thing to come back where you live and to make that a part of your practice…. It's a way of making people responsible beyond the pressures of their own rhetorical commitments, and the realization that commitments have to be something other than *rhetorical*; they have to be practical or praxial, in the sense of a practice. That's what I see missing in our discussions today about race, gender, class,
Critiquing interracial logics within these gendered “intramural relationships” found in larger Afro-Asian coalitions, this thesis theorizes how Hagedorn and Shange’s literary aesthetics and intimacies *practiced* their interracial intimacies in both private and public displays of their poetry and performances. By studying various genres, I argue throughout my thesis that Hagedorn and Shange alter multiple artistic praxis and exchanges through multiple genres. Moreover, their alternative exchanges occur in both public and private venues. They are public in their co-performances in *for colored girls, where the mississippi meets the amazon*, and in *Shadow & Veil*. Their relationship is also public when their writings are circulated within the anthologies that the multiracial literary collectives organized. Simultaneously, their intimacies are private within their individual poetry collections wherein the interior is made public.

Miranda Joseph, an anthropologist who has experience working in predominantly white and queer theater spaces in San Francisco, states the dangers of essentializing community and intramural relationships during the 1970s and 1980s,

> There is an essential and common core to gay identity rather than opening up the theater to the diversity of gay identities…. The invocation of the community of women has often served to produce a white women’s movement that could not adequately address or account for women who were simultaneously or even primarily faced with oppressions based on race or class or sexuality (xvii).

Within this activist theater space, the term “community” can thus be used a placeholder for otherwise complex webs of networks between artists and activists, even in liberal and social activist efforts. In grappling with these differences among Filipino and African American women, understanding the tensions and conflicts of varied racial, sexual, class, and national
boundaries proves necessary for critiquing Afro-Filipino artistic exchanges in theater and poetic spaces. I aim to offer that the innovative poetic collaborations between Shange and Hagedorn at poetry readings, theater performances, in anthologies, and their poetry collections generate cross-racial and gendered politics between Filipino and African Americans.

Methodology and Chapter Structure

Chapter one explores how Third World print cultures and literary collectives began to circulate and include women of color writings within anthologies. In this time period, poetry anthologies and literary groups established cooperatives as ways to publish and disseminate writings by authors of color that were often excluded from American and Eurocentric literary canons. Moreover, many of the anthologies and collectives, edited by writers of color, were masculinist. Asian American male writers, such as Frank Chin and Shawn Wong, often asserted a “yellow manhood” that asserted misogynistic and homophobic depictions of racial self-determination. In response, collectives such as the Third World Women’s Alliance (TWWA) in New York City and San Francisco’s Third World Communications (TWC) organized to include feminist and queer of color voices. The printed anthologies *Four Young Women, Time to Greez! Incantations from the Third World*, and *The Third Woman: Minority Writers of the United States* recover women’s subjectivities and their “disobedient” and transgressive creative expressions. Hagedorn and Shange’s fiction and poems in these anthologies sample jazz and dance from African American oral traditions. In doing so, I argue that they reimagine a Third World “Afro-Filipino” women’s contact and space that transcends racial, gendered, and transnational borders.

Chapter two analyzes how Shange and Hagedorn’s alternative intimacies within these multiethnic poetic cooperatives built and (re)assembled multiracial identities and mixings in their individual poetry collections. In this chapter, I argue that Hagedorn and Shange’s poems
converse and refract, giving chorus with one another as they sample one other’s poems. As friends, they are “avidly reading and creating the conditions for each other’s work” (Dewey and Rifkin 9) through their poetry collections. This chapter delves into how both poets layer and riff off one another, in Hagedorn’s *Dangerous Music* (1975) and Shange’s *Nappy Edges* (1978), and how they conjure poetic and political (re)formations of danger, dance, and intimacy.

Chapter three examines Hagedorn and Shange’s collaboration in *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* and their co-written play *where the mississippi meets the amazon*. I begin with analyzing how their friendship initiated during the formation of the Third World Communications in San Francisco, and how their first collaboration initiated in *for colored girls* when it first premiered in women’s bars, cafes, and gender studies departments in Berkeley, California. My analysis will examine how Jessica Hagedorn and Ntozake Shange’s performances and writings center the female body by performing and inscribing resistant narratives central to the Third World political formations. Through these women-focused artistic expressions and spaces, they formulate new political formations between Filipino and Black women through plays and poetry set to music. Setting their earliest performances within intimate spaces like female bars, house parties, and even Broadway, Hagedorn and Shange conjure the possibility of dismantling their silenced narratives and the structural violences afflicted against women of color. They also reimagine a new corporeal politics that considers one’s individual performance within intramural and interracial relationships, whether platonic and/or queer.

I conclude my thesis by thinking about how literary retreats and writers of color spaces today mirror the legacies of the 1970s Bay Area and Third World Arts Coalitions. I also theorize what Filipino and Black women and queer of color critiques can propose for contemporary critiques of multiracial coalition building. I also recommend alternative sources of further
examination of Afro-Filipinos—i.e. queer sites of Afro-Filipino contact in Hagedorn’s *Dogeaters* (1990)—and propose that the category of “Afro-Filipino” as a developing field in Critical Ethnic Studies. Additional scholarship is needed to further mine through the ways that critical race theory, feminist, and queer of color critiques can intervene in comparative Filipino and African American studies. By applying these interdisciplinary lenses to contemporary American poetics and social practices, we can further envision how spoken word, performance, and dance mobilize feminist and queer contacts between Filipino and African American artists.
CHAPTER I

Assembling Afro-Filipino: Third World Collectives and Radical Print Cultures in the 1970s

“Fact is, the invention of women under siege has been to sharpen love in the service of myth. If you can’t be free, be a mystery.”

—Rita Dove “Canary,” 1989

 “[W]hat was fascinating was that the maps these women were creating in their fictions — the social, critical, cognitive maps; these matrixes that they were plotting — were far more dangerous.


On the cover of the 1975 printed anthology *Yardbird Reader IV*, an unidentified woman carries her child on her back. She holds a purse and umbrella while wearing a head wrap and traditional dress. She faces towards the camera, but the umbrella’s shadow and the photograph’s dark contrasts obscure her face. Her ethnicity and geographic location are unknown. Her name and the photograph’s date are unacknowledged. The woman, blurred in the sepia-tone photo, could be African, Caribbean, or Southeast Asian. She is racialized and geographically located by her traditional dress and the buildings in the foreground of the photograph. Her ambiguous racialization and visual representation, as a “Third World” woman subject in the public, engenders questions of gaze and representation: Who is she? Where is she? Why is she on the cover of this literary anthology?
Bay Area poets Ishmael Reed and Al Young released *Yardbird Reader IV* in 1975, a year that marked a turn in Afro-Asian literary community and racial formation. First published in Berkeley in 1972, “*Yardbird Reader* was the messenger at the crossroads through which different cultures communicated” (Reed 14). The Reader features fiction, poetry, art, and interviews with Black, Asian, Latino/a, and Native American writers and artists. The anthology’s first volumes were predominantly comprised of Black male writers. However, Frank Chin and Shawn Wong co-edited the *Reader*’s first Asian American issue in 1974.

At this time, Asian American literature started to gain “material support from black publication houses” (Chon-Smith 49). Asian American political identity also started to emerge within the activist movements spurred by the Third World Liberation Front. Thus, the *Reader*’s support of Asian American voices serves as a foundational text to “understanding the comparative racialized and cultural formations between the Asian American writing movement, Black Power writers, and Third World Liberation” (50). The *Reader* promoted the earliest radical print cultures between African and Asian Americans. Afro-Asian alliances and communications were not limited to anthologies; networks flourished through small presses, literary collectives, public reading spaces, and individual poetry collections.

Within these Afro-Asian utopic visions, however, *Yardbird Reader* predominantly catered to masculinist views of racial justice, space, and cultural identity. Although the *Reader*’s first volumes featured Filipina poet Cyn Zarco and Black feminist writer Thulani Davis, the *Reader* primarily included cover photographs, quotes, pictures, and selected works of and by men. Scholar Cheryl Higashida notes of the masculinized spaces of Chin and Wong’s issue: “*Yardbird Reader*, volume 3, extends the largely male-centered Asian American nationalism that Frank Chin and Shawn Wong had articulated in *Aiieeee! An Anthology of Asian American*
Writers. The Reader’s editorial statements and many of its selections assert a militant ethnic identity” (Higashida 229). This militancy, demonstrated through misogynistic and homophobic undertones, yielded what Daniel Kim theorizes as “yellow manhood” (Kim 33) during the early political Asian American racial formations. This performance of “yellow manhood” over-exaggerated Asian American masculinity, while simultaneously obscuring women and gay men’s experiences.

For example, in their 1972 essay “Racist Love,” male writers Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan write against white stereotypes of Chinese American men as “the only racial stereotype completely devoid of manhood” (Chin and Chan 68). They write further “Our nobility is that of an efficient housewife...womanly, effeminate, and devoid of all the traditionally masculine qualities of originality, daring, physical courage, and creativity” (68). In this piece, Chin’s Asian American cultural nationalism and masculinity revises white stereotypes of Asian males as weak, emasculated, and unoriginal. However, in doing so, he positions women as “traditionally” occupying subservient roles and as lacking original talent and pleasure. His analyses further contribute to the controlling images of women of color’s place in the domestic sphere as caretakers—roles that Filipino and Black women have occupied for centuries. Chin’s polemics affirm Asian American creativity insofar that his views pronounce Asian and Black misogyny and castigate feminized and even queer performances of race and manhood.

However, women of color writers Jessica Hagedorn and Ntozake Shange challenge Chin’s masculinist notions, by incorporating Filipino and Black women’s subjectivities in the next volumes of Yard Bird Reader, and in other Third World radical anthologies. Unlike the militant and homophobic rhetoric that Black and Asian male nationalists employed during this time, Third World women wrote against violence and towards women’s survival and belonging.
Like the woman on the cover of volume four, Hagedorn and Shange problematize the masculinist conflicts and instead complicate women’s experiences in the public sphere. In their contributed pieces to these Third World anthologies, their female characters are complex, from a lead singer in a rock n’ roll band to a housewife who reimagines her creative life with a vision from Billie Holiday.

This chapter analyzes how Hagedorn and Shange’s earliest writings implement felt architectures in three multiethnic anthologies: *Yardbird Reader IV, Time to Greez!,* and *The Third Woman.* I argue that felt architectures, assembled spaces where their female characters craft counter-narratives against representations of women as docile and subservient subjects, demonstrate how women of color writers re-imagined spatial agency. Hagedorn and Shange use jazz and improv to reconfigure collective possibilities between Filipino and Black women. Ultimately, I argue that their innovative poetic aesthetics altered the built environments to map “Afro-Filipino” interracial and feminist intimacies. In doing so, they simultaneously challenge the “African American and Asian American cultural [nationalism’s]…misogyny and homophobia” (Higashida 233) in these anthologies and redefine the flattening representations of women of color within Afro-Asian collaborations.

**Radical Print Cultures: Third World Women in Anthologies**

Printed anthologies increased opportunities for readership and promoted women’s writings within a larger literary forum. Inhabiting a “powerful role in canon formation” (Di Leo 9), collected pieces curated within printed anthologies depicted social and political movements in transition. For example, Hagedorn and Shange’s writings altered Cold War adaptations of the cult of “true womanhood” what Patricia Hill Collins writes as “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (Collins 266). In the following section, I begin by historicizing how women of
color writings in these anthologies began to reshape built environments and spatial agencies. I focus on Hagedorn and Shange’s fiction and poetry in *Time to Greeze! Incantations from the Third World, Yardbird Reader IV*, and *The Third Woman*. Their writings in these anthologies, unbounded in form and genre, alter women’s respectability through allusions to jazz and prominent jazz figures like Billie Holiday. Rather than secure their characters within the domestic sphere, Shange and Hagedorn create characters who are lead singers and creative writers who strive to claim their own space. Ultimately, their constructed felt architectures challenge gender, sexuality, and race in women’s public and private lives in America.

In 1972, Japanese American poet Janice Mirikitani edited *Third World Women*, the first anthology to assemble only women of color writers. This anthology initiated during the formations of Third World Communications (TWC) publishing press and cooperative, which partnered with Glide Publications. In an interview with Will Powers, Ntozake Shange details that the *Third World Women* was “a book in four languages, with silk-screens and music scores in it—art by women of every ethnicity, from every place imaginable” (Powers 32). During this time, feminist writers like Ntozake Shange, Janice Mirikitani, and Alta Grey were forming their own feminist collectives and presses. For example, Grey’s Shameless Hussy Press, established in 1969 in Oakland, C.A., was one of the first feminist-centered publishing cooperatives in the Bay Area. The press published “the first books by four women who would later become internationally prominent feminist writers: Pat Parker, Mitsuye Yamada, Ntozake Shange, and Susan Griffin” (Kivlen 2015). Other publishing houses such as St. Momo’s Press and Persephone Press published more women of color work anthologies including *This Bridge Called My Back* (1980).

The first publication of *Third World Women* signaled a turn in the San Francisco
Renaissance poetry circles. In the 1950s and 1960s Beat Generation, publishing houses predominantly catered to white male poets. Kenneth Rexroth, one of San Francisco’s most recognized Renaissance poets, articulates the exclusion of women from the Beatnik poetry canon: “After about the age of twenty-five [women] begin to disappear… The answer is apparent upon even the most cursory survey of literary magazines and small presses. They find it very hard indeed to get published. Many anthologies of genuinely young poets, many series of poetry booklets contain no females whatsoever” (Rexroth x). Responding to these omissions, TWC’s *Third World Women* and *Time to Greez!* laid groundwork for women of color to collectivize. These new writings, a symbol of action to decolonize white male-dominated literatures, revolutionized the American literary canon. In particular, Hagedorn and Shange’s writings opened up literary anthologies to imagine felt architectures between Filipino and Black women.

*Time to Greez! Incantations from the Third World* (1975)

After publishing *Third World Women*, Janice Mirikitani edited *Time to Greez!* Incantations from the Third World in 1975. Poet Maya Angelou introduces this anthology, “In this Book, *Time to Greez!* we hear the truth—Black, Brown, Reds, Yellows are telling the story. The poetry sings and the total effect is harmony. There is hurt, humor, and hope in these pages” (Angelou iii). Angelou centers the sounds that “sing” (iii) from these poets. She refers to multiethnic voices as telling their own stories and being in tune with the senses of their communities. For example, in Angelou’s description, the poetry animates sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smells. These senses act as part of one’s home-making and healing intimacies for the interracial poets. Through group meet-ups and poetry recitals, poets of color in TWC produced rhythm and beats that created felt transmissions of their histories across the diaspora. As Angelou writes,
This book is a many-sided mirror of our lives, reflecting the colors and sounds, taste, smells, touch of our homes, the rhythm of our inner music, the music of our food, the food of our lives…The ‘greez’ is a feast—a sharing of spirits and a feast of words, music and symbols (v).

These interracial sharings happened within both private and public felt architectures. These spaces nurtured intimacies in their neighborhoods and homes and sheltered writers. Privately, they built relationships with one another within these domestic and familial structures. Publicly, these artists read and performed at readings, dominating political and social justice spaces. As Angelou suggests, these multietnic anthologies symbolize both the public and private exchanges. They were ways that artists disseminated their writings and politics to their friends and larger audiences, thus strategizing for a common purpose of belonging and acceptance in the United States. As the intimacies happened in their private homes, at large, they were also reshaping literary canons. The personal becomes political when these kinship ties uplifted their communities during protests, political uncertainty, and racial violence.

As Time to Greez! is a testament to how felt architectures were assembled and built through anthologies, Hagedorn’s included poem “Natural Death” speaks to the violences that control women and inhibit their livelihood in the city. Hagedorn remarks on all the “warnings” that women, outside of these sanctuary spaces, are conditioned to hear: “beware of nightclubs n cuban mamas / beware of the street / beware of doorbells n abortions / beware of pregnancy / beware of public transportation” (Hagedorn 29). In enumerating these fears, through the repeating anaphora “beware,” Hagedorn plays with how the normalization of violence against women affect women’s lives in the public sphere. Hagedorn pens “Natural Death” to remark on how misogynist surveillance on women’s lives conditions women to fear the outside world. This
produces isolation, or as Hagedorn warns “beware of loneliness / n the rhythm / of your heart / beat” (29). This loneliness, fear of the outside world, leads to one’s “Natural Death.”

Transgressing this particular surveillance, Ntozake Shange’s “Sechita” poem in *Time to Greez!* responds to Hagedorn’s poem with Shange’s Lady in Green character from her choreopoem *for colored girls*. In contrast to the women in Hagedorn’s “Natural Death,” Shange’s Sechita transcends time and space. As a mobile subject in the public, she is at one moment at the “quadroon balls” and in the next in “new orleans n okra crepes” (Shange 110). She is “sechita/ egypt/ goddess” and a “mulatto” (111). Shange conjures Sechita as a transgressive female spirit who defies the notions of race, geographic location, womanhood. She is not confined to time and space. Rather, she transcends borders and binaries. She is the all-seer and mythic spirit in charge of “recording of history / sechita / kicked viciously thru the night / catchin stars / tween her toes” (111). Showing both sides of women’s lives, Hagedorn and Shange’s writings show two sides of domestic womanhood in *Time to Greez!*. Both writers remark on how women must negotiate their roles and acts of liberation in the public. To own their space, they imagined powerful women who resist structural violences that keep them fearing in their homes.

*Yardbird Reader VI* (1975)

Similarly, in *Yardbird Reader IV*, Hagedorn and Shange map new feminist terrains. *Reader IV* editor William Lawson writes, “[*Yardbird 4*] draws its contributors from a wide range of African and American writers to point up the differences and similarities in our reactions to experience and in our ways of giving it shape” (Lawson vi). These “reactions to experience” produce new subjectivities, particularly for female writers, who were in the minority in the past *Reader* issues. The *Reader’s* editors published authors of color and explicitly “rejected the idea
that European or mainstream standards could assess the multifarious American artistic experience” (Harris 72). However, unlike TWC, *Yardbird Reader* rarely included female writers. Thus, feminist contributed more of their art to the conversation. Revising Black nationalist politics, women of color within these anthologies reshaped jazz and Bop as masculinist domains and genres. Furthermore, Hagedorn and Shange’s work in this anthology uses jazz music to complicate women of color experiences in public and private realms.

For example, Hagedorn’s fiction piece “Bump City” in *Yardbird VI* features female protagonists Ruby and Juanita in San Francisco. Along with “soul sister number one” (arguably Ntozake Shange), the story begins with the three young women at a grocery store as they purchase food and liquor for their New Year’s celebrations. The women jump into “soul sister’s 1959 blue mercury” as they “drove faster down the freeway, shucking and jiving to the joe cuba sextet, wham! bang! push ‘n shove—i’ll never go back to georgia/ i’ll never go back!” (Hagedorn 91). Alluding to the music, Hagedorn paints the young girls as liberated and free with the songs on the radio, depicting eternal youth and the celebration of girlhood. The scenes cut to soul sister’s “gig,” where she is the lead singer of the band. Hagedorn paints the musical scene as “bizarre-oakland-san francisco family: bizoni the drummer and bizarta his beautiful creole lady” (91). Positioning the soul sister as the leader of this band, Hagedorn grants her agency and mobility as she moves from one space to the next and harnesses a feminine voice—from grocery stores to house parties.

“Bump City” illuminates how multicultural artists and neighbors interchanged music and dance within house parties. Within these private architectures, celebration elucidated women’s experiences with sex, alcohol, cocaine use, and rock n’ roll music. These signal gestures of rebellion complicate women’s respectability within the private sphere as “juanita was high and
oblivious to the dynamite that was around her and she kept dancing” (93). Situating Juanita in a
daze, in tune with her body, Hagedorn assembles women of color in contrast to the stereotypical
notions of white women as proper, docile, and taking care of their men. Moreover, as Apryl
Berney writes, basement parties for girls of color “symbolized a space within urban
neighborhoods and communities where they could prioritize their own pleasures and desires, and
use them to connect across racial, ethnic, and class lines” (Berney). In these “dynamite” parties,
heightened by the pandemonium, women dominate this scene. They own their bodies, sexuality,
and the music. This agency, combined with the drugs, liberates them from social control,
however, dangerously.

Hagedorn’s “Bump City” conflicts with Shange’s piece “Sassafrass,” an excerpt from her
novel *Sassafrass Cypress & Indigo*, her female protagonist Sassafrass also contends with her
private life and domestic responsibilities at home with her yearning to create jazz music. The
protagonist Sassafrass lives in Los Angeles with her partner Mitch. Shange writes that “walter
cronkite’s voice cd be heard” (Shange 55), as Sassafras crochets and listens to jazz to capture the
form’s “permanent monument to the indelibility of black creativity” (56). This image of a
woman in the domestic sphere attunes to the nuclear family and notions of Black women
assuming the caretaker role of her husband. She takes care of her husband’s needs, making sure
“there waz anything else to do to the house to make it the most perfect place for her & mitch”
(56). At first, Sassafrass follows the traditional scripts of domesticity. However, tensions
between her interior desires to “share like Richard Wright had done & zora neale Hurston… the
way lady gave herself every time she sang” (Shange 58) manifest when Mitch harangues
Sassafrass for not pursuing her creative writing.

Although Mitch supports Sassafrass’s artistic talents, he also symbolizes Black
masculinist appearance. His “torrent” (58) results in the piece’s volta when Sassafrass’s interior transitions to all-caps with a vision from Billie Holiday’s ghost: “IT’S THE BLUES, SASSAFRASS, THAT’S KEEPIN YOU FROM YR WRITIN & THE SPIRITS SENT ME CUZ I KNOW ALL ABT THE BLUES” (59). De-centering the Black male jazz virtuoso, Holiday’s haunting presence compels Sassafrass to imagine the genealogy of Black women musicians that have come before her,

MA RAINNEY, MAMIE SMITH, BIG MAMA THORTON, FREDDIE WASHINGTON, JOSEPHINE, & CARMEN MIRANDA? DONT YOU KNOW WE IS ALL SAD LADIES CUZ WE GOT THE BLUES & JOYFUL WOMEN CUZ WE GOT OUR SONGS. MAKE YOU A SONG, SASSAFRASS & BRING IT OUT HIGH SO ALL US SPIRITS CAN HOLD IT & BE IN YR TUNE… MAKE US SOME POEMS & STORIES SO WE CAN SING, A LIBERATION SONG. FREE US FROM ALL THESE BLUES & SORRY WAYS (59).

Shange centers these women to remark on the legacies of Black women before her. Within these felt architectures, the women become part of Sassafrass’s Black feminist chorus line. She does not need to seek validation from Mitch; rather, it’s the women from her imagination that inspire her to write. Downplaying the patriarchal figure, Billie Holiday, instead, is the leading voice within the house. The vision then jumps and juxtaposes the recipes that Sassafrass makes for Mitch for “her bein perfect today” (62), showing the tensions between Black women’s creativity and the roles they assume at home to take care of their men. Shange’s allusion to Billie Holiday comments on Black women’s responsibilities and labor. In particular, Shange describes how Black women, like Holiday’s ghost, survive by supporting one another, even across generations.
Within this turn towards the expansion of women of color stories, *Yardbird IV*’s inclusion of Hagedorn’s “Bump City” and Shange’s “Sassafrass” challenges confined notions of Black and Filipino women as solely custodial help, as well as privately domestic lovers and wives. Both writers situate their characters within alternative spaces to rebuke monolithic ideals of women as servile and incapable of making original and creative work. Instead, in *Reader IV* women are the frontrunners of their lives as they serve on one another’s’ chorus lines. Their improvisational works add to the avant-garde aesthetics that deconstructed linear time. Rather, their temporalities are never fixed within this female-centered “jazz time,” as they record over histories of their voiceless-ness and re-imagine the material conditions for their lives.

*The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States (1980)*

Dexter Fisher’s *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States (1980)* succeeds the *Third World Women* anthology as the second anthology to solely include women of color writers. *The Third Woman* grapples with male-centered narratives in Black studies and the emphases of white women’s history and perspectives feminist movements. Furthermore, *The Third Woman* demonstrates the innovative contributions to contemporary literature that Third World women sojourned. Fisher also remarks on the liminal identities that women of color confront: “her hyphenated existence—as Asian American, Black American, Mexican American, or American Indian—imbues her angle of vision with perceptions that revitalize our concepts of tradition and folklore, language, and imagination” (Fisher xxvii). Along with Shange’s “Cypress—Sassafrass,” Hagedorn’s ode to Billie Holiday “Sometimes You Look like Lady Day” is included in this anthology,

sometimes you look like lady day,

the smokiness of yr silence
yr hand holding shreds of poetry,
old photographs; and broken hearts
[...]
& i tell you sometimes
serenity in yr madness
& the love
always (354)

Writing a poem across generations and space, Hagedorn shapes another connection between Filipino and Black women and the felt architectures and intimacies between them. Hagedorn’s gestures towards Holiday produces a connective thread to her relationship with Shange. In analyzing this poem, novelist Gayl Jones writes “Filipino American writer Jessica Hagedorn acknowledges her poetic influences of African American oral tradition in the recreation of self in her poem ‘Sometimes you look like Lady Day.’ When the voice is restored to literature, the identity is restored” (Jones 179). As Jones notes, Hagedorn interweaves Black oral traditions and musicians—that she shared with Shange—as part of her embodied voice and own identity.

As Shange similarly alludes to Billie Holiday in her novel “Sassafrass,” Hagedorn also remarks on a shared artistic lineage between Filipino and Black women as she pays tribute to poets and jazz musicians that resonate throughout both of their works. Through interracial poetic and sound recordings, Hagedorn and Shange fashion Afro-Filipino women’s community and self-making within these anthologies. This is demonstrated further in the 1977 Chicago production of *where the mississippi meets the amazon*, where Shange and Hagedorn perform at the Getz Theater. When reciting “Sometimes You Look Like Lady Day,” Hagedorn looks at Shange “lovingly as ‘I Cover the Water Front’ plays in the background and says, ‘Sometimes I
look at you and you look like Lady Day / The way you hang your head in the afternoon…’
(Glusker 9). Thus, reading Shange’s *Sassafrass* in this manner, along with the recitation of
Hagedorn’s “Sometimes You Look Like Lady Day” we can begin to see the intertextual gestures
of their intimacies within each of their pieces. Through the figure of Billie Holiday, a racialized
and tragic female figure that both writers looked to for sources of healing and inspiration,
Hagedorn and Shange proposed new interracial politics that centered their felt architectures.

**Conclusion**

After the 1980s, Art Lange and Nathaniel Mackey’s 1993 anthology *Moment’s Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose* also includes Hagedorn and Shange’s jazz poems. This inclusion
signals Hagedorn and Shange’s writing as part of the jazz literary canon. This anthology features
Hagedorn’s “Solea” and Shange’s “okra to greens” and “rite-ing.” The editors write that their
anthology includes “writers, consistent with jazz’s emphasis on invention and the ‘sound of
surprise,’ [that] have challenged conventional expectations regarding structure, language,
character, voice and other components of literary form” (Lange and Mackey 1). As anthologies
disseminated Hagedorn and Shange’s first poems and short stories, editors highlighted the
musical aspects of their works that altered poetic forms, representations of womanhood, and
racial formations.
CHAPTER II
Afro-Filipino Intimacies: Jazz Poetry, Dance, and Sonic Resistance in Jessica Hagedorn’s
Dangerous Music (1975) and Ntozake Shange’s Nappy Edges (1978)

“Reality is tight when the music’s right.”
—Toro y Moi, Boo Boo (2017)

When the Africans and Asians run amuck…
you better run for cover
you better duck!
When the Latins don their satins
you’re outta luck
you better run for cover
or you’ll get fucked!

In 1974, Jessica Hagedorn wrote a “very old ditty” titled “Watch Out.” Etched in typewriter font on Woo International letterhead, Hagedorn’s subtle humor casts a warning about liberating Africans, Asians, and Latinos. The danger in Hagedorn’s foreboding is one of strife and play. Strife because Brown and Black people are often stereotyped as the dangerous “Other,” particularly those living in low-income neighborhoods. These stereotypes of Black and Brown bodies as wild and unruly, and thus needing to “civilized,” extend to the earliest colonial encounters that justified punishment, assimilation, and acts of noblesse oblige. Also, an act of
play, this ditty uses hyperbole and rhyme to write against assimilationist histories. By exaggerating the xenophobic trope that the racial “Other” is dangerous, Hagedorn gestures to and inverts the foreign “alien-ness” that colors representations of Black and Brown people. Rebelling against these stereotypes, Hagedorn and Shange insert disobedient dance and sound forms in their 1970s avant-garde poetry to defy the colonial master’s social control.

These aesthetics of resistance, mirroring the fugitive histories of the Caribbean maroons and Filipino anti-imperial insurgents, resonate throughout Hagedorn’s 1975 poetry collection *Dangerous Music* and Ntozake Shange’s 1978 collection *Nappy Edges*. Filled with myths, music, and magic, Hagedorn’s poems reorient the Filipino working-class immigrant experience to pay homage to what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney deem as the “under commons,” or the “unassimilated underground” (Moten and Harney 105). These subcultural and interracial spaces, where fugitives organized to flee from racialized punishment and surveillance, are reflected in the music performances, dances, and house parties that Hagedorn alludes to in her writings. In particular, these spaces became felt architectures, where Hagedorn’s jazz-influenced poems interacted and conversed with her poetic tribes, especially with Shange. Released within the same time frame, Shange’s collection *Nappy Edges* also makes uses of anger against the colonial master. Shange implements jazz music and syncopation to de-center the outsider White dominant gaze and the language used to exclude writers of color from the Western literary canon.

The playful ditty that I have chosen as the epigraph to this chapter joins Africans, Asians, and Latins in poetic, social, and musical spaces in San Francisco and New York City. After the Civil Rights and Third World Liberation Front movements, writers and activists of color in these cities used their anger and creative energies to rewrite the colonial language. Doing so, they addressed violence, love, pleasure, poverty, and racial conflict. As Shange and Hagedorn
experimented with poetic verse and sound, they also served as “cultural workers” (Murguía 62) and recorded women’s experiences within the Third World histories. In this chapter, I propose that their collections cite and allude to one another. In doing so, they map felt architectures between Filipino and Black women, creating interracial and feminist spaces of dance and disobedience that have been traditionally masculinist. Ultimately, by examining Hagedorn and Shange as poetic and collaborative cultural workers, these poetry collections further demonstrate how they envisioned aesthetic and political spaces of interracial belonging.

**Dangerous Music (1975)**

While writing *Dangerous Music*, Hagedorn co-led the West Coast Gangster Choir (WCGC), a multiracial band featuring Julian Priester a former member of Herbie Hancock’s Jazz Ensemble. Alongside Priester, the band members also included “R&B singer Ota Pierce, poet and former KPFA reporter Norman Jayo, and Linda Tillery, former lead vocalist of Bay Area rock/soul band, The Loading Zone” (Balance 76). In the 1970s, the WCGC toured universities in San Francisco and northern California. They delivered their first performance at the Poetry Center at San Francisco State University (SFSU). Hagedorn’s earliest songs and poems in *Dangerous Music* illustrate her musical addictions to rock and jazz.

In addition, her poems detail her transpacific migration from Manila to San Francisco as a young girl. As scholar Susan Evangelista writes, Hagedorn’s primary characters are “working class Filipino teenagers… against the background of sixties music: Smokey Robinson, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Jimi Hendrix. There is a certain seediness in the environment in which her characters move, but the music relates them to time and place” (Evangelista 41). The background music of these poems were inspired by the physical locations, San Francisco and New York, as she “musically maps an urban itinerary of Filipino America” (Balance 74).
In addition to the musical landscapes attributed to *Dangerous Music*, the community of St. Momo’s Press was also a multiethnic space that experimented with collaborative projects. Members of the St. Momo’s Press published a Special Issue of *Shocks*. In this piece, writers took turns adding pieces “to create a collective journal in which the various writings would vibrate off one another to create a larger dimension. This interfacing of borders and crossings of various writings and writers has remained the most serious intention of the press” (Vincent 1). The underground cross-pollination attends to the ways that writers were invested in working together within the “third world renaissance” (Balance 73). Artists of color imagined coalition-building and addressed conflicts. Moreover, their differences emerged out of these heterogeneous spaces,

The magazine and the press were a way of establishing a larger writing out of intense and conflicting fragments. The sum would be greater than the parts. It was time to break away from the focus on one writer over another, or the myth of the writer as isolated and independent hero. The intention became to establish contexts in which writers could occur in simultaneous situations (“The New Diversity” 1).

These contexts, places where complicated interracial narratives bred, formed the basis for Shange and Hagedorn’s experimental poetry. In particular, Shange and Hagedorn paid homage to the revolutionary artists of color and artists that they grew up learning from and listening to. Referencing to multiple time periods, they envisioned trans-historical and non-linear contexts for their craft. These contexts become a shared cultural place for their works to flourish.

For example, in *Dangerous Music*, Hagedorn’s Latin jazz music, from bomba to boogaloo, gestures to shared and nuanced histories of insurgency and fugitivity that are a part of the Filipino and African American experience. Moreover, their use of music, from different time periods and contexts, created a non-linear time and space. I argue that these temporal disjunction
serves as a rebellious space for female and queer pleasure to resist the predominantly masculinist musical traditions. As Martin Joseph Ponce notes “music serves as the expressive, figural, and erotic terrain on which Hagedorn’s cross-cultural and transnational acts of address take place… where cultural meanings associated with race, nation, gender, and sexuality converge and compete with one another” (Ponce 124). Hagedorn addresses trans-temporal histories of the fugitive and performing figure to complicate and even queer how women’s lives fit within the masculinist jazz spaces.

Within these contending discourses, the female personas in her poems attend to how the sensuous female emcee and lead-singer soloist transcends racial, gendered, and transnational borders within the felt and disobedient spaces of the under commons. Poet Thulani Davis reviews Dangerous Music in the anthology Yardbird Reader Volume 5,

Dangerous Music is the receipt of the fire in brown, black, yellow minds; the dope and drink of violation; the laughter of the cynics; the beauty of the outsider in a dangerous place and time. It is the bittersweet taste of being colonized and often being too ignorant of the colonization, its past or its present. Her language works in and out of our various colors, weaving through the rainbow of our collective possibilities (v).

Referencing this multicultural hub, Davis notes of the conflicting discourses that arise in Dangerous Music. As part of her reckoning with the larger Third World struggles, Hagedorn’s poems about her Filipino identity expose the complexities of one “being colonized and often too ignorant of that colonization” (Davis v). As a subject of Spanish and U.S. colonial rule, histories of imperialism conflict with her identity. Thus, in many communities, Asian, Latino, and African American, she is the “outsider in a dangerous place and time” (v). Hagedorn is situated at a liminal space, and her uses of Spanish phrases and allusions to Latin music and dance strive to
carve out a community space that grapples with colonial legacies that afflict her gendered experiences and multi-ethnic communities.

Furthermore, Thulani Davis’s review speaks to the “collective possibilities” (v) of these gendered and class struggles that trouble interracial solidarities. Dangerous Music can be read as a place to think about how poets strategized against racist and sexist built environments. As Christine Balance argues, “disobedient listening” (Balance 4) practices produced hybrid and rebellious sound waves that re-envisioned Hagedorn’s “colonial mentality.” Instead, Hagedorn’s gestures to music offer a sense of pleasure and female space within the interracial and working-class urban scenes of New York and San Francisco. Hagedorn’s poems and musical influences destabilize this colonial thinking by implementing resistance sounds from African American, Latin, and Caribbean traditions. For example, in Hagedorn’s poem “Latin Music in New York” she writes,

```
in a furtive smile
    in a good fuck
    in the boogaloo i do
there’s no escaping it
    somewhere  with plumjam eyelids
i danced the tasty freeze shuffle with you
the reds  the blues  the tango con tu madre
it’s there
in town for the night
a guest appearance   a quick solo
death gets hyped
```
and i’m in love again (47)

Boogaloo is a form of call-and-response Afro-Latin blues and soul music that Nuyorican communities co-opted in Spanish Harlem, New York City. In addition, Boogaloo encompasses African American boogie and Latin salsa and mambo dances, “Latin boogaloo—sometimes called shing-a-ling, sometimes Latin Soul... connotes dance-oriented, blues-derived music—roughly equivalent to boogie—or an African American dance popular in the sixties” (Goldman 2015). In “Latin Music in New York,” Hagedorn’s inability to escape Boogaloo, and thus needing to submit to it and her sexuality, produces up-tempo soundtracks that sync within the felt architectures. Hagedorn’s lines write these architectures as inhabiting an alternative urban performance space where Black and Brown people surround one another and celebrate their cultural traditions across the diaspora.

Furthermore, the enjambments and line breaks of the poem mimic how the music and dance call-and-respond, between the performers and the audience. In this way, the collective bodies in the room are connected through sounds and the band. There is a communal and dependent relationship between the two. Hagedorn’s references to mixed-genre songs and dances, even “tango,” intertwine within the urban soundscapes that she constructs in her poem. These sonic intimacies breed alternative spaces of contact and pleasure that blur the edges of race, ethnicity, and nation.

Writing from these blended city sounds, Hagedorn also centers a female Filipino subjectivity within traditionally masculinist Latin jazz and rock music spaces. Musicians most renowned for this musical fusion of 1960s and 1970s boogaloo include: Salsoul (portmanteau for salsa and soul music) Afro-Filipino singer Joe Bataan, Ricardo Ray, Joe Cuba Sextet, Carlos Hayre, and Ray Barretto (Wang 1). Traditionally, in these masculinist musical spaces, Puerto
Rican, African American, and Latino crooned over lost loves, the beauty of their women, or their harsh upbringings. For example, one such song is Bataan’s “Ordinary Guy (Afro-Filipino).” Appropriating Fania traditions and re-mixing them with the female personas and lead singers in her poems, Hagedorn’s boogaloo poem enacts her “quick solo” (Hagedorn 47), as she takes co-ownership of the music and space. Through this female-centered voice, she sets the tropical scenes in New York’s urban underground to reflect her affective pleasures: “I’m in love again” (47). This turn towards the woman’s space becomes a form of social change that Hagedorn envisions these art forms as taking. Hagedorn writes: “Revolutions are creeping out / from under my bed! / and I sing a song for you” (47). This love—addressing the impending “revolution” of female pleasure within the bedroom’s intimate domain—dominates these subcultural environments.

After “Latin Music in New York,” Hagedorn’s poem also takes reference the spiritual, particularly of African American oral traditions. In “Canto Negro,” Hagedorn writes about “in dancing ecstasy / the spirit shaking everyone / shake / shake” (48). Hagedorn’s remarks on the conjuring of the “voodoo” (48) mirrors her opening poem “Sorcery.” The convergence of the mythic with the corporeal compels Hagedorn to lose control with the dream-filled sounds and spirit surrounding her. In this unsettled space, sounds evoke ecstasy and transcend the body. Hagedorn revels in the pleasure of the disobedient soundtracks. Here she celebrates the spiritual manifestations of the female body and its occupancy within these imagined felt architectures. She lives in the sounds and music, as she dances with her band and collective audiences, conjuring new possibilities for Filipino American to be.

These mythic and sonic elements merge together in her final poem “Something About You.” She starts the poem by referencing Shange,
this is for ntozake

of the painted sacred monkeys

on the beaches of the Caribbean

the chinese ladies weep

into their ivory fans

as she dances the bomba (50).

In this poem, Hagedorn gestures to Shange’s essence with a myriad of transnational images. The “painted sacred monkeys,” “beaches of the Caribbean,” and the “chinese ladies” provide an intercultural diaspora that Shange adopts in her poems and art. However, these images are not without their own sources of conflicts. By juxtaposing the Caribbean alongside the Chinese women, Hagedorn layers how both places have had histories of indentured and slave pasts. Hagedorn connects these ideas to Shange and her own colonized heritage that is part of their intimate bond. Thus, Hagedorn’s allusions to Asian, Caribbean, and Latin cultures piece together a hybrid rendition of their Afro-Filipino connection and shared histories. This racial blending blurs the boundaries between racial formations. This act of homage also demonstrates that their intimacies connect through global and interconnected histories of colonialization.

These shared connections also appear at the end of the stanza when Hagedorn references Shange performing the “bomba” (50), a dance and cultural exchange between musician and performer, which stems from Puerto Rican slave traditions and customs. Bombas originated as an “African-related tradition consisting primarily of dance and drumming styles that were developed by black slaves in Puerto Rico during the Spanish colonial period (1508-1898)” (Diaz 1). Highlighting the chorus relationships between the percussionist and dancer, the bomba is “based on a call-and-response structure with linguistic interjections in Spanish, Creole, or an
African language” (1). Hagedorn alludes to the slave dance practices, while also referencing the “chinese ladies”, to reveal the intercolonial relations between Filipino and African Americans. Referencing Shange in this manner, Hagedorn displays their intimate relationship through the disobedient dance and community practices of their ancestors. That “Something About You” connects them with Hagedorn’s transgressive allusions to dance and music that practiced against and subverted assimilation.

**Nappy Edges (1978)**

During the 1976 Broadway production of *for colored girls* in New York City, Shange simultaneously wrote essays and gathered poems for her collection *Nappy Edges*. In a 1978 *Washington Post* book review, Harriett Gilbert reviews *Nappy Edges* as Shange writing “from such an intense honesty, from so fresh an awareness of the beauty of sound and of vision, from such mastery of words, from such compassion, humor and intelligence” (Gilbert E1). Her close attention to language, and understanding its power in creating narratives, fuel much of the impetus for dismantling it. In *Conditions: 5 The Black Women’s Issue*, Cheryl Clarke also reviews *Nappy Edges*: “The language is metaphoric and allusive; it approximates the improvisational quality of Afro-American music forms; and the diction attempts to replicate Afro-American parlance and vernacular, or rather the essays and poems are talked in the same way some black folk may talk when we are among ourselves” (Clarke 159). *Nappy Edges* is a testament to how language and everyday Black voices and relations appear in this collection. This is evident in how Shange constructs spaces that resound with Afro-American music and language. As Tejumola Olaniyan writes,

In Shange’s theater, music and dance are not conceived as ornamental elements added on to enrich the drama but as the very constitutive fabric of the performance, setting and
upsetting the pace, underscoring and contradicting the mood, creating and destroying moods, showing the form (the way it is) and the formlessness (the way it is contingent, alterable) of history (126).

Mixing theater, music, and dance, Shange’s poems privilege Black and Brown women’s intramural relationships and intimacies. During this time period, Jazz music and poetry were often depicted through the masculinist and heteronormative lenses, oftentimes depicting women as muses and/or instruments for the male performers to control and excite (Jones 141). In the last twenty years, Black feminist scholars have written about the Black nationalist and masculinist appropriations of jazz and Black women as their muse. Scholars Farah Jasmine Griffin, Hazel Carby, Harryette Mullen, and Meta Jones are amongst the prominent feminist scholars problematizing these masculinist soundscapes. In Nappy Edges, Shange’s use of jazz also re-envisioned her poetic forms and feminist projects. The Black Arts writers often celebrated jazz and its unique craft of mimicry and syncopation. As Harryette Mullen notes, the “essence of black creative innovation [were found in] the improvisational brilliance of black musicians, especially the jazz soloists, the figure most highly regarded as a model of virtuosity by writers of the Black Arts movement” (Mullen 214). However, as Jazz epitomized Black innovation within their communities, it also silenced women performers.

In Nappy Edges, Shange’s essay “takin’ a solo/a poetic possibility/ a poetic imperative” kindles a congregation with the late jazz musicians and poets that provide a context for her poetry. First written as a speech delivered at the 1977 Afro-American Writers Conference at Howard University, this piece is included in many of her compendiums, such as See No Evil: Prefaces, Essays, and Accounts 1976-1983 and Lost in Language & Sound. Shange’s bricolage essay, part poetic verse, tribute, and political manifesto, counters literary conformity and
respectability politics. One of the mavericks behind this utopic movement towards racial
solidarity, Shange’s work downplays Eurocentric formalism by performing a sonic aestheticism
that centers Afro-Filipino women’s experiences. In *Nappy Edges*, Shange commemorates Black
poets and singers, such as Bob Kaufman and Tina Turner, for their distinct voices. By the “flow”
and beats of their individual rhythms, Kaufman and Turner formed their own legacies in Black
artistry. When or if they have passed, their lives will be remembered through idiosyncratic notes
or lines. One can differentiate a Clifford Jordan track from a line in Leroi Jones’s (Amiri
Baraka) poems by their diction, tones, or use of enjambment. Shange urges readers to learn the
variations that formulated Black aesthetics within this countercultural movement.

Along with the Black artists she tributes her work too, she also includes Jessica Hagedorn
within this jazz-filled genealogy. In “takin’ a solo,” Shange samples from Hagedorn’s poem
“Sometimes You Look like Lady Day,”

or jessica hagedorn?

*sometimes you remind me of lady day*

& *i tell you sadness*

*the weariness in yr eyes/ the walk you have*

*kinda brave when you swing yr hips*

*sometime serenity in yr eyes*

& *the love always* (10)

Shange’s remixed samples from Hagedorn’s poem, a tribute to jazz singer Billie Holiday, or
“Lady Day.” Shange re-performs Hagedorn tribute to both Shange and Holliday. This gesture
not only alludes to Billie Holiday’s significance, but also grounds their friendship in the
company of revolutionary, yet tragic Black female artist like Holiday. Shange’s vulnerability and
“sadness,” is in tune to Hagedorn’s “weariness in yr eyes/ the walk you have” suggesting Hagedorn’s forlorn disposition. However, Hagedorn’s artistic performances, often of displacement from her home in the Philippines, contrasts her “brave…swing [of] yr hips” and the “serenity in yr eyes,” demonstrating how Hagedorn’s art moves people to community and political action. Shange and Hagedorn’s relationship is driven by the intimate “love” and friendship between them. Through poetic music and sounds, their support for one another bridges an Afro-Filipino creative union. Moreover, these intimacies were not without its problems as these connections were often messy. Thus, thinking through their intimacies, we see race as not only one struggle, but also the product of colonial legacies that Black and Filipino women grappled with.

In unison with the Third World politics and musical soundscapes, Shange’s poetics transgress language and authority with music. On the frontispiece of Nappy Edges, she quotes Juan Goytisolo: “…from this moment forward you will learn to think about fighting your own language” (Shange 1). Shange’s grammar, lower-cased words with no punctuation, signals that her poetics does not conform to rules. Cognizant that “language defines reality” (4), she crafts her own language, using words like “waz” and “wd,” to create a new musical lexicon that dismantles the fixed linguistic order. Scholar Farah Jasmine Griffin writes that “She spells [words] as she hears them… and she has to invent a notation system to represent them. Just as the sounds of Black music have not always fit within the Western musical system of notation, the English language, the King’s English, the words available to her cannot always represent the sound of the spoken word or their full meaning” (Griffin 3). In the section “whispers with the unicorn,” she also quotes Hagedorn’s refusal to speak the master’s tongue,

i could never decide
between arts and zoology...

in the middle of the vision

i ride the unicorn through

the midtown tunnel

i refuse to speak the English language (125)

Quoting Jessica Hagedorn within this section, Shange pronounces that both women cultivate their own language, one in tune with the sound and body. Mirroring Hagedorn’s “refusal to speak the English Language” and Hagedorn’s use of Spanish, Shange implements her own sound and aesthetics as a new language to subvert white gazes. This is prominent in her poem “i live in music.” In this poem, Shange writes “I live on c# street / my friend lives on b-flat avenue / do you live here in music / sound” (63). Shange addresses her neighbors through her allusions to the streets and the sounds made from communities across the diaspora. Marking “c# street,” Shange writes about how communities used sound disobediently to cultivate their own spaces and modes of survival. Thus, as one “lives in music,” that is one’s sacred zone.

In regard to women, Meta Jones writes, “Shange combines forms of domesticity, feminine corporality, and sensuality in the poem, illustrating the language of jazz is not solely the province of male action. The female persona in Shange’s poem asserts she is a first-class denizen in the world of music” (Jones 143). Within the felt architectures of the domestic space, like in her piece “Sassafrass,” Shange remarks that Black women are a central part of the Black musical tradition, yet they have been silenced. Thus, in “i live in music, she chooses the pronoun “you,” to pay homage women, including Hagedorn, who are a part of her musical soundscapes and who have inspired her work. She compels readers to listen to the improvisational sounds happening in the everyday exchanges between women of color in their neighborhoods.
The harmonies and 12-bar rhythms allow for the woman soloist, amidst the drummer, pianist, guitar, saxophonist, bassist, singer, etc., to take lead. Thus, as the solo act, the female emcee is both an agent on her own right, but she is also strengthened by her chorus line. Similarly, Hagedorn and Shange’s material relationships emerge as references within *Dangerous Music* (1975) and Shange’s *Nappy Edges* (1978). Hagedorn and Shange’s poems allude to and respond to one another. They form an “Afro-Filipino” women’s intimacy through poetry inciting new formations of Black and Filipino women’s friendship. Their cross-sampling aesthetics also demonstrate how Black and Filipino communities sampled musical traditions, namely African American jazz and Latin and Caribbean aesthetics.

Both Hagedorn and Shange sought to connect various music and dance histories between Filipinos and African Americans, while also expand representations of “Third World” female subjects in America. Shange remarks on the importance of both individuality and community within the Black Arts to urge Black female artists to assert their position as emcees and as music makers. Ultimately, both Hagedorn and Shange argues that women of color, and their singularity, have the ability to resist monolithic representations of their experiences. Their names map an arts lineage, alongside Black oral and folk traditions, and these contemporary sonic archives resist erasure through alternative re-tellings.

**Conclusion**

Jessica Hagedorn and Ntozake Shange’s individual poetry collections demonstrate how they constructed felt architectures to produce alternative intimacies. Within these multiethnic poetic groups, we see these cultural workers building and (re)assembling community histories from the ground and in experimental ways. In doing so, they dissemble monolithic tropes of as Black and Filipino women as “Othered” foreign bodies as dangerous and needing to be policed.
In this chapter, I contend that Hagedorn and Shange’s dynamic poems resist the Black and Filipino body as foreign and alien. Instead, their allusions to disobedient practices—jazz, boogaloo, and bomba—recover insurgent and fugitive histories to give chorus to their activist poetics. Within their sampling and suturing, as friends, they are “avidly reading and creating the conditions for each other’s work” (Dewey and Rifkin 9) through their poetry collections.

This chapter explores how both poets layer and riff off one another in their poetry collections, Hagedorn’s *Dangerous Music* and Shange’s *Nappy Edges*. I analyze how they create new poetic and political (re)formations of intimacy and felt space within the entanglements of women of color feminisms and Third Worldist solidarities. In making their poetics public, and by organizing in venues with their poetry read to music, they redefined representations of their lived experiences to protest the master language. They experimented with language by troubling it, creating rebellious avant-garde aesthetics that mapped out dances and songs onto their own literary landscapes. In the next chapter, I delve into how their disobedient aesthetics and felt architectures also appear in their 1974 co-performance of *for colored girls who have considered suicide* and in their 1978 piece *where the mississippi meets the amazon*. 
CHAPTER III

“It’s My Space”: (Sound)Tracking Afro-Filipino Women’s Theater and Performances

“The earth cannot move without music.”
—Sun Ra, Space is the Place, 1974

“I segregated my work & took it to women. much like i wd take fresh water to people stranded in the mojave desert… I believe my work waz nourished & shaped to a large degree by the time I spent with women.”
—Ntozake Shange, Ms. Magazine, 1977

This chapter examines how two choreo-plays, for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf (1974) and where the mississippi meets the amazon (1978), illuminate Afro-Filipino women’s spatial and literary mappings in the 1970s. Black and Filipino feminist politics rose to prominence as the collected voices of women of color emerged into political consciousness within the Black Arts and Third World Women Arts Collective. These new political and artistic alliances shifted the aesthetic landscapes of avant-garde protest poetics and social practices. They also reinvented women’s social spaces in underground and social justice-oriented theater spaces by sculpting women-centered built environments in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City. Playwright and for colored girls actress Laurie Carlos explains, “[for colored girls] developed through an interracial, organic process of creating work from ritual, in which looking at each other, and loving each other in performance was as important as the words and the movement” (Dolan 1).
Doing so, I argue that they map “Afro-Filipino” poetics and theater spaces for women of color poets. Analyzing *for colored girls*, today a hallmark of Black feminist theater and choreopoetry, through an Afro-Filipino framework presents innovative ways to think about solidarity and conflicts within the urban coalitions formed in post-Civil Rights America. For example, as part of the space and practice of poetic embodiment, Shange writes that “the freedom to move in space, to demand of my own sweat a perfection that could continually be approached, though never known, waz a poem to me, my body & mind ellipsing, probably for the first time in life” (xi). This convergence her space with her “body & mind” sync together Hagedorn and Shange’s relationship within these poems, and for Filipino and Black women to share this space intimately re-focuses the mono-ethnic theater and activist spaces.

Examining *for colored girls* and *Mississippi* as spaces where disobedient praxis—spatial geography, sound, and performance—converge and contest, I argue that “Afro-Filipino” feminist performances restructured the built environment to include their interracial intimacies. At the same time, although Hagedorn and Shange’s choreo-poems sought to dismantle Euro-centric and masculinist performance spaces, mainstream productions of *for colored girls* obscured their interracial relations. However, their co-performances in *Mississippi* rewrite this silencing and re-map Afro-Filipino women’s spaces towards the end of the 1970s.

**Outsider Spaces: (Sound)Tracking Afro-Filipino Theatre**

Laurie Carlos remarks on the peripheral roles of women of colors in the theater: “there was nowhere for people like [me] to be. Women of color were cast as maids, as mammies, as prostitutes in American theatre. To escape the constraints of convention and racism, [I] worked in bars, jazz clubs, dance halls to express [myself] with other performances…who were also resisting the dominant discourse of the time” (Dolan 1). In theater productions, women of color
previously inhabited supporting and custodial roles or were blatantly invisible. According to Carlos, these roles were predominantly working-class, and their main roles were to prop up and provide assurance to white actors and actresses. Or on the side of the spectrum, women of color were hypersexualized and catered to the exotification of the sexualized and “Othered” Black and Brown woman.

To resist these doubled representations, women of color like Carlos fought to redefine representations of their lives by seeking out underground musical spaces or activist-oriented performance venues. Shange writes in *Lost in Language and Sound*: “The space we used waz the space I knew: Women’s Studies Departments, bars, cafes, & poetry centers” (10). Choosing these underground built environments was part of the organizing and reclamation of a poetic space for Shange. These zones provided the felt architectures where women could performer without the outsider expectations of these women as having to please and conform to their controlling images. Moreover, these places manifested into social sites, where “intramural relationships” (Spillers 1) formed intimate, quotidian, and ephemeral exchanges between women of color performers.

Hagedorn and Shange’s collaboration in *for colored girls who have considered suicide* incorporated improvised and rehearsed narratives of Third World women that were practiced and celebrated. Moreover, in *lost in language & sound*, Shange further writes “I moved what waz my unconscious knowledge of being in a colored women’s body to my known everydayness… I learned the wealth of our bodies, if we worked, if we opened up, if made the dance our own” (Shange 8). Shange’s ownership aligns with a women-centered consciousness within Black and Third World Women’s cultural productions in the 1970s. These spaces are present in Shange’s
opening poem “lady in brown” where she remarks on women, represented as different colors of the rainbow, writing from multiple cities,

lady in brown

i’m outside chicago

lady in green

i’m outside san francisco

lady in blue

i’m outside manhattan

lady in orange

i’m outside st. louis (19)

These urban locations are markers of the social spaces joined in their journey into sound. Echoing Murray Schader’s ideas of “soundscapes,” Shange is aware of “how space is constituted through sound and how sound is structured as spatial” (Brooks and Kheshti 331). However, the women in the poem appear to be outside these cities. They have been excluded. Instead of working inside the logics of the state, the ladies peer from the periphery. Thus, Shange remarks how women have had to develop intramural relationships from these outsider spaces. In particular, Black women have had to develop new “unconscious knowledges” and a shared “known everdayness” to debunk the “heteronormative domesticity that is the primary organizing social logic of the state” (Colbert 1). Thus, although the women are outside the cities, they are not confined to the domestic spaces. Shange’s liberating positioning achieves a revelatory effect.

These ubiquitous exchanges propose the end to the violences and silences of women of color in Shange’s “sing a black girls song.” The poem reads: “sing a black girl’s song / bring her out / to know herself / to know you / but sing her rhythms… she’s been dead so long / closed in
silence so long / she doesn’t know the sound / of her own voice” (Shange 18). In *for colored girls*, the body is not only a site violence of “closed in silence,” but also a place for sonic and physical resistance. If we view this as reclamation of occupancy, women of color forge their own terrain. As lady in brown calls for an acceptance of Black and Brown women’s knowledge, through the politics of one’s body, Shange’s *for colored girls* confronts the white supremacist, militant, patriarchal state of the “Third World” movement. Her poetry creates a corporeal politics that considers women and their individual performances within a collective struggle for liberation, no matter the urban location.

The urban soundscapes are filled with the possibility of becoming and moving audiences within this women-centered space. In “Lady Brown,” Shange writes that “she’s half-notes scattered / without rhythm/no tune / sing her sighs / sing the song of her possibilities /sing a righteous gospel / let her be born / let her be born” (Shange 19). The presence of music and rhythm within these poems are indicative that “even before the poems’ publication, Shange preferred to perform the poems to music, always with ‘someone dancing’ in the background” (Sullivan 2014). In his essay “The New Diversity—The Early 1970s,” Stephen Vincent writes “When Jessica and Ntozake performed their work together, with the dancers and the music, they could stir a crowd to an obsessive frenzy, the language hit such a chord in the time” (Vincent 1). It was within this space of feminism, sound, and energetic exchanges between the performers and audiences that Hagedorn and Shange moved their crowds.

Grounding my critiques through an interracial and comparative lens, Tamara Roberts’s book *Resounding Afro Asia: Interracial Music and the Politics of Collaboration* further illuminates how Afro-Asian musical collectives, particularly Shange and Hagedorn’s co-authorship, promoted multi-ethnic community formations and cultural productions. For Roberts,
Shange and Hagedorn’s performances at places such as “Spec’s, an old beat hangout, to ‘new’ Malvina’s, Minnie’s Can-Do Club, the Coffee Gallery, & Rippletad” (Shange ix) problematize mono-ethnic infrastructures, whose “racial assumptions…paint them as mono-racial” (Roberts 3). As Roberts makes clear about the political implications of Afro-Asian music,

Afro Asian music is *interracial*, meaning its creators, audiences, and/or marketers explicitly acknowledge racial mixture in ways that co-opt and obfuscate industry structures based on racial segregation. By foregrounding multiple raced bodies and sounds, Afro Asian ensembles perform group identities and aesthetic utterances that cannot be collapsed into one officially sanctioned racial category… Afro Asian music can help us think through the stakes of interracial identity formation, especially between multiple nonwhite categories or groups. Querying the im/possibilities of racial flexibility—both as mandated by institutional structures and as a progressive political strategy (3-4).

Roberts’s ideations of these “progressive political strategies” through Jessica Hagedorn and Shange’s political performances resist the capitalist and racialized built environments. Asking from a feminist standpoint, these chapter questions: How do urban space and spatial geographies affect female artists of color in these social and historical contexts? How have these intimacies, within Hagedorn and Shange’s collaborative performances, been remembered or forgotten? Uncovering these interstices, via close examination Hagedorn and Shange’s poetry and transnational politics is the focal point of this chapter.

*for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (1975)

The first edition of *for colored girls* was printed by Shameless Hussy Press, “the first feminist press in the United States” (Kivlen 1) in 1975. Shameless Hussy was founded in 1969
by Alta Gerrey in Oakland, CA. Alta published Ntozake Shange’s first collection, as *for colored girls* debuted in bars, cafes, and women’s studies departments around the San Francisco Bay Area. As this play was conceived in San Francisco, it moved to Broadway in New York City and transformed Black Arts feminist thought. Affective emotions and attachments to the physical environment and space resonate throughout *for colored girls*. In particular, urban cities are central units that act as part of the theatrical spaces. Shange’s use of space and geography contributes to the larger feminist, political, and aesthetic projects of feminist-centered built environments that Shange and Hagedorn reimagine during this time period.

The use of physical space, by organizing in women’s bars, was important for Ntozake Shange when she was choosing how to present *for colored girls*. A 1977 *New York Times* article “The Three Stages of Ntozake Shange” quotes Shange,

I began reading my poetry in women’s bars, where they can go without being hassled or having someone try to pick them up. Anyhow those were the places that would hire me, and when I was there I realized I was where I belonged (Buckley C4).

Shange speaks of “belonging,” how women of color come to being and share their acceptances. Subcultural women’s bars, outside the university and corporatized spaces, created intimate and queer contacts between women. Rather than write poetry in seclusion, these women stretched poetry to the public and in social gatherings, creating their own felt architectures that resisted hegemonic logics of the state and violence against women of color. These places, contacts outside of capitalist structures, celebrate the multilingual communities and music reminiscent of the multicultural neighborhoods that she grew up in. Their collaboration contributed to a larger conversation that was understood and affirmed by the collective, where shared knowledges nurture women’s experiences. House parties, celebrations, and informal gatherings kindled safe
spaces where women gossiped shared stories.

In the first printed edition of *for colored girls*, Shange dedicates the collection “This book is for Esa, Thulani, Jessica, Bisa, & June” (Shange v). As this was first published in 1975, when Shange was living in San Francisco and served as a crucial role within the Third World Women’s Collective, she dedicates this collection the myriad of women from multiple ethnic backgrounds. These women were also part of the very first cast. In many ways, this Shange’s acknowledges is aware that these women writers were creating the conditions for one another. Thulani was a student at Barnard with Shange, Hagedorn had met Shange through Third World Communications (TWC), and June Jordan and Shange shared a close friendship, as June Jordan was a proponent of social justice poetry with her group Poetry for the People. *For colored girls* was first staged at Bacchanal, a woman’s bar just outside of Berkeley in Albany, California on Solano. The wine bar was renamed Britt-Marie’s Wine Bar & Restaurant in 1982 and prides itself on being a place “by and for women” (Pazdirek 1). After the cast performed *for colored girls* in the Bay Area, it premiered on Broadway in New York City in 1976.

In the preface to the 1997 Scribner Poetry edition of *for colored girls*, Shange writes that she first performed with Paula Moss, Elvia Marta, Nashira Ntosha, Jessica Hagedorn and Joanna Griffin in December of 1974 (Shange ix). Before the official print publication of *for colored girls*, the piece was in a transition, and was a part of feminist and interracial writing societies. In particular, San Francisco’s Intersection for the Arts was crucial for Shange. In an interview with Will Powers for *American Theater* magazine, Shange states, “I used to work at Intersection when I lived in San Francisco in the 1970s. Jessica Hagedorn and Thulani Davis and I all worked there. We were members of the Bay Area Poets Collective” (33). Intersection for the Arts, featuring Bay Area Poets Collective and Third World Women’s Art Collective, established close
connections and ties. For example, Jessica Hagedorn, Ntozake Shange, and Victor Hernandez Cruz billed an exclusive performance of their early poems together.

Terry McMillan writes in a 1996 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*: “I used to read my poetry in the ‘70s, at the Intersection, with people like Jessica Hagedorn, Ntozake Shange, everyone was playing and performing. I think the Bay is rich aesthetically and artistically” (Caroll 31). This rich history was a part of the first productions of *for colored girls* in 1974 in the Bay Area. However, as the play gained more popularity, East Coast mainstream theater scenes and producers privileged the Black-White racial dyads of the time. This is evident in 1976 *for colored girls* Broadway premiere in New York City at Joseph Papp’s Public Theater. The production cast an all-Black female ensemble and excluded multi-ethnic women’s voices in *for colored girls*. As Shange recalls in an interview with Will Powers,

As I remember it, the Bay Area was one of the few places in the country that was truly and actively multicultural. When I wrote *for colored girls*, I meant it for all women of color. When I took that idea to New York, they took out all my Puerto Ricans, and when I wanted to include Asians, they looked at me like I had lost my mind (Powers 32).

Shange’s pan-ethnic visions in *for colored girls* did not translate on the East Coast as she was originally envisioned, demonstrating how Latina and Asian American voices were ultimately excluded from these theater scenes. Shange states further in her interview: “Easterners perceived the world—in terms of black and white. You see, the history of the migration of black people to the North, and our integration (to the degree that we have any) into white society was very brash and abrasive. Other people from other places—until this recent immigration stuff started—weren’t dealt with as aggressively as intruders as we were” (32). Thus, thinking about how *for colored girls* is represented in the Bay Area, in comparison to the New York City audiences,
magnifies the ways that non-Black artists like Hagedorn are excluded and included as part of the cast. As Will Powers notes in the interview about the cultural attitudes present in physical locations, “with hip-hop theater, inclusiveness is more of a natural thing—it can be blacks and Asians, particularly on the West Coast. That’s a very Bay-Area—type perspective” (32).

Within these contested spaces and conflicts, however, the nuanced relations between Hagedorn and Shange is not silenced definitely. Rather, mining through the archives and exchanges between the two of them reveals how Shange references back to Hagedorn as an integral part of *for colored girls*. Their intimacies are apparent even the 2010 reprint of *for colored girls* by Simon Schuster. In the preface, retitled “Beginning, Middles, and New Beginnings—A Mandala for Colored Girls: Musings and Meditations on the Occasion of the Second Publication,” Shange retells the history behind the inception of *for colored girls*. Rather than explicitly starting with the choreopoem’s beginnings in Berkeley, as she had in the 1997 version, Shange remarks on how individual poems were shaped and selected by her friends. For example, in her poem “somebody anybody sing a black girl’s song,” Shange writes that that poem began in Southern California when Shange was an instructor at CSU Long Beach. In recovering the poem to include in *for colored girls*, Shange writes,

> I remember the poem clearly, but we couldn’t find it anywhere. We went through every notebook of writing I possessed. I began to wonder if I had perhaps dreamed it…Finally, out of desperation, we started calling my friends. I often sent poems as gifts, never thinking I would need them back. But Jessica Hagedorn didn’t have it, Wopo Holup didn’t have it, Paula Moss didn’t have it. Finally my sister found it, and “sing a black girl’s song” made its way back to me (9).

In this moment of reflection, Shange remarks that she sent poems as gifts to her friends,
including Hagedorn. Shange’s tribe of women and contemporaries played a role in how her works were crafted. These intimacies were a part of her poetry and theater making.

We can glean from Shange’s reflections their collaborations remark on the conflicting racial attitudes of the 1970s, as they differed in San Francisco and in New York City. In a 1996 newspaper article by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Lori Reed notes about the multicultural cast as initially “including Thulani Davis, Jessica Hagedorn, Cyn Zarco, and Shange herself” (Reed 22). Cyn Zarco, also a Filipino feminist poet writing within the Bay Arts Coalition, was also an instrumental force in shaping the Afro-Asian solidarities. As Cheryl Higashida writes, “For writers…such as zarco, anti-imperialist critique and the affirmation of Filipino nationhood was analogous to the Black Aesthetics’ (sometimes romanticized) recovery and celebration of African roots” (Higashida 231). As writers like Cyn Zarco and Al Robles wrote their writings of Filipino identity and nationhood, alongside histories of African American racial and economic justice. These new articulated spaces convened into crossovers between the Third World Communications and Black Arts Movements.

As we return to the legacies of *for colored girls*, alternative mappings of Afro-Filipino crossings expand how these spaces were rendered during this boom of women’s theater and poetics. These histories display the discursive setbacks towards harmonious bonds amongst women of color that collide with our contemporary moment. In 2010, Tyler Perry’s filmed a modern-day *for colored girls* with high profile Black actresses and musicians such as Kerry Washington, Janet Jackson, Kimberly Elise, and Loretta Devine. In 2014, *for colored girls* celebrated its 40-year anniversary since the play’s first performance in San Francisco. MSNBC news pundit Melissa Harris-Perry interviewed Shange on the legacies of *for colored girls*, with Perry stating that no other play demonstrates that Black Women Matter. Perry’s own book *Sister
Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women also includes the subtitle: “For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Politics When Being Strong Isn’t Enough.” In our contemporary racial politics, what would it mean to tell interracial stories of Filipino and Black women’s history together in America—through theater and/or poetry? How can we conceive these new spaces and parameters? These questions bring me to Hagedorn and Shange’s play where the mississippi meets the amazon, which offers the first appearance of Filipino and Black women claiming these space and history within both mainstream and subcultural theater spaces.

**where the mississippi meets the amazon (1978)**

On December 20, 1977, Mel Gussow writes in the *New York Times*, about the “Satin Sisters”: “Imagine the Supremes as poets, with Miss Shange as Diana Ross” (42). This musical triumvirate wrote Mississippi and premiered their show at the Public Theater Cabaret on 425 Layfayette street in New York City. The Satin Sisters co-authored the play together and performed it not only in New York but also in Chicago and San Francisco. Furthermore, Gussow reviews Mississippi in New York as “much more soft-hued, romantic and nostalgic. For all three women, jazz was a formative influence. Clearly, it has shaped their lives and their poetry” (42). Debuting on stage in 1977, Mississippi is a 14-piece monologue series that is accompanied by a jazz band. The Satin Sisters take turns reading monologues, and they riff off one another’s lines and the improvisational rhythms played by their band. The piece that bridges the performance together is Shange’s title poem “where the mississippi.” Shange writes this poem as a love letter to women’s space and healthy emotional intimacy. Relating to felt architectures,” the piece centers women who cultivate self-love and space to embrace that love, even if one has a lover.

Hagedorn moved to New York to perform Mississippi with Shange and Davis. In her 2005 compendium *Danger and Beauty*, Hagedorn details how the Mississippi project began,
My satin sisters, Thulani Davis and Ntozake Shange, are most of the reason I move to New York in 1978. I miss my band [Westcoast Gangster Choir], but I’m not worried—I know we will eventually regroup in this scary place. Thulani, Ntozake, and I perform our poems to music in ‘Where the Mississippi Meets the Amazon’ at Joseph Papp’s Public Theater. Oz Scott directs, and David Murray conducts an all-star, ‘sizzling orchestra.’ It is an intense collaboration among volatile poets and musicians, and I fall in love with New York (ix).

In contrast to for colored girls and the all Black female production in New York City, Mississippi, illuminates Afro-Asian feminist collaborations that were silenced during the New York production of for colored girls. Thus, if we conceive Mississippi as a sequel to for colored girls, we see that this collaboration as creating and building powerful Afro-Filipino female intimacies and resistant spaces in theater spaces.

To date, only newspaper reviews have critiqued the production of this play and the poem “where the mississippi meets the amazon” that is featured in Shange’s 1978 poetry collection Nappy Edges. In this collection, Shange dedicates her poem “where the mississippi meets the amazon” to jazz maverick David Murray, Shange’s former husband. The couple collaborated with one another on this piece and recorded a version of the poem on her 2005 recorded album Wild Flowers. Shange recites the poem version of Mississippi with David Murray’s jazz in the background. This collaboration illuminates the intimacy of sound and verse, particularly between the collaborators. When Shange performs Mississippi on Wild Flowers, she riffs off Murray’s saxophone. The poem on the page is completely changed by Shange’s emphasis on “my space,”

i’m so into it

i can’t even take you
it’s my space

a land lovin you gives me (28-29)

In *Mississippi*, although Shange has a lover, she is completely immersed in her space. Her language is playful and seductive, as she says “tho i ran there with you / tho you appear to me by the riverbed / i can’t take you / it’s my space” (28). In this embodied terrain, Shange speaks about one’s felt space that no one can occupy except for herself. This space is imagined as “a realm of monuments & water / language & the ambiance of Senegalese cafes” (29). This space is a sacred one, filled with moments and memories across the globe. Starting as a poem, and made into a theater cabaret set to music, the felt architectures also emerge in theater spaces.

In addition to the *Mississippi* poem in *Nappy Edges*, Jessica Hagedorn’s papers at U.C. Berkeley’s Bancroft Library houses artifacts of *Mississippi*. For example, a flyer dated January 12 & 13th, 1978 promotes *Mississippi* as a music and poetry cabaret at a historic theater in Chicago. The performance took place at the 11th St. Theater, now named the Getz Theater at Columbia College of Chicago. On the flyer, the cast includes Famoudou Don Moye, Chico Freeman, and Malachi Favors alongside Hagedorn and Shange’s vocals. The 11st Street Theater was founded at the Chicago Women’s Club, home to “the organization’s meeting rooms, offices, and theater. Rich in history it was the site for rallies in support of women’s voting rights, efforts on behalf of compulsory education laws and fundraising for scholarships at the School of Art Institute of Chicago and a women’s dormitory at the University of Chicago” (Williams 1). The theater was renamed the Getz Theater when it was acquired by Columbia College in 1981, four years after *Mississippi*’s debuted.

Anna Glusker’s 1978 theater review in *The Grey City Journal*, a student journal at the University of Chicago, titles her article “Staying Crazy and Singing About It.” Hagedorn and
Shange performed the piece differently in Chicago than in New York, Glusker begins. For starters, Thulani Davis was not present; only Shange and Hagedorn performed together. In the review, Glusker details Shange and Hagedorn stepping onto the stage as they “entered in elaborate Forties style dresses, while the musicians embroidered on a swing motif throughout the performances” (Glusker 9). Their poetry was accompanied by musicians such as Chicago Freeman, Don Moye, Malachi Favors, and Jay Hoggard. Hagedorn and Shange “had very little room to move, most of the stage area taken up by the musicians and their instruments. As a result, their performances had to come exclusively from their facial expressions and the way in which they spoke their lines” (9). Glusker further notes that “moments when voice and instrument, imagery and solo segued into one another, learned from one another, are what gave this piece its strength and form its unlimited possibilities” (1). Through the call-and-response, from poet to musician, these mixings contributed further to intimate soundscapes—riffs and solos—present in the electric mappings of the Afro-Filipino spaces.

The women’s performance emphasized new forms of felt architectures: “Thulani (the absent performer), Hagedorn, and Shange have created a world, a country, which they repeatedly refer to as ‘my space’ (Glusker 9). These contacts were filled with intimate glances and gestures between Hagedorn and Shange: “Hagedorn looks at [Shange] lovingly as ‘I Cover the Waterfront’ plays in the background and says, ‘Sometimes I look at you and you look like Lady Day / The Way you hang your head in the afternoon…’” (9). Hagedorn references her poem “Sometimes You Look Like Lady Day” as gesture towards Shange. In this moment, the intense bonds between women are privileged. They are simultaneously queer, platonic, and supportive: “The feeling of dependence on other women, regarded not as a weakness but as an enormous strength, pervades the piece. It seems that it was this kind of atmosphere which fostered its
creation” (Glusker 9). Mississippi suggests possibilities of Afro-Asian connections between women, particularly in the theater’s historic space that was once home to feminist activists. Setting their piece in this building contributes yet another palimpsest to the revolutionary women before them. There piece’s poetry and music emphasized a changed world that eradicated violence. Towards the end of the Chicago performance, Shange stands on the stage to recite a spoken word piece,

With no apparent cause
Every three minutes a woman is beaten
Every five minutes a woman is raped
Every ten minutes a child is molested
Some woman’s innocence rushes from her mouth
Boiling water or boiling sperm decorate her body
But I rode the bus today
And I bought a paper
I was looking for the announcement
About the women’s bodies (10)

Ultimately, through this collaboration and shared space, women’s issues—violence, displacement, women’s bodies, and mental illness—became the forefront. In this social conscious spoken piece, Shange and Hagedorn transition from their intimacies to the lived violences faced by both Filipino and Black women’s communities, both in the United States and abroad. Mississippi, performed at this particular place when Third World women were organizing in Chicago, San Francisco, and New York, pushes the boundaries of interracial and feminist theater to new spatial politics and poetic aesthetics. The piece also demonstrates how
they used this particular performance genre comment on trans-historic women’s movements and the struggles they routinely faced. *Mississippi* was performative, intimate, and confessional. Ultimately, it was a statement about the global female politics and the precarity of their lives.

**Conclusion**

Hagedorn and Shange’s co-performances reveals rifts between Black and Filipino women’s expressions and their generative imaginings. *for colored girls*, now a mainstay in Black feminist art, started as an experimental project during the inception of Third World women politics. The subcultural performance spaces, the all-women inclusive felt architectures—these sites privileged interracial intimacies. Today, *for colored girls* is performed at schools—of all ages—where women of color dance, sing, and cry the Shange’s verses. The manipulation of this text, and its ability to translate multiple identities at the crossroads, further complicates the ways that Third World women joined together.

Furthermore, recovering the cabaret and mixed-media performance *Mississippi* reveals silences of interracial theater. This show, a place that articulates a woman’s relationship to space, exemplifies the power of how these urban centers constructed new archives of feelings. Women during this time wrestled with their position in this world—both the private and public corners of their existences. Mapping Afro-Filipino woman as a place to contest these spaces—in theater, music, poetry, etc.—conjures new imaginings of the Third World women as agents of these genre-changing cultural productions. Hagedorn and Shange constructed sensuous places of healing and refuge. As literary architects, their insurgent and fugitive myths and dances marked cityscapes and urban scenes. Since then, they never looked back.
CONCLUSION

Today, literary collectives continue to be an essential place for artists of color to thrive. For example, in 1996, African American poets Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady established Cave Canem, a “home for the many voices of African American poetry [that] is committed to cultivating the artistic and professional growth of African American poets” (Cave Canem 1). In addition, Kundiman, an Asian American fiction and poetry retreat started in the early 2000s by two Filipino American writers Sarah Gambito and Joseph O. Legaspi. Kundiman strives to “create a nurturing yet rigorous environment Asian American Literature. They envisioned a space that would facilitate the creation of new work, foster mentoring relationships, and address the particular challenges facing Asian American writers” (Kundiman 1). Echoing the legacies of 1970s writers of color and cultural workers, these contemporary collectives nurture the myriad of voices that stagger in the margins of major literary institutions by cultivating physical spaces.

One such pivotal space for this connectivity and resistance is VONA/Voices of Our Nation Foundation, the only multi-genre (poetry, fiction, memoir, playwriting, etc.) retreat organized solely for writers of color. VONA/Voices was formed in San Francisco in 1999 after Dominican American novelist Junot Diaz noticed how he was one of the only writers of color in his MFA program at Cornell. To mediate this gap, Diaz partnered with Elmaz Abinader, Victor Diaz, and Diem Jones to create VONA/Voices. Their mission “envisioned an arts organization that could change the landscape of the literary world by supporting writers-of-color through workshops, mentorship, community building, and information sharing” (VONA 2018). Today, the residency has expanded its workshops from the Bay Area and the University of California—Berkeley and has held programs at The University of Miami and the University of Pennsylvania.

The legacies of the 1970s San Francisco and New York Third World Art scenes surface
in collaborative spaces like VONA/Voices. Moreover, Jessica Hagedorn and Ntozake Shange’s intimacies are a testament to the contemporary movement of writers forging bonds with another and paying homage to one another’s works. The purpose for creating these environments reflects our current political moment. Specifically, today we continue to live in polarizing political climates that contend with the policing of Brown and Black bodies, borders and xenophobia, violence against women and LGBTQ communities, etc. Similar to the 1970s, artists of color contend with the Third World struggles of communities abroad and the white supremacist and racist rhetoric apparent in today’s American culture. By thinking about Hagedorn and Shange’s “felt architectures” of disobedience and belonging, these same praxes appear as artists of color continue to grapple with the complex cross-overs of gender, sexuality, race, and nationhood.

My thesis “Afro-Filipino Archives and Architectures” contends with how outspoken women of color like Hagedorn and Shange established relationships and co-created interracial artistic spaces throughout the 1970s. I analyze their interchanges in anthologies, individual poetry collections, and theater performances, while also addressing the myriad conflicts that their interracial unions experienced. Throughout this thesis, I argue that both writers cultivated felt architectures, rebellious and sensorial spaces that imagined antiracist, anti-imperialist, and feminist places of belonging. In analyzing these histories, I reveal how Hagedorn and Shange contribute to “Afro-Asian” artistry in nuanced ways, as they experimented with poetry and theater for social justice and women-oriented causes. When doing so, they used jazz and avant-garde aesthetics to connect the insurgent and fugitive histories of their ancestors’ pasts.

New scholarly directions involve centering Afro-Asian queer of color critiques. Through these sexual and gendered frameworks, scholars can further dismantle the hetero/homo-normative intimacies and relationships that elide the experiences of gay and lesbian voices in
Afro-Asian studies. Although my thesis touches upon female intimate space—and the possible queer affect imbedded within those histories—what would it mean to center Afro-Filipino queer love and non-heteronormative relationships?

Hagedorn’s novel *Dogeaters* (1990), features one of the first mappings of a queer Afro-Filipino figure/character in contemporary American literature. Joey, a hustler and DJ at the sex club CocoRico, is the son of a Black American soldier and Filipino mother. Joey proclaims himself as one of the best turn-tables in Manila: “I’m in control again, the most advanced DJ in Manila… I’m going to put something different on, something dangerous. What Andres calls my psycho music” (Hagedorn 141). A queer and biracial character, Joey’s liminal positioning problematizes representations of Afro-Asian figures. Moreover, contemporary queer and Afro-Filipino poet Ronaldo Wilson has begun to address these racial mixings in his collections *Poems of the Black Object* (2009) and *Narrative of the Life of the Brown Boy and the White Man* (2008). Ultimately, additional critical race and gender studies are paramount to examining “Afro-Asia” as a place to critique masculinist coalition-building and the conflicts between racial groups, especially those positioned at the periphery of Afro-Asia.
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